Criminal Justice Contact and Romantic Relationships: Moving Beyond Marital Dissolution

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Colton Tanner Kilpatrick

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Billy D. Kilpatrick, who passed away in 2016, three months before I began graduate school. I also dedicate this dissertation to the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and all the other organizations, scholars, and activists working to reduce harms to families impacted by the criminal justice system.

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ABSTRACT

Changes to U.S. criminal justice policies during the latter part of the twentieth century dramatically increased the number of people incarcerated, and the impact continues to reverberate throughout millions of families today. This three-part dissertation extends scholarship on the effects of criminal justice contact on adult romantic relationships in several ways. The first study uses the PRISMA framework (Liberati et al., 2009) to systematically review what is known regarding how criminal justice contact may increase the risk of marital and non-marital relationship dissolution and whether this risk differs by form of criminal justice contact or by gender. Results were overwhelmingly consistent in suggesting that multiple forms of criminal justice contact increase the risk of relationship dissolution, particularly among people in committed relationships who lived together prior to criminal justice contact. The second study uses data among married and romantically involved couples (N = 1,257) who participated in the Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (Bir & Lindquist, 2017). Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM) suggest that perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance were related to relationship satisfaction and commitment and institutional barriers to contact moderate the link between bonding and commitment. The third study uses survey data among 331 women involved in romantic relationships to examine whether having ever been arrested or incarcerated was associated with relationship violence and functioning. After controlling for selection factors associated with criminal justice contact, OLS regression models show that arrest histories could increase exposure to physical violence. Taken together, this work

demonstrates the enduring impact of criminal justice contact on romantic relationships. Implications for future research, policy, and practice are discussed across studies.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Changes to U.S. criminal justice policies during the last few decades of the twentieth century dramatically increased the number of people incarcerated (Alexander, 2011; Miller & Alexander, 2016). The ramifications of these changes have disproportionately affected communities of color and socio-economically disadvantaged people, deepening existing economic and health disparities (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010). The effects have been particularly pronounced for families (i.e., Arditti, 2012; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2013; Wildeman & Western, 2010), and continuing to examine how criminal justice contact may impact romantic relationships is critical to understanding the experiences of one of society's vulnerable populations.

Many incarcerated people are embedded within family systems as spouses and romantic partners (Glaze, 2011), and there is evidence that incarceration can disrupt and/or dissolve these roles (Apel et al., 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Massoglia et al., 2011; Siennick et al., 2014; Turney, 2015a). For example, physical and emotional interactions are often limited due to geographic distance (Massoglia et al., 2011). Although physical separation is a common obstacle for maintaining long distance relationships more generally (Sahlstein, 2006; Stafford, 2005), the geographic separation from an incarcerated spouse often occurs involuntarily, which can increase relationship uncertainty (Massoglia et al., 2011; Nickels, 2020). Additionally, institutional barriers to contact, such as complicated administrative rules, phone call costs, and unfriendly visiting environments, can also strain marital relationships (Arditti et al., 2003; Tewksbury & DeMichele, 2005). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that incarceration

increases the risk of marital dissolution (Apel at al., 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Turney, 2015a; Western, 2006).

Though the impact of incarceration on marital dissolution remains concerning, examining how incarceration may affect romantic relationships more broadly is also critically important to adopt a wider and more inclusive lens on how criminal justice contact may impact romantic relationships. Moreover, we know less about how an arrest or a conviction, which are much more common than incarceration, may affect romantic relationships. Camp and Heatherton (2016) describe how over-policing, particularly in neighborhoods where Black and Brown people live, has led to mass arrests and brief criminal justice contact experiences have been shown to be associated with notable harms to romantic relationships (Phillips & Zhao, 2010; Turney & Sugie, 2021; Skipper et al., 2020; Williams & Perry, 2019). This means we are potentially underestimating the impact criminal justice contact may have on a substantial portion of families.

Thus, moving beyond the narrow focus on marital dissolution and broadening our scope to include romantic relationships more broadly is important from both basic and applied perspectives. For example, cohabitation rates have dramatically risen over the past few decades and ignoring cohabitating relationships misses a large portion of the population (Manning, 2020). Additionally, understanding what is known about how criminal justice contact may impact romantic relationship dissolution is important because dissolution of non-marital relationships can also lead to important changes in family structure (Hadfield et al., 2018). These changes can be particularly burdensome for vulnerable families due to social and economic marginalization (Brown et al., 2016; Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Lehrer & Son, 2017). It is also important to understand how

criminal justice contact may impact indicators of relationship violence and relationship functioning. First, theory and research suggest that psychological aggression and physical violence are key indicators of relational health (Newman et al., 2020; Vergruggen et al., 2020). Second, indicators of relationship functioning such as consensus regarding relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breaking up may also be central to understanding how criminal justice contact may affect relational health (Agnew et al., 2008; Turney, 2015c). Broadening our lens on romantic relationships would therefore provide a more complete picture of how criminal justice contact affects people and families.

The goal of this dissertation is to address three gaps in our understanding of the immediate and long-term implications of criminal justice contact for romantic relationships. First, researchers interested in the effects of incarceration on adult romantic relationship dissolution have largely focused on martial relationships, overlooking other forms of romantic relationships. Additionally, there is growing evidence that an arrest or a conviction, which are much more common than incarceration, are also associated with relationship dissolution. To address these gaps, the first study systematically reviews the literature to summarize what is known regarding how criminal justice contact may increase the risk of marital and non-marital relationship dissolution, and whether the risk differs by form of criminal justice contact or by gender. The review also assesses the methodological quality of the identified studies using the Cambridge Quality Checklist (CQC; Murray et al., 2009).

Second, researchers who study the impact of incarceration on families have increasingly recognized the need to examine within-group variability (Arditti & Johnson,

2020). This similarly applies to adult romantic relationships because contact with the criminal justice system may present varying effects not only between, but also within couples (Turney, 2015b). Furthermore, it is important to understand how institutional barriers to contact, such as the location of the prison facility, cost of visiting, phone call costs, administrative rules, and the experience of visiting may affect the nature and implications of relationship maintenance behaviors. To address these gaps, the second study examines variability in the nature and consequences of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance for relationship satisfaction and commitment, and the moderating role of institutional barriers to contact among currently incarcerated men and their non-incarcerated women partners.

Finally, despite compelling links between current incarceration and harms to relationship functioning and stability (Seinnick et al., 2014; Turney, 2015c), the enduring impact of criminal justice contact on later romantic relationships is not well understood, especially among women. To understand how criminal justice contact histories (arrest or incarceration) may impact current romantic relationships, the third study examines links between criminal justice contact and multiple indicators of relationship violence and functioning among women. Collectively, these studies are expected to extend what is known regarding how criminal justice contact may affect romantic relationships and have important implications for future research and practice.

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CHAPTER 2 CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONTACT AND RELATIONSHIP DISSOLUTION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Abstract

Objectives: Researchers interested in the effects of criminal justice contact on romantic relationship dissolution have largely focused on martial relationships, overlooking other forms of romantic relationships. This study provides a systematic review and evaluation of the literature on how criminal justice contact relates to marital and non-marital relationship dissolution.

Methods: Relevant electronic databases, reference lists, and curriculum vitas of authors who have published on the subject were searched for studies written in English with no date restriction. The search identified 22 studies that met the inclusion criteria and were summarized and evaluated for methodological quality.

Results: The studies reviewed were overwhelmingly consistent in suggesting that criminal justice contact increases the risk of relationship dissolution, particularly among people in a committed relationship who lived together prior to criminal justice contact. Regarding incarceration, there appear to be two distinct time periods when the risk may be highest: (1) when one partner begins their incarceration term, and (2) when the incarceration term ends, though this evidence was less consistent. Additionally, the effect of incarceration on relationship dissolution does not notably differ for men and women. Regarding arrest and convictions, women's arrests and convictions appear to be associated with higher rates of relationship dissolution than men's, but further research is needed. Results from the Cambridge Quality Checklist showed that the methodological quality of the included studies was higher relative to other content related literature reviews.

Discussion: The studies reviewed generally demonstrate an association between criminal justice contact and relationship dissolution, particularly among people in committed relationships who lived together prior to criminal justice contact. Differences by type of criminal justice contact and gender are discussed along with directions for future research.

Background

Each year more than 600,000 people enter state and federal prisons, and new or reoccurring jail admissions occur around 10.6 million times every year (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Many people who enter carceral spaces occupy roles within family systems as spouses, romantic partners, and parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; McKay et al., 2018a). Investigations into how contact with the criminal justice system may impact family relationships suggest that incarceration increases the risk of marital dissolution (Apel, 2016; Apel et al., 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Massoglia et al., 2011; Siennick et al., 2014; Turney, 2015a). These findings have been consistent across studies using large-scale longitudinal data and robust methodological designs to address concerns of selection bias and unobserved heterogeneity.

Although threats to marital relationships remain concerning, most people who enter the penal system have never been married. For example, in 2008, an estimated 26% of federal prisoners and 16% of state prisoners reported being married (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). However, non-marital relationships are much more common and many studies have found that incarcerated men consider themselves to be involved in cohabitating relationships (Apel, 2016; Comfort, 2008; Grinstead et al., 1999; Khan et al., 2011; Lattimore & Visher, 2009; McKay et al., 2018a; Mumola, 2000; Nickels, 2020; Turney & Sugie, 2021; Volker et al., 2016). Identifying how criminal justice contact may impact non-marital relationships is therefore essential.

Although the literature has focused on how incarceration may impact marital and, to a lesser extent, non-marital relationships, other forms of criminal justice contact may also be consequential to relationships (Comfort, 2007; Turney & Sugie, 2021).

Incarceration begins with an arrest or conviction, which are much more common and may not result in incarceration (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Additionally, the potential for criminal justice contact has increased over time even in the absence of criminality (Davis et al., 2018; Weaver et al., 2019). For example, Weaver et al. (2019) examined two generational cohorts from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and found that while arrest rates were low but strongly linked to offending in 1979, a larger share of Americans experienced an arrest without committing a crime in 1997. This suggests that the potential for criminal justice contact has become even higher in the absence of offending.

This study systematically reviews the existing quantitative empirical literature to summarize what is known regarding how criminal justice contact (arrest, conviction, jail, and prison) may impact both marital and non-marital relationship dissolution. This information is important from both basic and applied perspectives because changes to family structure, which occur when people form or dissolve romantic relationships (Hadfield et al., 2018), are largely viewed as a threat to children's psychological and social functioning (Bachman et al., 2012; Bzostek & Beck, 2011; Cooper et al., 2011; Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Osborne & McLanahan, 2007). Changes to family structure can also increase the risk of financial instability (Schwartz-Soicher et al., 2011), adverse psychological and emotional well-being (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006), sexually transmitted infection (STI)/HIV transmission (Khan et al., 2011; 2018), residential mobility (Yetter, 2018), or reincarceration (Wallace et al., 2020). In short, changes to family structure can have a number of significant implications for individuals and families, challenges that are

particularly burdensome for socially and economically marginalized families (Brown et al., 2016; Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Lehrer & Son, 2017).

Advancing our understanding of how criminal justice contact may increase the risk of marital and non-marital relationship dissolution also requires understanding what role gender plays because relationships may function differently for men and women (Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2006). On the one hand, men are incarcerated at much higher rates than women (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020), and incarcerated men tend to have more positive assessments of relationship quality and commitment than their non-incarcerated women partners (Lindquist et al., 2016; Turney, 2015b). From a social exchange perspective (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), women often fulfill the role of primary caretaker as well as provide additional financial and emotional support to incarcerated men (Arditti, 2016). The burden of taking on multiple roles and providing additional levels of support could be costly enough for women to dissolve their relationship and could potentially explain why men have more positive assessments of their relationships than women.

On the other hand, women who experience criminal justice contact may find romantic relationships more emotionally and physically rewarding than men, though there may be additional consequences. For example, Leverentz (2006) interviewed 49 female ex-offenders and their romantic partners and found that most women were involved with recovering drug users and/or ex-offenders. Although some of the men played supportive roles for women, others played a central role in women's offending (or repeat offending). Thus, women who experience criminal justice contact could face stigmatization in their primary roles in life as a parent or spouse because of their

involvement with antisocial men (Ferraro & Moe, 2003), and being labeled as an unfit mother or spouse could be costly enough for a relationship to dissolve.

As the number of published quantitative studies focused on how criminal justice contact may impact marital and non-marital relationship dissolution continues to grow, our understanding of causal associations remains limited. Outside of intervention research, where randomized control trials are widely used (Boruch, 1997), criminal justice contact cannot be randomly assigned and researchers more often rely on observational studies (Farrington & Welsh, 2005). Nevertheless, Murray et al. (2009) noted that, "it is important to identify and summarize evidence from high-quality observational studies to draw the best possible conclusions" (p. 2). Therefore, the Cambridge Quality Checklist (CQC; Murray et al., 2009) is used to identify high quality studies in the existing body of literature.

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to systematically review the literature to summarize what is known regarding how criminal justice contact may impact marital and non-marital relationship dissolution. *Criminal justice contact* is defined as being arrested, convicted, or incarcerated in jails and prisons. By defining criminal justice contact in this way, this study permits the examination of whether the risk of relationship dissolution differs by type of criminal justice contact and gender. Moreover, this review assesses the methodological rigor of any identified studies using the Cambridge Quality Checklist (CQC; Jolliffe et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2009), which was designed to examine the methodological quality of correlates, risk factors, and causal risk factors in studies on offending. Systematically reviewing the literature in this manner will underscore key

findings, determine the strength of the evidence, and identify important gaps for future work to address.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this systematic literature review. (1) What is known regarding how criminal justice contact may impact marital and non-marital relationship dissolution? (2) Does the risk of relationship dissolution differ by the form of criminal justice contact (i.e., arrest, conviction, jail, prison)? (3) Does the risk of relationship dissolution differ by gender? (4) What is the methodological quality of work in this area?

Methods

Search Strategy

This review followed the steps laid out in the PRISMA reporting guidelines (Liberati et al., 2009). The electronic databases *PsycINFO, Web of Science, Sociological Abstracts*, *Scopus*, *Social Work Abstracts*, and *Criminal Justice Abstracts* were systematically searched for studies written in English with no date restriction. Search terms regarding non-marital relationship dissolution were derived from a previous meta-analysis (Le et al., 2010), and the search term configuration and search strategy were co-created with a university librarian to yield maximum results. The search terms are as follows: (incarcerat* or arrest* or imprison* or inmate* or jail* or prison* or "criminal justice contact" or "criminal offender*" or "correctional institution*" or "correctional facilit*" or "detention center*" or “convict*”) and ("sexual partner*" or dating or intimacy or intimate or romance or romantic or couple* or “co-habitation” or marriage* or marital or "relationship quality" or wife or wive* or husband* or "relationship

satisfaction" or "marital relation*" or "marital conflict*" or "relationship status" or "marital status" or spouse* or "significant other*" or "domestic partner*" or boyfriend* or girlfriend* or lover* or partner*) and (divorc* or “breakup*” or "break-up*" or separat* or stability or dissol* or terminat* or persist* or ended or continuance or stay* or reject* or abandon or maintain or intact or disrupt*) not ("prisoner* of war*" OR “cardiac arrest* OR "prisoner* dilemma").

Searches were conducted for papers published up through December 2020. After completing the electronic database search, bibliographies from each study included for screening were scanned to identify other potentially relevant articles. Additionally, electronic databases were revisited to search for records that cited studies included for screening. This step was also carried out in Google Scholar. As a final step, the curriculum vita of authors who have published on this subject were reviewed.

To increase the rigor of the review, an independent reviewer was recruited and trained to co-conduct the selection, data extraction, and quality assessment procedures. The author conducted the search and screened studies by title and abstract to determine which studies should be considered for full-text review. Studies that were considered eligible for full-text review were co-evaluated with the independent reviewer. Regarding data extraction, the independent reviewer conducted the first round of data extraction using a standard template. The author verified the information by cross-checking the data extraction template with the included studies. Finally, the author conducted the quality assessment and confirmed the results with the independent reviewer.

Selection Criteria

Studies that were eligible for full-text review were co-evaluated based on the following selection criteria: (1) a quantitative analysis of the association between criminal justice contact and relationship dissolution; (2) participants or couples must be involved in an romantic relationship at baseline of the study measured by self-report, collateral-report, official records, or population records; (3) criminal justice contact and relationship dissolution data measured by self-report, collateral-report, or official records, and; (4) studies must be peer-reviewed articles published in scholarly journals. There were four evaluation discrepancies between the author and independent reviewer that were resolved by reaching consensus that the four studies should not be included.

Data Extraction

Using a standardized template, information from each study was extracted to describe key sample characteristics, methodological quality, and results (Gough et al., 2012). Information extracted included: authors, data source, study population and sample characteristics, type of relationship, criminal justice contact measures, relationship dissolution measures, criminal offense and duration, facility type, unit of analysis, and findings regarding relationship dissolution. The independent reviewer conducted the first round of data extraction and the author verified the information by cross-checking the data extraction template with the included studies. Discrepancies regarding the analytic sample and measurement sources (self-report, collateral reports, or official criminal records) were corrected by the author and confirmed by the independent reviewer.

Quality Assessment

To assess the methodological quality of each study, the Cambridge Quality Checklist (CQC) was used. The CQC was designed to examine the methodological quality of correlates, risk factors, and causal risk factors in studies on offending (Jolliffe et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2009). According to the CQC, correlates are variables associated with each other and do not need to be causally related or predictive of the outcome (Murray et al. 2009). Risk factors are correlates that are predictive of, and therefore must precede, the outcome, thus requiring longitudinal data. Causal risk factors are risk factors that can change and modify the risk for an outcome requiring correlation and precedence.

The CQC is comprised of three checklists (correlates, risk factors, and causal risk factors) where higher scores indicate greater methodological quality. The CQC for *correlates* is scored out of five based on the following criteria: (1) total population or random sampling method; (2) cross-sectional studies have a response rate ≥70% and longitudinal studies have retention rates ≥70% and differential attrition ≤10%; (3) sample size ≥400; (4) a reliable source or measure of criminal justice contact was used, such as self-reports, collateral reports, or official criminal records, and; (5) relationship dissolution was based on a reliability coefficient ≥.75 and reasonable face validity, or criterion or convergent validity coefficient ≥.3, or more than one instrument or information source used to assess the correlate, such as self-reports, collateral reports, or official records. The CQC for *risk factors* is scored out of three to determine whether the data can establish precedence between the risk factor and the outcome. Studies using

cross-sectional data are scored as 1, retrospective data as 2, and prospective data (or study of a fixed risk factor) as 3.

To determine whether risk factors directly or indirectly increase the risk of the outcome, *causal risk factors* are scored out of seven depending on whether the study examined within-individual change, included a comparison group, and controlled for confounding variables that precede the risk factors. Based on prior systematic literature reviews (Le et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2012), this study considered relevant confounders to be prior relationship stability and functioning, low socio-economic status, and criminality (i.e., prior criminal justice contact). Studies that examined these confounding variables at the same time or after the risk factor of criminal justice contact, as opposed to before, were scored as inadequately controlled (Murray et al., 2009). Causal risk factors were scored as follows: studies without analysis of change and a comparison group were scored as 1; studies without analysis of change, that did not include or inadequately controlled for confounding factors, and had a comparison group were scored as 2; studies that included an analysis of change but did not include a comparison group were scored as 3; studies that included analysis of change and a comparison group, but inadequately controlled for confounding factors, were scored as 4; studies without analysis of change but had a comparison group and adequately controlled for confounding factors were scored as 5; non-experimental studies that included analysis of change, a comparison group, and adequately controlled for confounding factors were scored as 6; and randomized experimental studies that included analysis of change, a comparison group, and adequately controlled for confounding factors were scored as 7.

Results

As shown in Figure 2.1, the database search returned 2,134 studies and 275 studies were identified through other sources (i.e., reference lists, author curriculum vitas, Google Scholar). Of these studies, 603 studies were unique and screened by title and abstract to assess eligibility and 43 studies met the full-text review criteria. We decided to exclude 21 studies that did not examine dissolution as an outcome (n = 11), were not empirical (n = 5), could not be found in English (n = 1), only controlled for criminal justice contact (n = 2), or did not report key information (n = 2). Ultimately, 22 studies met the inclusion criteria. Most of the studies were published after the year 2010 (n = 18), which could indicate an increasing interest regarding how criminal justice contact may impact relationship dissolution. Samples were drawn from the U.S. (n = 14) and Europe (n = 8; Denmark, Poland, The Netherlands, and the U.K.). Most of the studies examined people as their unit of analysis (n = 16), whereas a few studies examined couples (n = 6).

Criminal Justice Contact and Relationship Dissolution

Consistent evidence suggesting that criminal justice contact increases the risk of relationship dissolution was found across studies (Table 2.1), even after several studies accounted for relationship stability and functioning, low-socioeconomic status, and criminality. However, caution should still be given to causal inferences because these studies are observational and many of these studies scored moderately on the CQC (see Table 2.2). For example, though most studies examined within-individual analysis of change (n = 18), many lacked a control group (n = 10) and a majority did not measure the relevant confounders before measuring criminal justice contact (n = 17). Furthermore, measures of criminal justice contact and relationship dissolution varied across studies.

Regarding criminal justice contact, 14 studies used self-reports or partners as collateral reports, whereas 8 studies used official criminal records. Regarding relationship dissolution, 17 studies used self-reports or partners as collateral reports, whereas 5 studies used official records.

Despite these limitations, significant associations were found across a few studies that scored relatively high on the CQC (Apel, et al., 2010; Turney, 2015a; Turney & Wildeman, 2013). For example, Apel et al. (2010) examined whether incarceration increased the risk of divorce among a sample of 2,790 men who participated in the Criminal Career and Life-Course Study (CCLS). The CCLS is longitudinal study among a representative sample of 4% of all criminal offense cases tried in The Netherlands in 1977. The data were obtained from official criminal records and those who had been sentenced to a spell of incarceration at any age for the first time for any length were considered "treated". An observationally equivalent group was created that did not have a history of incarceration but was convicted at the same age as the treated counterpart. Results suggested that incarceration increased the risk of divorce one year (b = .04, SE = .02, p < .10, Cohen's d = .14), three years (b = .05, SE = .03, p < .05, Cohen's d = .14), and five years (b = .08, SE = .03, p < .01, Cohen's d = .18) post-incarceration, particularly if the men were married before they entered prison, compared to men who were convicted at about the same age but never imprisoned.

Two studies showed a decreased risk of relationship dissolution after a national implementation of an alcohol treatment program and electronic home monitoring as alternatives to incarceration. Sourcing populations records, Andersen (2016) examined the effectiveness of an alcohol treatment program implemented in 1990 on relationship

stability among convicted drunk drivers in Denmark (N = 5,504). During this time in Denmark, drunk drivers charged with a blood alcohol content BAC > .15 while driving were automatically sentenced to prison. However, offenders could enroll in the alcohol treatment program to avoid serving time in prison. Participating in the alcohol treatment program was associated with having the same partner after program completion at year two and year three, compared to those who were sentenced to prison.

Using the same population records, Fallesen et al. (2017) examined the effectiveness of electronic monitoring during home confinement as an alternative to incarceration for offenders convicted of violent offenses, minor drug offenses, or theft and property crimes. Participants were serving sentences up to three months in length and the researchers split the sample by median sentence length (40 days). Those in the treatment group were serving their sentence under electronic monitoring and those in the control group were serving their sentence in prison. Electronic monitoring decreased the risk of relationship dissolution by four and a half percentage points in the full sample (B = -.045, SE = .01, p < .001), nine percentage points among those who were in a relationship at the time of conviction (B = -.091, SE = .02, p < .001), and nearly three percentage points among those who were not in a relationship at the time of conviction (B = -.028, SE = .01, p < .001). Therefore, even though people who received alternatives to incarceration had lower risk of dissolution than people who were incarcerated, the results still fit the overall pattern of effects suggesting that criminal justice contact is associated with marital and non-marital relationship dissolution.

Type of Criminal Justice Contact and Relationship Dissolution

Regarding whether the risk of relationship dissolution differed based on the type of criminal justice contact, many studies used a combined measure of incarceration which included jails, prison, detention centers, etc. (n = 11). The remaining studies examined samples that had either been jailed (n = 1), imprisoned (n = 4), arrested (n = 2), convicted (n = 2), or were considered criminal offenders (n = 1). Only one study examined state and federal facilities separately. Using data from Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS; Reichman et al., 2001), Wildeman et al. (2016) examined whether the risk of relationship dissolution differed depending on whether fathers were ever incarcerated in local jails, state prisons, federal prisons, or unknown type of facilities. Descriptive statistics suggested that a higher percentage of mothers reported ending their relationship with the focal child's father if he was incarcerated in a local jail (72.7%), a state prison (76.9 %), a federal prison (77.6%), or an unknown type of facility (76.2%), compared to those not incarcerated (40.2%). However, the descriptive data were not examined for statistically significant differences. Additionally, because the relevant confounders were not accounted for and the researchers did not use a matched comparison group, these findings should be replicated to determine whether dissolution rates do not significantly differ between local, state, and federal facilities.

The 11 studies that used a combined measure of incarceration (jail, state or federal prison, adult corrections institution, or juvenile detention) scored very high for correlates ($\bar{x}$ = 4.54; out of 5), high for risk factors ($\bar{x}$ = 2.82; out of 3), and moderately for causal risk factors ($\bar{x}$ = 3.72; out of 7). Most of these studies used data from large, nationally representative data sets (NLSY = 4, FFCWS = 3, Add Health = 1), whereas others used

official records (Statistics Denmark = 2) or a community-based sample (1). The large, nationally representative data sets either allowed researchers to capture relatively short incarceration spells (Apel, 2016; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Siennick et al., 2014; Widdowson et al., 2020) or longer periods of incarceration (Massoglia et al., 2011; Turney, 2015a; Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Taken together, findings suggest that the risk of relationship dissolution is concentrated among people in committed relationships who lived together prior to incarceration.

However, the risk of relationship dissolution among relationships that survive this initial period could linger, particularly among married couples who spend a substantial portion of time away from each other (Apel et al., 2010; Massoglia et al., 2011). For example, Massoglia et al. (2011) examined whether the stigma or duration of physical separation increased the risk of divorce among a sample of 3,576 men who had ever been incarcerated. They found that having ever been incarcerated increased the risk of divorce, but this relationship became insignificant after length of time incarcerated was added to the model, which was positively and significantly related to divorce. This suggests that the duration of physical separation was more consequential for divorce. To understand what protective factors could keep couples intact, Widdowson et al. (2020) found that being married, a longer union duration, having a child together, having full-time employment, and a shorter incarceration spell all decreased the risk of relationship dissolution. Yet, these findings differed by racial and ethnic groups such that the risk of relationship dissolution was higher among Black people regardless of the protective factors, compared to White and Hispanic people. Blacks face lengthier time behind bars, relative to Whites or Hispanics (Spohn, 2000), and being separated for longer durations

can contribute to relationship uncertainty. Moreover, Blacks may be particularly vulnerable to relationship dissolution because of the cumulative stress felt from various social, racial, and economic factors (Mugoya et al., 2017) after incarceration, compared to Whites or Hispanics.

A handful of studies that examined changes in relationships after being released from prison found that relationships were vulnerable to dissolution, but evidence was less consistent and these studies scored lower on the CQC. For example, Volker et al. (2016) used panel data among 702 detainees to examine changes in their social networks before and after imprisonment. Although only 18% of their sample returned to the same romantic partner, they found that romantic partnerships were less likely to dissolve compared to relationships with friends ($RR = .53$, $p < .05$). Additionally, McKay et al. (2018b) examined 666 couples who participated in the MSF-IP to determine whether intimate partner violence (IPV) was a predictor, or a result, of separation after imprisonment. They found that IPV victimization before incarceration was significantly associated with higher odds of IPV victimization at the first and second post-release interviews among imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners. They also found that being romantically involved during incarceration (combined: marriage, romantic relationship, and coparenting only) was significantly associated with higher odds of being romantically involved at the first and second post-release interviews among men and women. However, only men who reported IPV at the first post-release interview had higher odds of relationship dissolution at the second post-release interview. The researchers argue that imprisoned men who participated in the relationship education treatment group could be more aware of unhealthy relationships and more willing to

discontinue such relationships than those in the control group. They also argue that issues of men's infidelity are not only a contentious issue for couples during and after incarceration, but also likely confound this relationship.

The five studies that examined arrests, convictions, a combination of the two, or offending scored relatively high for correlates ($\bar{x}$ = 3.80; out of 5), very high for risk factors ($\bar{x}$ = 3.00; out of 3), and relatively low for causal risk factors ($\bar{x}$ = 3.00; out of 7). Two studies used data from FFCWS, one study used data from Statistics Denmark, and two studies used community-based samples in Europe. Integrating the findings together suggest that being arrested and convicted increases the risk of relationship dissolution, compared to those who had not experienced criminal justice contact. However, this risk could differ based on which partner experienced criminal justice contact and the type of conviction. For example, Turney and Sugie (2021) used a sample of 2,201 mothers and fathers who participated in the FFCWS and found that the primary stressor of a mother's recent arrest (not father's) was associated with an increased risk of relationship dissolution, compared to those who had not experienced an arrest. This risk was situated among parents living together prior to the arrest. Though this evidence should be followed up with future work that measures the type of offense, resources available to the mother (i.e., family support, financial means), and prior relationship functioning, these findings raise important questions about the salience of a mother's arrest for relationship dissolution.

Regarding the type of conviction, Zoutewelle-Terovan et al. (2016) used a community-based sample of 248 males and females in The Netherlands to examine the effect of criminal offending on relationship dissolution over a long observation period

(age 12 to age 36). Findings suggest that recent (within the past year) violent offending increased the risk of relationship dissolution among men, and recent violent and property offenses increased this risk among women. Past violent or property offenses were not associated with an increased risk of relationship dissolution among men or women. These findings suggest that there could be variation in the risk of relationship dissolution based on the type of offending behavior, when it occurred, and which partner committed the offense. What is less clear, however, is whether non-violent offenses that can result in a conviction such as inchoate (solicitation, conspiracy, attempt, accomplice), statutory (alcohol or drug related, traffic offense), or financial crimes (fraud, embezzlement, tax evasion, cybercrime) are associated with relationship dissolution.

Gender and Relationship Dissolution

Most studies examined men (n = 11) or both men and women (n = 6) who experienced criminal justice contact. Studies that used couples as the unit of analysis examined men who were either incarcerated or convicted and their women partners (n = 4). Only one study (Pelka-Slugocka & Slugocki, 1980) used a sample that was exclusively women (N = 327) to describe the effects of women's imprisonment on marital functioning and stability. The women were serving medium (2-5 years) and long-term sentences (more than 5 years). Of the 164 women who reported how strong they felt their bond was to their husband during imprisonment, 101 returned to their husband after being released, 61 did not, and the other two women were attached to husbands who died before they were released. Most women who returned to their husband reported having a strong or existing bond (81%) whereas most of the women who ended their marriage reported a disappearing or broken bond with their husband (97%). Roughly 17%

remained single after the marriage ended during imprisonment. Though this information provides insight on how incarceration may could be associated with marital dissolution among women, these findings are several decades old and the methodological quality of this study was low according to the CQC.

Of the studies that examined both men and women, three studies used a combined measure of incarceration, whereas the other three studies examined the effects of jail, arrest, or offending separately. Among the three studies that used a combined measure of incarceration (Apel, 2016; Siennick et al., 2014; Widdowson et al., 2020), the findings were consistent suggesting that recent incarceration can present similar risk of relationship dissolution among women and men. In the study that examined jail incarceration, Moore et al. (2018) used a sample of 334 pre- and post-trial inmates held on felony charges in an urban jail to examine changes in community integration from pre- to post-incarceration. Most of the participants were male (70.7%) and due to issues of power, gender differences were not examined. They found no significant changes in marital status after release regarding probation status, length of incarceration, or first jail experience. However, being transferred to another facility was associated with an increased risk of marital dissolution. The two studies that examined arrest (Turney & Sugie, 2021) and offending (Zoutewelle-Terovan et al., 2016) have already been discussed but both suggest that women's arrest and offending are associated with higher rates of relationship dissolution, compared to men's arrest and offending.

Among the four studies that examined couples with currently or formerly incarcerated males and their non-incarcerated women partners, two used a combined measure of incarceration (Turney, 2015a; Turney et al., 2013) and the other two either

examined imprisonment (McKay et al., 2018b) or arrest and criminal charges (Skipper et al., 2020) separately. Regarding incarceration, Turney (2015a) examined data among 2,201 couples who participated in the FFCWS to determine whether father's incarceration at Wave 3 was associated with an increased risk of immediate relationship dissolution (between Waves 3 and 5) or delayed dissolution (between Waves 5 and 9). Using a matched sample of non-incarcerated fathers, she found that father's incarceration was associated with an increased odds of immediate relationship dissolution ($b = 1.06$, $OR = 2.90$, $p < .01$), particularly among parents who lived together prior to incarceration ($b = 1.60$, $OR = 4.97$, $p < .001$), compared to non-incarcerated fathers. She further found that a longer duration of incarceration and mother's relationship quality explained a considerable portion of the association between incarceration and immediate relationship dissolution.

Regarding arrest or criminal charges, Skipper et al. (2020) used data among 725 families who also participated in the FFCWS to examine whether criminal charges against a husband and father would increase the likelihood of divorce. Only couples married at Wave 4 were included and fathers were asked whether they had been arrested or criminally charged within the last two years of the survey (*yes*/*no*). The researchers measured whether the couple divorced at Wave 5. They found that husbands and fathers charged with a crime were more likely to get divorced, compared to husbands and fathers who had not been charged with a crime, and this finding extended to fathers who had at least one child and have been in a relationship for at least 5 years. They also found that husbands and wives who considered their relationship satisfaction as "*excellent*" or "*very good*" were less likely to get divorced, compared to those who rated their relationship

satisfaction as "*good*" or "*poor*". Additionally, they found that fathers who reporting experiencing depressive symptoms were more likely to get a divorce compared to fathers with little or no self-reported depressive symptoms.

Taken together, these studies suggest that incarceration is associated with higher rates of relationship dissolution among women and men, compared to those who have never been incarcerated or experienced alternatives to incarceration. However, findings from the handful of studies that examined the effects of other forms of criminal justice contact on relationship dissolution suggest that rates of dissolution could differ by gender. Importantly, results highlight how little is known regarding the association between women's contact with the criminal justice system and relationship dissolution. This is concerning considering how salient an arrest and offending behavior were shown to be for women's relationship dissolution compared to men's (Turney & Sugie, 2021).

The overall assessment of methodological quality using the CQC (Table 2.2) revealed that studies scored relatively high for correlates ($\bar{x}$ = 4.04; out of 5), high for risk factors ($\bar{x}$ = 2.86; out of 3), and moderate for causal risk factors ($\bar{x}$ = 3.45; out of 7). Regarding confounders, a moderate number of studies controlled for, or created matched samples based on, relationship stability (10), relationship functioning (4), low-socioeconomic status (8), and criminality (15). Compared to other content related systematic literature reviews that used the CQC (see Jolliffe et al., 2012 and Whitten et al., 2019), the overall methodological quality of this collection of studies was higher because of the use of national data sets in the U.S., official populations records in Europe, and more robust methodological designs.

Discussion

This paper systematically reviewed 22 studies focused on the association between criminal justice contact and marital and non-marital relationship dissolution and whether this association differed by type of criminal justice contact or by gender. Most studies were published in the past decade, highlighting increased scholarly attention paid to how contact with the criminal justice system may impact marital and non-marital relationship dissolution. Three key takeaways emerged from this review. First, the body of evidence is overwhelmingly consistent in suggesting that criminal justice contact is associated with higher rates of relationship dissolution, compared to no criminal justice contact. Second, it appears that incarceration at the state and federal level present similar risk of relationship dissolution. There also appears to be two distinct time periods when the risk could be highest: (1) when one partner begins their incarceration term (particularly among people in a committed relationship who lived together prior to criminal justice contact), and (2) when the incarceration term ends, though this evidence was less consistent. Third, the effect of incarceration on relationship dissolution does not differ much for men and women. However, women's arrest, convictions, and offending behavior appear to be associated with higher rates of relationship dissolution than men's, but additional work is needed.

This collective body of evidence was consistent by suggesting that criminal justice contact appears to increase risk for relationships dissolution. Yet, the CQC revealed important methodological limitations in the studies reviewed that impact the capability to make causal inferences regarding the direct effect of criminal justice contact on relationship dissolution. For example, although a handful of studies that examined the

relationship between incarceration and relationship dissolution were scored relatively high in correlates, risk factors, and causal risk factors, others lacked a matched comparison group, did not account for relevant confounding factors, or the research design did not account for the theoretically suggested temporal patterning of effects. Therefore, it remains unclear how much of the direct effect is explained in these associations, especially among studies that examined the relationship between arrests, criminal charges, or offending and relationship dissolution. Nevertheless, criminal justice contact does play a role in destabilizing relationships and policy efforts should focus on identifying alternatives to traditional carceral practices, such as treatment and rehabilitative programs for non-violent offenders found to be effective in Europe (Andersen, 2016; Fallensen et al., 2017). Additionally, financial investments in communities and incentivized programs that enable employment and wealth development opportunities could decrease criminal justice contact thereby lessening any negative consequences for families (Schlager, 2018).

Although one study (Wildeman et al., 2016) suggested that incarceration in state and federal facilities are associated with similar rates of relationship dissolution, the descriptive data were not examined for statistically significant differences. Studies often aggregated across facility types, and future work should consider facilities separately to account factors such as duration, distance between facility, place of residence, being transferred to another facility, and policy differences at the state and federal level. These limitations notwithstanding suggest that the risk of relationship dissolution is particularly concentrated among people in a committed relationship who lived together prior to incarceration (Apel, 2016; Apel et al., 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Turney, 2015a;

Turney et al., 2013), rather than partnerships where one partner experienced incarceration before the relationship began (Siennick et al., 2014).

Additionally, marital relationships that survive the initial incarceration experience where the couples share a similar history and perspective on their degree of intimacy can degrade and eventually dissolve over time due to spending time away from each other (Massoglia et al., 2011; Pelka-Slugocka et al., 1980). This evidence underscores the importance of implementing family-oriented policies aimed at removing institutional barriers to contact such as costly phone calls, scheduling conflicts, and other prohibitive administrative rules. Such policies could help couples maintain their relationship while geographically separated (Arditti, 2016; Cochran & Mears, 2013; Comfort, 2008; Nickels, 2020) and help reduce post-release offending, especially among men, those who experience conjugal and furlough visits, and if the incarceration term is less than one year (Mitchell et al., 2016).

The studies reviewed potentially highlight two distinct time periods where relationship could be most vulnerable to dissolution, when the incarceration term begins and when the incarceration term ends. However, there was more evidence to support that relationships are at risk of dissolving when an incarceration term begins, especially among people in a committed relationship who lived together prior to criminal justice contact. According to models of family stress (e.g., Arditti, 2016), incarceration is a primary stressor that can have a direct effect on relationship dissolution. Incarceration can also enable secondary stressors such as barriers to family contact, parenting stress, economic hardship, and mental health challenges, all of which have implications for relationship dissolution. Although the association between incarceration and relationship

dissolution may, at least, be partially explained by secondary stressors or the other relevant confounders, these findings raise concerns about the immediate and reverberating effects at the beginning of an incarceration term that can further harm already vulnerable families (Brown et al., 2016; Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Lehrer & Son, 2017).

A handful of studies showed changes in relationship status after an incarceration term ends (Volker et al., 2016; McKay et al., 2018b; Moore et al., 2018). However, this evidence was less consistent and this group of studies scored lower on the CQC, relative to other studies. Regardless, challenges families commonly navigate while a partner is incarcerated are geographic separation (Massoglia et al., 2011) and barriers to contact such as distance to the facility, cost of phone calls, and unfriendly visiting environments (Arditti et al., 2003; Tewksbury & DeMichele, 2005), all of which could contribute to relationship instability (Massoglia et al., 2011; Nickels, 2020). Moreover, recently released people could face other challenges, such as poor employment prospects, mental health challenges, substance use, and financial strain; all of which have been linked to poorer relationship quality (Bryant et al., 2006; Conger et al., 2002; Cutrona et al., 2003; Hardie & Lucas, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Kogan et al., 2013). These challenges further underscore the importance of identifying alternatives to traditional carceral practices for non-violent offenders and implementing programs that facilitates successful reentry (Andersen, 2016; Fallensen et al., 2017).

Regarding whether any effects of criminal justice contact on relationship dissolution differs by gender, findings suggest that arrests, convictions, and offending behaviors among women may be associated with higher rates of relationship dissolution,

compared to men (Turney & Sugie, 2021; Zoutewelle-Terovan et al., 2016). Qualitative work describes how brief forms of criminal justice contact among mothers often leads to relationship vulnerabilities, unresolved loss, and mental health risk that could further destabilize relationships (Arditti & Few, 2008; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014). Additionally, mothers with criminal histories could be considered deviant or unfit to serve in their role as a partner or mother (Ferraro & Moe, 2003), which could reduce their role responsibility and further destabilize relationships (Geiger & Fischer, 2003). Much more research is needed, however, to determine whether these findings were sample specific or whether such forms of criminal justice contact among women have greater implications for couple destabilization, compared to men.

Greater attention to the racial disparities in dissolution rates are also needed because Widdowson et al. (2020) found that dissolution rates among incarcerated Black people are higher relative to White or Hispanic people. It is well-documented in the United States that Blacks, particularly Black men, have a higher probability of criminal justice contact than other racial or ethnic groups (Mumola, 2000; Prison Policy Initiative, 2019). Moreover, Black men experience lengthier incarceration terms (Spohn, 2000). These disproportionate rates are a result of over-policing Black and Brown neighborhoods (Camp et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017; Davis, 2011) and racial bias in sentencing (Sweeney & Haney, 1992). These disproportionate rates are also a result of structural conditions, such as poor employment prospects, exposure to family and community violence, and financial strain (Conger et al., 2002; Cutrona et al., 2003; Kogan et al., 2013). Therefore, the U.S. must rectify the wrongs committed to Black and Brown people by acknowledging and remediating the devastating impact that

criminalization of certain neighborhoods as well as systemic racism in police forces and the criminal legal system have had (Vaidyanathan, 2020), and begin moving towards preventative justice (McLeod, 2015).

There are several general limitations pertaining to research examining the relationship between criminal justice contact and marital or non-marital relationship dissolution. First, the external validity of this body of evidence may be limited because family and criminal justice policies in the U.S. are different than those in Europe, and the experience of criminal justice contact, stigma, and relationship support services may differ internationally. Second, only a handful of the included studies accounted for the relevant confounders – relationship stability and functioning, low-socioeconomic status, criminality – prior to criminal justice contact and over half lacked a matched comparison group, which impacted the overall methodological rigor based on the CQC. Third, the included studies analyzed data sets that were over a decade old, except for Apel (2016) and Widdowson et al. (2020) who examined more recent waves from the NLSY. Fourth, research has focused on men's contact with the criminal justice system, highlighting a considerable gap in our understanding regarding how women's experiences of criminal justice contact may impact relationship dissolution. Finally, several qualitative studies and mixed-methods studies were identified in the literature search but only five would have met the selection criteria, revealing a critical gap in methodology employed.

Future Directions

Future research should attend to several important issues. First, future work should account for the relevant confounders before, during, and after criminal justice contact while using a matched comparison group to account for selection bias and

unobserved heterogeneity. Second, future work should build on research that has examined mechanisms between criminal justice contact and relationship dissolution, such as separation, parenting stress, and relationship functioning (Massoglia et al., 2011; Siennick et al., 2014; Turney, 2015a; Turney et al., 2013). Next, an important line of inquiry would be to investigate whether men are more likely to leave women who experience criminal justice contact, compared to women leaving men. Another important consideration would be further investigating the role that supportive networks (family, friends, clergy) play in helping men and women who experience criminal justice contact maintain their relationships (De Clair et al., 2019; Nickels, 2020). Sources of support from prosocial relationships outside of romantic relationships are not only instrumental for adult development and relational health (Sprecher et al., 2020), they also help decrease the risk of recidivism (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Markson et al., 2015).

Finally, considering the overall methodological quality of the studies reviewed was relatively high compared to other content related literature reviews that used the CQC, it is important to investigate the differences between quantitative investigations and participant accounts in qualitative work, which could reveal obscured variability in family relationships (Ellis, 2021). For example, qualitative investigations could reveal how lower-level offenses or short-term jail stays could impact relationships regionally given differences in state criminal justice policies and facility characteristics (e.g., age of facility, administrative policies, overcrowding, etc.). Qualitative methodology could broaden our understanding of families impacted by criminal justice contact by providing important insights into non-heterosexual or non-monogamous relationships. Additionally,

it is important to explore the potential impact of publication bias o (Dwan et al., 2008) on our understanding of how contact with the criminal justice system affects romantic relationships.

In summary, this systematic literature review suggests that criminal justice contact appears to increase the risk of both marital and non-marital relationship dissolution. The studies reviewed, albeit few given how prevalent criminal justice contact is in the U.S. and how central relationship dissolution is, suggest that the risk of relationship dissolution is largely concentrated among people in a committed relationship who lived together prior to criminal justice contact. However, other confounding factors, such as relationship functioning and stability, low-SES, and criminality, could explain more of this association. Criminal justice contact may be symptomatic of significant family adversities that destabilize family relationships resulting in changes to family structure, which could further harm already vulnerable families. Nevertheless, shrinking our reliance on the criminal justice system could reduce rates of relationship dissolution, particularly if we invest more resources in social services and poverty reduction initiatives that improve human welfare (Schlager, 2018; Thuma, 2019).

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Appendix

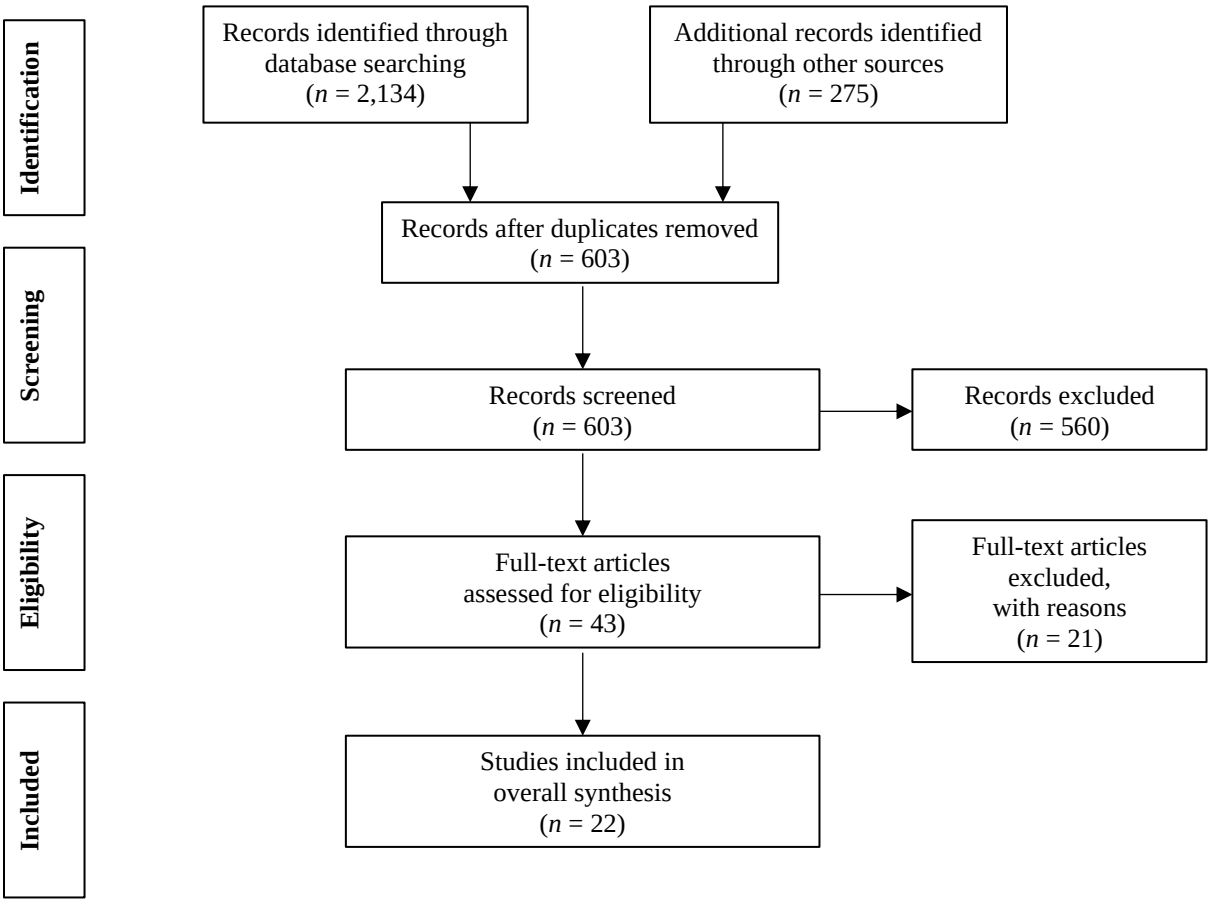


Figure 2.1. Flow Diagram of Included Studies (Liberati et al., 2009)

Table 2.1. Studies on Criminal Justice Contact and Relationship Dissolution

Study	Sample Characteristics			Measures		Results
	Data Set and Sample	Type of Relationship	Criminal Offense and Duration	Criminal Justice Contact	Relationship Dissolution	
Andersen (2016); Denmark	Statistics Denmark; 1989-1991 5,504 males and females selected from population registry data who were convicted drunk drivers; 18-74 years old	Combined cohabitational and marital relationships	Offense: Convicted of drunk driving Duration: Sentenced to 40 days or fewer	Official records Treatment = Drunk drivers convicted after the introduction of an alcohol treatment program in July 15, 1990 Control = Did not participate in an alcohol treatment program	Official records (1) Offender has the same partner the year of the conviction and the first year after the conviction (1=*yes*) (2) Offender has the same partner the year of the conviction and both the first and second year after the conviction (1=*yes*)	OLS regression Same partner 2 years -Treatment: convicted after July 15th 1990 (*b*=.03, *SE*=.01, *p*<.01) Same partner 3 years -Treatment: convicted after July 15th 1990 (*b*=.03, *SE*=.01, *p*<.01)
Apel (2016); U.S.A.	NLSY; 1997-2013 Nationally representative sample of 4,289 females and 4,502 males = 8,791; 18-32 years old	Cohabitational or marital relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: 4 incarceration spells per person; 7.4 months in length (median=1)	Self-reports – monthly measure (1) Sentenced to jail, adult correctional institution, or juvenile correctional institution since previous interview (2) Residence at current interview in jail, prison, detention, or work release	Self-reports of month-to-month change in residential partner status (1) Unmarried, living alone; (2) Unmarried, living with a partner; (3) Married, living alone; (4) Married, living with a partner; (5) Married, living with a spouse; (6) Separated, living alone; (7) Separated, living with a partner; (8) Divorced, living alone; (9) Divorced, living with a partner	Hazard analysis - Cohabitating to living along (*b*=1.74, *SE*=.36, *p*<.001), 1 month - Cohabitating to living along (*b*=.61, *SE*=.28, *p*<.05), 5 month - Married to unmarried (*b*=1.72, *SE*=.63, *p*<.001), 1 month - Married to unmarried (*b*=.66, *SE*=.39, *p*<.10), 5 month - Females (*b*=2.51, *SE*=.59, *p*<.001), 1 month - Females (*b*=1.11, *SE*=.50, *p*<.05), 5 month - Males (*b*=1.80, *SE*=.40, *p*<.001), 1 month - Males (*b*=1.09, *SE*=.30, *p*<.001), 5 month
Apel et al. (2010); The Netherlands	CCLS; 1977-2003 Representative sample of 2,790 males; 18-38 years old	Marital relationships	Offense: Several violent, property, and other crimes Duration: Length of first imprisonment (1 day to 42 months; Average=14 weeks)	Official criminal records (1) Treated – sentenced to a spell of incarceration of any length for the first time at a given age (2) Untreated – observationally equivalent, does not have a history of imprisonment, and who was convicted but not imprisoned at the same age as "treated" counterpart	Official records (1) indicator of marriage conditional on being unmarried at the time of treatment (2) indicator of divorce conditional on being married at the time of treatment	Propensity score estimation - Age adjusted (*b*=.04, *SE*=.02, *p*<.10, Cohen's *d*=.14) - 1 Year post-incarceration - Age adjusted (*b*=.05, *SE*=.03, *p*<.05, Cohen's *d*=.14) - 3 Years post-incarceration - Age adjusted (*b*=.08, *SE*=.03, *p*<.01, Cohen's d=.18) - 5 Years post-incarceration
Fallensen & Andersen (2017); Denmark	Statistics Denmark; 2006-2009 Subsample of 1,859 males from the 4,522 males in the study; >25 years old (Avg.=36 years old)	Combined cohabitating and marital relationships	Offenses: Theft, Violence, Other Crimes Duration: Up to 3 months in length, (median=40 days)	Official records: Reform = electronic monitoring (33% of the sample)	Official records Singlehood = unmarried and not cohabitating with a partner for each to the four years following conviction	Fixed effects difference-in-difference models Policy effect of electronic monitoring: - Decreased the risk of singlehood in the full sample (*B*=-.045,*SE*=.01*p*<.001), the relationship sample (*B*=-.091, *SE*=.02,*p*<.001), and among those who were not in a relationship at the time of conviction (*B*=-.028, *SE*=.01, *p*<.001) - Decreased the risk of singlehood within forty days *(B*=-.046,*SE*=.02, *p*<.01) and over forty days since starting the process (*B*=-.046,*SE*=.02, *p*<.01) in the full sample. - Decreased the risk of singlehood among the relationship sample within forty days (*B*=-.095,*SE*=.03, *p*<.01) and over forty days since starting the process (*B*=-.081,*SE*=.03, *p*<.05).

Table 2.1. Continued

Study	Sample Characteristics			Measures		Results
	Data Set and Sample	Type of Relationship	Criminal Offense and Duration	Criminal Justice Contact	Relationship Dissolution	
Lopoo & Western (2005); U.S.A.	NLSY; 1979-2000 Nationally representative sample of 2,762 males; 1979: 18-21 years of age; 2000: 35 to 42 years of age	Marital relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Combined: jail and prison Self-reports (1) Currently incarcerated, (2) Ever incarcerated, and (3) Incarcerated before marriage (1=*yes*)	Self-reports Divorces or separates (1=*yes*)	Event-history analysis Current incarceration increased the odds of getting divorced for the null model (OR=3.61***, Z=4.37) and full model (OR=2.99***, Z= 3.72).
Massoglia et al. (2011); U.S.A.	NLSY; 1979-2006 Nationally representative sample of 3,576 males; 16 to 49 years old	Marital relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: Incarcerated while married - 0-11 years (mean=2.2 years)	Combined: jail and prison Self-reports (1) Ever incarcerated while married (1=*yes*) (2) Length of time incarcerated (0-11)	Self-reports Ever separated or divorced (1=*yes*)	Event-history analysis - Having ever been incarcerated increased the risk of marital dissolution in the full model (b=.610**, SE=2.66). - Adding length of time incarcerated to full model increased the risk of divorce (b=.278*, SE=2.35) and having ever been incarcerated became unsignificant. - The length of time incarcerated increased the length of separation among ever incarcerated men (b=.786**, SE=3.05).
McKay et al. (2018b); U.S.A	MFS-IP; 2008-2011 Large non-random sample of 666 heterosexual couples; "Typically in their early thirties" (p. 300)	Marital, romantic, and coparenting only relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: Baseline interviews were conducted ~2.6 years into male partner's incarceration; Post-release male interviews occurred within ~5.6 months after release	Self-reports from imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners	Self-reports Couple relationship status = (1) Romantically involved during incarceration, (2) Romantically involved at 1st post release interview, and (3) Romantically involved at 2nd post release interview (1=*yes*)	Time-invariant, autoregressive cross-lagged (ARCL) model - Among men, being romantically involved at baseline increased the odds of being involved at the 1st post release interview (OR=4.94***, 95% CI [3.63, 6.72]), and being involved at the 1st post release interview increased the odds of being involved at the 2nd post release interview (OR=4.29***, 95% CI [2.70, 6.82]). - Among women, being romantically involved at baseline increased the odds of being involved at the 1st post release interview (OR=4.76***, 95% CI [3.50, 6.46]), and being involved at the 1st post release interview increased the odds of being involved at the 2nd post release interview (OR=3.94***, 95% CI [2.64, 5.86]).
Moore et al. (2018); U.S.A.	2002-2007 Non-random sample of 236 male and 98 female pre- and posttrial inmates held on felony charges in an urban jail; 18.40 to 69.60 years old (Avg. 33 years old)	Marital relationships	Offense: Felony charges Duration: Incarcerated on average 1 year and 3 months	Among participants in an urban jail	Self-reports Marital status (1=*legally married*, 0=*non legally married*)	Logistic regression - Among inmates not functioning adaptively at Time 1, Probation status, length of incarceration, and first jail experience did not decrease the odds of dissolution but being transferred did (OR=0.36*, 95% CI [0.15, 0.84]). - Among inmates functioning adaptively at Time 1, probation status and first jail experience did not decrease the odds of dissolution but being transferred did (OR=4.02*, 95%CI [1.07, 15.07]).

Table 2.1. Continued

Study	Sample Characteristics			Measures		Results
	Data Set and Sample	Type of Relationship	Criminal Offense and Duration	Criminal Justice Contact	Relationship Dissolution	
Pelka-Slugocka & Slugocki (1980); Poland	1976 Non-random sample of 327 women in prison; Conjugal group consisted of 183 women.; Up to 50 years of age	Marital relationships	Offense: (1) Against public property at place of work, (2) Against public property away from place of work, (3) Against private property, (4) Offenses by officials, (5) Other offenses/homicide, grievous bodily harm, arson Duration: Medium sentences 2-5 years, Long sentences more than 5 years	Self-report among women prisoners	Self-reports (1) Returned/not returned to husband after imprisonment; (2) Married life of the couple before wife's imprisonment (*very good*, *good*, *medium*, *bad-breaking up*)	Chi-square The association between relationship quality before arrest and return to husband was significant ($\chi^2(111)= 22.112$, $p < 0.05$. Among 165 women who reported on the quality of married life before their imprisonment, about 79% of those who reported a very good quality relationship, 62% in a good quality relationship, 50% in a medium quality relationship, and 18% of those in bad quality relationship returned to their husbands after imprisonment.
Rietzes (1955); U.S.A	Illinois Felon Study; 1951-1953 Random sample of 176 male parolees inducted from Northern Illinois; (-)	Marital relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Official criminal records of Illinois state prisons or jails Two groups: (1) Non-recidivist (104) and (2) Recidivist (46)	Self-reports Divorce or separation	Difference tests - Only 2% of the non-recidivists were divorced at the time of the interview while 30% of the recidivists were then divorced. These two differences were significant at the 1% level. - There was a significant difference at the 5% level between the two groups regarding separations, 2% of the non-recidivists were separated and 9% of the recidivists.
Siennick et al. (2014); U.S.A	Add Health Waves 1 to 4; 1994-2008 Nationally representative sample of 1,107 females and 645 males = 1,847; Wave 3 (18-28 years old); Wave 4 (24-34 years old)	Marital relationships	Offense: (1) Behavioral issues (not convicted): Hard drug use, Drinking, gambling, Non-family violence (2) Behavioral issues (convicted): Prior domestic violence Duration: (-)	Combined: jail, prison, or other correctional facility Self-reports: Three matched groups: (1) Never during marriage, (2) Incarcerated during marriage, by Wave 3, (3) During marriage, after Wave 3	Self-reports Relationship dissolution at Wave 4 (1=*yes*)	Discrete time survival model - Predicting duration-dependent risk of relationship dissolution from respondent incarcerated during marriage: (b=.70***, SE=.18, OR=2.02). - Predicting duration-dependent risk of relationship dissolution after adjusting for relationship characteristics, only incarcerated during marriage and after wave 3 was significant (b=.72**, SE=.26). - Among the male subsample, incarceration during marriage and after wave 3 was associated with dissolution when controlling for the mediators (b=.81**, SE=.30). - Testing for robustness, neither incarcerated during marriage by wave 3 or incarcerated during marriage after wave 3 were significant.

Table 2.1. Continued

Study	Sample Characteristics			Measures		Results
	Data Set and Sample	Type of Relationship	Criminal Offense and Duration	Criminal Justice Contact	Relationship Dissolution	
Skipper et al. (2020); U.S.A.	FFCWS Waves 1 to 5; 1998-2008 Longitudinal survey data that used unweighted stratified sampling among 725 couples married at Wave 4; Male average age=36 years, Female average age=33 years	Marital relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Combined: arrested or charged with any crime Father reports: Father had been arrested or charged with any crime within the last two years of the survey (Wave 4) (1=*yes*)	Self- reports Marital status measured at Wave 5; Divorced (1=*yes*)	Two-stage least square (2SLS) linear probability model (LPM) - Fathers charged with a crime in the last 2 years at Wave 4 was statistically significant at the 10% level in the full model (*b*=1.53, *SE*=.85, *t*=1.80, *p*=.072) predicting divorce at Wave 5. - Fathers charged with a crime in the last 2 years at Wave 4 was statistically significant at the 10% level in the full model (*b*=.16, *SE*=.10, *t*=1.65, *p*=.099) predicting divorce at Wave 5. - Mothers charged with a crime in the last 2 years at Wave 4 was significant in the full model (*b*=-.14, *SE*=.04, *t*=-3.29, *p*=.001) predicting less risk of divorce at Wave 5.
Svarer (2011); Denmark	Statistics Denmark and Crime Register; 1990-2003 Population registry data of 39,370 couples; 18 to 35 years old	Combined cohabitational and marital relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Official criminal records Conviction among males (1=*yes*)	Official records Relationship dissolution (1=*yes*)	Duration or timing-of-events models Being convicted increased dissolution risk by 76% (*b*=.57, *SD*=.08, p<.05) and reduced relationship duration to nearly 2 years among males, compared to those who were not convicted.
Tach & Edin (2013) U.S.A.	FFCWS Waves 1 to 5; 1998-2008 Longitudinal survey data that used weighted stratified sampling, used a pooled sample among 4,244 couples or 9,781 couple-wave observations; Male age in years at baseline (Married=31.77; Cohabitating=27.83 ;Nonresident dating=26.26) Female age in years at baseline (Married=26.36; Cohabitating=24.74 ; Nonresident dating=22.67)	Married, cohabitating, or nonresident dating relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Combined jail or state and federal prison Mother and father reports: Embedded within a larger construct – Behavioral and Health Characteristics: Mother or father reports of whether father had ever been in jail or prison at one-year survey and not baseline.	Mother reports Union dissolution at Waves 2 through 4	Discrete-time event history models Father ever in jail or prison at year 1 increased the risk of union dissolution following a child's birth (b=.31, p<.001). The increased risk of union dissolution among fathers having ever been in jail or prison was significant among unmarried parents (*b*=.33, p<.001).

Table 2.1. Continued

Study	Sample Characteristics			Measures		Results
	Data Set and Sample	Type of Relationship	Criminal Offense and Duration	Criminal Justice Contact	Relationship Dissolution	
Theobald & Farrington (2013); U.K.	CSDD; 1964-2004 Prospective longitudinal survey of 404 males; Risk factors measured at ages 8-10 and 18 years old, interviewed at ages 32 and 48	Marital relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Official criminal records Convicted of an offense between ages of 10 and 50 (1=*yes*)	Official records Separated if he remained separated but cohabited with another woman, if he divorced and remarried, or if he divorced and remained alone up to the age of 48 (1=*yes*)	Logistic regression - Having been convicted (*OR*=2.67, *p*<.05, 95% CI[1.69-4.22]) and having a convicted wife (*OR*=4.75, *p*<.01, 95% CI[2.23-10.11]) predicted separation. - Among men who experienced their marital breakdown, those convicted (*b*=.521, *SE*=.31, *p*<.05, Exp(B)=1.68) and those with a convicted wife (*b*=.98, *SE*=.51, *p*<.05, Exp(B)=2.66) had higher odds of separation. - Being convicted of a crime mediated the relationship between coming from a broken home and later separation among men (*b*=.889, *SE*=.32, *p*<.05, Exp(B)=2.43).
Turney (2015a); U.S.A.	FFCWS; Baseline to nine-year survey; 1998-2008 Longitudinal survey data that used weighted stratified sampling of 2,201 couples; 26 to 29 years old at baseline	Marital, cohabitating, or non-residential romantic relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Combined jail or state and federal prison Mother or father reports: Father incarceration at Wave 3 (1=*yes*)	Mother reports (1) Immediate dissolution between third- and five-year surveys (1=*yes*), and (2) delayed dissolution between five- and nine-year surveys (1=*yes*)	Propensity score models and logistic regression - Matched estimates: Incarcerated fathers have higher odds of immediate relationship dissolution, compared to never incarcerated fathers (*b*=.82; OR = 2.27, *p*<.01). - Doubly robust propensity score model: Incarceration was associated with a greater likelihood of immediate dissolution (*b*=1.06, *OR*=2.90, *p*<.01). - Currently incarcerated fathers have a greater likelihood of immediate dissolution (*b*=1.32, *OR*= 3.74, *p*<.05), compared to previously incarcerated men. - Incarceration was associated with a greater likelihood of dissolution within two years among co-residential couples (*b*=1.60, *OR*=4.97, *p*<.001). - In mediational analyses: The relationship between incarceration and dissolution became insignificant in the model after the inclusion of the mechanisms.
Turney & Wildeman (2013); U.S.A	FFCWS; Baseline to five-year surveys; 1998-2004 Longitudinal survey data that used non-weighted stratified sampling of 3,567 couples; Ages at year 3: (1) Residential fathers=31.92 years, (2) Non-residential fathers=29.62 years, (3) Residential mothers=29.56, and (4) Non-residential mothers 26.70 years	Marital, cohabitating, nonresidential romantic relationship	Offense: Violent 4% Nonviolent 6% Duration: Less than 3 months=5% 3 months or greater=9%	Combined jail or state and federal prison Mother or father reports: Recent incarceration at three-year survey or up to five-year survey (1=*yes*)	Self-reports Outcome: Repartnership at year 5 (break up with father and remain single, breakup with father and repartner, stay with father) (dummy coded) Mediator: Relationship status at year 5 survey	Fixed-effect models and propensity score models - Recent incarceration increases the risk of breaking up with the father and remaining single compared to saying with the father (*b*=1.46, *SE*=.21, *p*<.001). - Restricting the sample to mothers attached to previously incarcerated fathers, recent incarceration increases the risk of breaking up with the father and remaining single compared to saying with the father (*b*=1.17, *SE*=.41, *p*<.001). - Recent incarceration increases the risk of breaking up with the father and repartnering compared to saying with the father (*b*=1.91, *SE*=.33, *p*<.001). - Restricting the sample to mothers attached to previously incarcerated fathers, recent incarceration increases the risk of breaking up with the father and repartnering compared to saying with the father (*b*=1.947, *SE*=.386, *p*<.001).

Table 2.1. Continued

Study	Sample Characteristics			Measures		Results
	Data Set and Sample	Type of Relationship	Criminal Offense and Duration	Criminal Justice Contact	Relationship Dissolution	
Turney & Sugie (2021); U.S.A.	FFCWS; Baseline to five-year surveys; 1998-2004 Longitudinal survey data that used non-weighted stratified sampling of 4,074 participants; Father's average age at year 3=30.72 years, Mother's average age at year 3=28.14 years	Married, cohabitating, nonresidential romantic relationship	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Arrested but also possibly incarcerated in jail or state and federal prison Mother and father reports: Arrested between year 3 and year 5 : "Since the date of the last interview/during the last 2 years, not counting minor traffic offenses, have you ever been booked or charged with breaking a law, either by the police or by someone connected with the courts?" (1=*yes*)	Mother reports Family life - Separation at year 5 (1=*yes*)	OLS regression - Models adjusted for controls: Mothers' arrest was positively associated with separation (*b*=.18, *p*<.05). Fathers associations were insignificant. Fixed effect models - Changes in mothers' arrest was positively associated with changes in separation (*b*=.15, p<.05). Fathers associations were insignificant. - Mothers' arrest was positively associated with separation (*b* =.16, *p*<.10). - Mothers' material hardship explained 17% of the total effect on separation (indirect effect: *b*=.03, *p*<.01).
Volker et al. (2016); Netherlands	Prison Project; 2010-2011 National longitudinal panel data among 702 males representative of 1909 prisoners; 18 to 65 years old	Romantic relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (-)	Official criminal records: Among male prisoners who were incarcerated and Time 1 and interviewed six-months after release at Time 2	Self-reports Used network contacts to create several groups at Time 2: (1) Stable; (2) Dissolved - still in touch; (3) Dissolved - no contact; (4) Dissolved - no information; (4) New	Multinomial multilevel regression analysis and multinomial logit models - 18% returned to same romantic partner, 16.9% reported they were a romantic partner prior to imprisonment and 13.8% reported they were a romantic partner after released. - Compared to prisoners' relationships with friends, romantic partner were less likely to be discontinued (*RR*=.53, *p*<.05).
Widdowson et al. (2020); U.S.A.	NLSY; 1997-2016 Nationally representative sample of 6,471 males and females; 17 to 33 years old	Combined: Marital and cohabitating relationships	Offense: (-) Duration: (1) 1 month=23%, (2) 2–6 months=33%, (3) 7–11 months=17%, (4) 12 or more months=28%	Combined: jail, adult corrections institution, or juvenile corrections institution Self-reports: Incarceration during marriage or cohabitation (1=*yes*)	Self-reports Union Dissolution = no longer coresiding in marital or cohabitating relationship reported at each wave (1=*yes*)	Cox proportional hazard models - Incarceration was positively and significantly related to union dissolution (*b*=.65, *p*<.001, exp(.65)=1.92). - Both Hispanics (*b*=-.43, *p*<.05) and Whites (*b*=-.34, *p*<.05) had significantly lower log-hazards of union dissolution than did Blacks. The difference between Whites and Hispanics was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1)=.24$, *p*>.10). - Marriage (*b*=-.52, *p*<.05), child with partner (*b*=-.25, *p*<.10), employed full time (*b*=-.58, *p*< .01), and union duration (*b*=-.01, *p*<.01) predicted a lower log hazard of union dissolution, and long incarceration (*b*=.39, *p*<.01) a higher log-hazard. - Being married, sharing a child, full-time employment, union duration, and long incarceration, respectively, accounted for 12%, 14%, 21%, 14%, and 9% of the difference in the log-hazard of union dissolution between Hispanic and Black respondents and 6%, 6%, 29%, 3%, and 18% of the difference between Whites and Blacks.

Table 2.1. Continued

Study	Sample Characteristics			Measures		Results
	Data Set and Sample	Type of Relationship	Criminal Offense and Duration	Criminal Justice Contact	Relationship Dissolution	
Wildeman et al. (2016); U.S.A.	FFCWS; Waves 2 to 4; 1999-2006 Longitudinal survey data that used stratified sampling among 4,069 females; Pooled age in years of fathers across Waves 2 to 4: (1) Jail=27.13 (2) State Prison=29.95 (3) Federal Prison=27.86 (4) Unknown =26.99	Married, cohabitating, and nonresidential romantic relationships	Offense: violent and nonviolent offense Duration: less than three months=5%, three months or greater=9%	Mother reports: Father incarcerated in: (1) local jail, (2) state prison, (3) federal prison, and (4) unknown (1=*yes*)	Mother Reports (1) Separated (1=*yes*) and (2) New romantic partner (1=*yes*)	Fixed effect models - Separation was higher among those in a local jail (72.7%), a state prison (76.9%), a federal prison (77.6%), and an unknown type of facility (76.2%), compared to those not incarcerated (40.2%). - Consistent with the descriptive data, jail incarceration, state prison incarceration, federal prison incarceration, and unknown facility type incarceration are associated with a statistically significant increase in the probability of the mother and father separating and of the mother having a new romantic partner (p<.05).
Zoutewelle-Terovan et al. (2016); The Netherlands	17Up; 2010-2012 Retrospective longitudinal study of 248 high-risk people born in the 1970's and treated in a youth juvenile treatment center (116 males, 132 females); 16 to 36 years old	Combined: Marital, cohabitational, and non-cohabitational relationships	Offense: Convicted of violent or property offenses Duration: (-)	Official criminal records of offenders in a juvenile treatment center: (1) Current violent, (2) current property, (3) past violent, and (4) past property (1=*yes*)	Self-reports and life history calendars (1) Separation - any relationship and (2) separation - living-together relationship (1=*yes*)	Multilevel logistic random effects models - At the end of the observation period, 78% of the males and 85% of the females had separated from a partner at least once. - Current offending was significantly associated with separation only for females in any relationship (*RR*=1.21, p<.05) or living-together relationship (*RR*=1.37, p<.01). - Males who committed violent crimes had a significant risk of separation among those in any relationship (*RR*=1.46, p< .05).

Note. Add Health = National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health, CCDD = Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development, CCLS = Criminal Career and Life-Course Study, FFCWS = Fragile Families and Child Welfare Study, Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering, NLSY = National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 17Up = longitudinal study in The Netherlands. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 2.2. The Cambridge Quality Checklist

	Correlates	Risk Factor	Causal Risk Factor	Confounders	Causal Risk Factor Criteria
Andersen (2016)	5	3	5	Stability Low-SES Criminality	Comparison group Before risk factor
Apel (2016)	5	3	4		Within-individual change Comparison group
Apel et al. (2010)	5	3	6	Stability Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group Before risk factor
Fallensen et al. (2017)	5	3	4	Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group
Lopoo et al. (2005)	5	3	3	Stability Criminality	Within-individual change
Massoglia et al. (2011)	5	3	4	Stability Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group
McKay et al. (2018b)	3	3	3		Within-individual change
Moore et al. (2018)	2	3	3	Criminality	Within-individual change
Pelka-Slugocka et al. (1980)	2	2	1		
Rietzes (1955)	3	1	1		
Siennick et al. (2014)	5	3	4	Stability Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group
Skipper et al. (2020)	4	3	3	Low-SES	Within-individual change
Svarer (2011)	5	3	3	Stability Low-SES Criminality	Within-individual change
Tach et al. (2013)	4	3	4	Stability Functioning Low-SES Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group
Theobald et al. (2013)	4	3	2	Low-SES Criminality	
Turney (2015a)	4	3	6	Stability Functioning Low-SES Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group Before risk factor
Turney et al. (2013)	4	3	6	Stability Functioning Low-SES Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group Before risk factor
Turney et al. (2021)	4	3	3	Stability RF Low-SES Criminality	Within-individual change Before risk factor
Volker et al. (2016)	4	3	3	Criminality	Within-individual change
Widdowson et al. (2020)	5	3	4	Criminality	Within-individual change Comparison group
Wildeman et al. (2016)	4	3	4		Within-individual change Comparison group
Zoutewelle-Terovan et al. (2016)	2	3	4		Within-individual change Comparison group

CHAPTER 3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS OF DYADIC RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE AND REALTIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND COMMITMENT AMONG IMPRISONED MEN AND THEIR NON-INCARCERATED WOMEN PARTNERS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO CONTACT

Abstract

This study examined whether perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance – bonding and supportiveness – are associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment among imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners. This study also examined whether institutional barriers to contact moderate these associations. Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM) using multilevel modeling (MLM) were analyzed using data from couples (N = 1,257) who participated in the Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP). Findings suggest that perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance were positively related to relationship satisfaction and commitment and institutional barriers to contact moderated the link between bonding and commitment. Perceived bonding was only positively associated with commitment towards the relationship when couples perceived fewer institutional barriers to contact. A subgroup analysis was performed among Black couples and White couples and revealed similar main effects within racialized groups. However, associations between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction were different for Black women and men, such that higher levels of bonding were associated with greater relationship satisfaction among women, and higher levels of supportiveness were associated with greater relationship satisfaction among men. Evidence extends qualitative work by linking perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance to relational outcomes among imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners. These findings also underscore the importance of removing, or at least reducing, institutional barriers to contact.

Introduction

Although incarceration rates among men have begun to decline in the United States (Kaeble & Glaze, 2016), the impact continues to reverberate throughout millions of families (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2016). For instance, investigations focused on currently incarcerated men have found that the prison system can negatively affect romantic relationship satisfaction and commitment (Siennick et al., 2014; Turney, 2015; Widdowsown et al., 2020; Wildeman et al., 2006). This evidence is supported by research documenting how physical separation creates challenges for women to maintain their relationship with incarcerated men by having to traveling long distances for visits (Mumola, 2000), paying costly phone bills (Tewksbury & DeMichele, 2005), and navigating unpleasant visitation experiences (Girshick, 1996; Hairston, 1998). Such challenges can further marginalize an already vulnerable population.

Despite these challenges, women who are motivated by love and concern for the well-being of incarcerated men find ways to maintain their relationships (Comfort, 2008; De Claire & Dixon, 2017; Fishman, 1990; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Nickels, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative inquiries have described how separation during incarceration could provide an opportunity for couples to reflect on their relationship (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008). These perceptions could play a critical role in how couples maintain their relationship, possibly demonstrating a resiliency and capability to cope while separated (De Claire et al., 2019; La Vigne et al., 2005; Nickels, 2020), which could also lead to greater relationship satisfaction and commitment towards the relationship. However, it remains unclear how institutional settings may constrain or enable relationship maintenance because of the distance to the prison, complicated administrative rules, cost of visiting, phone call costs, scheduling conflicts, and whether visiting the partner is a pleasant experience.

This study draws upon Merolla's (2010a) relational maintenance-continuity model to examine whether perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance are associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment in a sample of imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners. Two indicators – bonding and supportiveness – are used to assess perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and consist of items that tap into four of the five domains of relationship maintenance: (1) positivity, (2) openness or self-disclosure, (3) assurance, and (4) sharing tasks (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013). Though we acknowledge the limitations of the narrowly defined set of measures, existing data sets that include measures for criminal justice contact do not include valid measurement scales for relationship maintenance, such as the Relationship Maintenance Behavior Measure (RMBM; Stafford, 2011). Nevertheless, reminiscing or reflecting on bonding experiences and expressions of support are a characteristic of relationship maintenance while couples are geographically separated (Merolla, 2010a).

We also examine whether institutional barriers to contact moderate these associations to explore if perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance are more strongly related to relationship satisfaction and commitment among couples who have fewer institutional barriers to contact, than those who have more institutional barriers to contact. The results could underscore the importance of removing oppressive administrative and state policies that restrict relationship maintenance and family contact. Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM) are estimated using baseline survey data from couples who participated in the Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP; Bir & Lindquist, 2017).

Relationship Maintenance

Relationship maintenance has been defined by relational scholars as communication and behavioral processes that help couples sustain their relationships in the face of difficult

circumstances (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Canary et al., 2002; Dainton & Myers, 2020; Dindia, 2000; Ogolsky & Monk, 2020; Stafford, 2011; Stafford & Canary, 1991). There are five domains that partners tap into to engage in relationship maintenance including: (1) positivity, (2) openness or self-disclosure, (3) assurances, (4) sharing tasks, and (5) social network involvement (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013). Positivity refers to romantic partners being cheerful and encouraging during their interactions with one another. Openness or self-disclosure is described as romantic partners disclosing their thoughts and feelings with each other and not withholding information. Assurances are expressions of commitment towards the relationship and love for the partner through words and actions. Sharing tasks refers to equal participation in tasks or sharing joint responsibilities. Social network involvement means spending time with family and mutual friends (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Myers, 2020; Stafford, 2011; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

Relationship maintenance has also been conceptualized as both strategic and routine (Dainton & Stafford, 1993). Strategies are intentional with the goal of maintaining the relationship. Routines are less intentional and require less consciousness than strategies since they are seemingly ordinary and regularly occurring behaviors. The significant difference between strategies and routines is the intention of the actor (Dainton & Stafford, 1993) and in the context of one partner's incarceration, relationship maintenance is likely more strategic due to physical distance and institutional constraints. For example, in-person prison visitation is an opportunity for incarcerated men and their non-incarcerated women partners to engage in relationship maintenance, such as planning for the future, bonding, and sharing experiences (Nickels, 2020). However, the physical distance between homes and prison facilities obstructs couples from engaging in these meaningful interactions (Mumola, 2000), which can negatively

affect relationship satisfaction and increase uncertainty regarding the future of the relationship (Massoglia et al., 2011; Rindfuss et al., 1990). Because of the geographic separation while men are incarcerated (Rindfuss & Stephen, 1990), couples may be more strategic in how they engage in relationship maintenance. This could include exchanging photos and letters and sustaining a positive outlook regarding the opportunity to be reunited (De Claire et al., 2019; Nickels, 2020), both of which map onto the five-factor definition of relationship maintenance.

To further contextualize how couples engage in relationship maintenance while geographically separated, this study draws upon the dyadic portion of Merolla's (2010a) relational maintenance-continuity model that illustrates how couples in long-distance relationships (e.g., military, transnational, commuter) sustain their relationship. The model consists of three distinct time periods. First, the prospective period is the time before couples become separated. Second, the introspective period is the time during which the separation occurs. Third, the retrospective period is the time after the separation is over and couples are reunited. Within each time period, there are three interactional dimensions of relationship maintenance that couples can draw upon to maintain their relationship: (1) intrapersonal - personal cognition and activities, (2) dyadic - one-on-one contact, and (3) network - interactions with family and friends. Not only do these interactional dimensions of relationship maintenance help keep relationships from dissolving, but they also play an instrumental role in helping couples cope with stressful events (Canary et al., 2002; Randall & Messerschmitt-Coen, 2020).

This study focuses on the dyadic dimension of relationship maintenance during the introspective period while men are incarcerated to examine whether perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance are associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment towards the relationship. This information is important because although geographic separation prevents

daily or frequent bonding between couples, a characteristic of dyadic relationship maintenance during the introspective period is reminiscing or reflecting on shared experiences (Merolla, 2010a). Thus, more positive perceptions of current dyadic relationship maintenance efforts could play a critical role in each partners' capability to cope while separated (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008; De Claire et al., 2019; La Vigne et al., 2005; Nickels, 2020) and help decrease any possible harms to relationship satisfaction and commitment.

Dyadic Relationship Maintenance

In-person prison visits are an opportunity for couples to engage in dyadic relationship maintenance, including bonding, expressions of support, positivity, sharing experiences, and self-disclosure (Nickels, 2020). The prison rehabilitation literature has stressed the importance of engaging in these behaviors to help maintain a healthy relationship, which in turn helps reduce the risk of recidivism (La Vigne et al., 2005; Laub & Sampson, 1993). Though expressing dyadic relationship maintenance behaviors during in-person prison visits can help couples stay intact while men are incarcerated, in-person visits are not always available and qualitative work has suggested they may come at a cost for women partners (Comfort, 2008; Nickels, 2020). Nickels (2020), for example, described how her sample of women (n = 124) who were relationally committed to an incarcerated male partner used self-disclosure, assurances, and future planning as frequent communication strategies to help maintain their relationship. Most of the women reported being in a committed relationship (engaged – 38%, married – 31%, or cohabiting – 4%) while others who reported being single (19%) or divorced (7%) remained committed to the male partner. Regardless, the women described how important it was to share experiences of everyday life outside of the prison environment with the men and assuring them of their commitment to the relationship by communicating future plans once men are released. At the same time, women

also expressed feeling disconnected because the men were not home to share milestone experiences or help navigate life stressors. This could further increase the risk of becoming emotionally disengaged from the relationship.

Relatedly, among her sample of women visiting imprisoned men in California prisons, Comfort (2008) described how the incarceration term led to a period of increased relationship stability but further explained how maintaining the relationship can lead to a "secondary prisonization of nonincarcerated women" (p. 66). Though some women may favor spending time visiting their incarcerated partner within the confines of the criminal justice system, rather than the household chaos before they were incarcerated (Fishman, 1990), women are repeatedly exposed to the scrutiny and control of the penal system (e.g., poor treatment by guards or other inmates) similar to the men. Thus, although engaging in dyadic relationship maintenance during in-person prison visits could lead to more positive relationship outcomes while men are incarcerated, the overall effect could differ among partners.

Because in-person visits are not always available, or harmful to women visitors, people may instead rely on their perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance during the introspective period while men are incarcerated. For example, De Claire et al. (2019) recruited a small group of four couples attending a relationship program in a U.K. prison. The men had been serving between six and twelve months of their current prison sentence. Using an interpretive phenomenological analysis to explore how couples' experience maintaining their romantic relationships, four main themes were identified: (1) motivation to maintain a special connection, (2) dealing with challenges and threats to the relationship, (3) developing mutual behaviors to overcome challenges, and (4) holding onto belief in the future of the relationship. Although these findings may not be generalizable to couples where men are serving sentences longer than twelve

months, or those impacted by the U.S. criminal justice system, these themes are part of a developing body of evidence emphasizing the importance of dyadic relationship maintenance while men are incarcerated. These descriptions also help us understand couples' motivations and expectations of relationship maintenance (i.e., expecting partner to support and encourage you; Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008) and how violating these expectations could affect relationship satisfaction and commitment.

The Challenges of Institutional Barriers to Contact

A central part of what makes incarceration a punishment institution is separation (Cochran & Mears, 2013; Windzio, 2006). Although visitation has been consistently linked to many benefits for prisoners and their families (La Vigne et al., 2005), in-person visits are rare (Cochran, 2014; Petersilia, 2005). Part of the problem is visitation policies that reward in-person visits to prisoners with good behavior, while punishing others, as well as reductions in visitation can contribute to severed ties between romantic partners (Cochran et al., 2016). Moreover, conceptual frameworks theorizing the effects of visitation on inmates suggest that the visitation timing (early, middle, or later into the incarceration term), visitation patterns (weekly, monthly, sporadic, etc.) and other visitation characteristics (types of visitors, visitation experience, and inmate characteristics) might condition the effects of visitation on prisoners and their romantic partners (Cochran & Mears, 2013). Therefore, couples may use other more frequent forms of contact including letter writing and phone calls as well as other recent options including email and virtual visits (Shlafer et al., 2015). However, phone calls can be costly and are typically time-limited, and emails and virtual visits are not widely available in U.S. prisons (Shlafer et al., 2015).

Because of these contact constraints, this study hypothesizes that institutional barriers to contact attenuate links between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction and commitment. More specifically, that more institutional barriers to contact may weaken associations between perceived dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction and commitment, relative to fewer institutional barriers that could more strongly link perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance to relationship satisfaction and commitment. Institutional barriers to contact may not only act as a prohibitive mechanism that could help explain why people face challenges to staying in contact while geographically separated, but also how these barriers threaten relationship satisfaction and commitment.

Overview of This Study

The purpose of this study was to examine whether perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance are associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment among imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners. This study also examines whether institutional barriers to contact moderate these associations. The two indicators of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance – bonding and supportiveness – consist of items that tap into four of the five domains of relationship maintenance: (1) positivity, (2) openness or self-disclosure, (3) assurance, and (4) sharing tasks (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Ogolsky & Bowers, 2013). Social network involvement, which refers to spending time with family and mutual friends, was excluded because men were currently incarcerated and physically unable to spend time with family or mutual friends.

On the basis of existing qualitative literature that has suggested that positive dyadic relationship maintenance may be related to higher levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment while men are incarcerated (De Claire et al., 2019; La Vigne et al., 2005), two

hypotheses were examined. First, we hypothesized that each person's perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance would be positively associated with their own relationship satisfaction and commitment (H1). Because data were obtained from both partners within each couple, this study was able to examine these hypotheses while controlling for confounders such as the dependence of partners' scores within couples (Kenny et al., 2006). More specifically, this study controlled for partners' perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance. Second, we hypothesized that the level of institutional barriers to contact among each person would moderate the link between their own perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction and commitment, such that perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance would be more strongly linked to relationship satisfaction and commitment when people reported fewer institutional barriers to contact than when they reported more institutional barriers (H2).

Additionally, we considered whether these pathways would operate similarly for Black couples and White couples. Black couples potentially face more threats to relationship satisfaction and commitment because Black men experience lengthier incarceration terms relative to White men (Spohn, 2000). Moreover, even Black men in prison near their home face significant disparities in the frequency of visitation and contact from their romantic partner, compared to White and Hispanic men (Cochran et al., 2016). The combination of economic disadvantage that cannot overcome the costs of staying in contact along with the fear of law enforcement can be significant barriers that keep couples separated and contribute to the erosion of romantic relationships. Therefore, the magnitude of the hypothesized associations may vary across Black and White couples (Bulanda & Brown, 2007, Spohn, 2000; Widdowson et al., 2020). Though this does not represent the experience of all racial-ethnic groups in the data set or those impacted by incarceration (i.e., Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander),

examining these hypotheses among Black couples and White couples are important for understanding family stability and well-being because both racial groups represent a large portion of people who have experienced incarceration (Spohn, 2000).

This study extends conceptual and empirical work focused on relationship maintenance among imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners in three ways. First, most of the research in this area has been qualitative. Moreover, the hypothesized associations have not been examined in a framework that could determine whether each person's relationship satisfaction and commitment depends on their own perception of dyadic relationship maintenance, while controlling for their partner's perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance. Second, this study builds on conceptual frameworks theorizing the effects of visitation on inmates (Cochran & Mears, 2013) by focusing on how institutional barriers to contact may moderate the hypothesized associations to illuminate whether the moderation effect may be felt more strongly among those who have fewer institutional barriers to contact, relative to those who have more institutional barriers to contact. Third, by examining how institutional barriers to contact may attenuate the relationship between perceived dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction and commitment, this study would provide new insights into how relationship outcomes may be impacted by institutional constraints while men are in prison.

Methods

Data

The data used are from the Multi-Site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP; Bir & Lindquist, 2017). These data were made publicly available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Science (ICPSR). The MFS-IP was

funded by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The MFS-IP documents the implementation and effectiveness of family and relationship strengthening programming among couples before, during, and after men's imprisonment. Nearly 2,000 incarcerated and reentering men and their women partners (1,482 couples) were recruited from five sites: Indiana, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota. Baseline interviews began in December 2008 and follow-up interviews were administered at 9- and 18-months. An additional 34-month follow-up was administered in August 2011 at the two largest sites (Indiana and Ohio). Respondents were recruited into the study if they participated in MFS-IP family and relationship strengthening programming (the "treatment group"), or they were recruited into the study as part of the control group who did not receive the programming. Furthermore, incarcerated men were included if they reported being married, in a committed romantic relationship, or in a committed coparenting relationship. During the baseline interview, men were asked to identify and provide contact information for their primary romantic or coparenting partner who was later contacted for an interview.

Although MFS-IP data are evaluative in nature (i.e., treatment and control group conditions), the purpose of this study was not to report findings on the impact of the MFS-IP programming. Moreover, each site implemented different family and relationship strengthening programming rather than one consistent format across sites (Lindquist et al., 2016). Instead, these data will be used to examine perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance among men and women while controlling for group assignment. Additionally, though these data are longitudinal where all the men were imprisoned at baseline and either released, reincarcerated, or remained incarcerated at the 9-, 18-, and 34-month interviews, this study focuses on the baseline

data when all the men are currently incarcerated to capture perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance during the introspective period while couples are separated. To create the analytic sample, couples who reported being in a coparenting only relationship at baseline (n = 235) were excluded to arrive at a sample size of 1,257 heterosexual couples who reported being in a committed romantic relationship or married at baseline.

Most of the analytic sample reported being in a romantic relationship (~70%) compared to a marital relationship (~30%). Additionally, many of the couples participated in the family programming condition (62%). Among men, the mean age was 33.73 years (*SD* = 8.92; range: 18-68) and they reported having nearly three children on average (*SD* = 2.18; range: 0-10). Men reported their race as either Black/African American (58%), White, non-Hispanic (27%), Hispanic (8%), or another racial/ethnic category (7%). Many of the men had either received a high school diploma/GED (35%) or less (33%) while others had some college experience (22%) or had completed an advanced degree (10%). Among women, the mean age was 32.81 years (*SD* = 9.80; range: 18-75) and they reported having nearly two children on average (*SD* = 1.97; range: 0-10). Women reported their race as either Black/African American (48%), White, non-Hispanic (38%), Hispanic (7%), or another racial/ethnic category (7%). Nearly half of the women received a high school diploma/GED (29%) or less (24%) while several others had some college experience (35%) or had completed an advanced degree (12%).

Measures

Satisfaction. A single-item global evaluation was used to assess relationship satisfaction (Finchman & Bradbury, 1987). Participants were asked, "Overall, how happy are you with the relationship?" Scores range from 0 to 9 with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction.

Commitment. Relationship commitment was assessed by a summary scale of several items adapted from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1979) by the MSF-IP investigators. These items tapped into participants' attitudes regarding the future of their relationship. Items included: "How often have you discussed ending your current relationship?" (0 = *often*, 3 = *never*), "Do you ever regret getting into your current relationship?" (0 = *often*, 3 = *never*), "You may not want to be with your partner a few years from now?" (0 = *strongly agree*, 3 = *strongly disagree*), "Do you want to remain in a committed relationship with your partner after you are released?" (0 = *no or do not know*, 1 = *yes*), "How easy or hard do you think it will be to have a good relationship with your partner?" (0 = *very hard*, 3 = *very easy*), "You feel good about your chances to make this relationship work for a lifetime?" (0 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *strongly agree*). Scores range from 0 to 16 and higher scores indicate more commitment towards the relationship (Men: $\alpha = .76$; Women: $\alpha = .84$).

Perceptions of Dyadic Relationship Maintenance

Bonding. Though geographic separation prevented daily or frequent bonding between couples, a characteristic of relationship maintenance during the introspective period while couples are separated is reminiscing or reflecting on shared experiences (Merolla, 2010a). To capture these perceptions, bonding was measured using four-items from the cohesion subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1979). Items include: "Do you confide in your partner…sharing secrets or personal, sensitive information?" (0 = *never*, 3 = *often*), "How often do you and your partner calmly discuss something?" (0 = *never*, 3 = *often*), "How often do you and your partner work together on something?" (0 = *never*, 3 = *often*), and "You and your partner have fun together" (0 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *strongly agree*). Scores range from 0 to 12 where higher scores reflect more positive perceptions of bonding (Men: $\alpha = .71$; Women: $\alpha = .75$).

Supportiveness. The MSF-IP support scale was used to measure supportiveness. The items asked whether: "Your partner encourages or helps you to do things that are important to you" and "When you have problems, your partner really understands what you're going through" (0 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *strongly agree*). Scores range from 0 to 6 where higher scores indicate more positive perceptions of supportiveness (Men: $\alpha = .64$; Women: $\alpha = .72$).

Moderator

Institutional barriers to contact. Institutional barriers include the location of the prison, administrative rules, cost of visiting, phone call costs, scheduling conflicts, and whether visiting the partner is a pleasant experience. To assess institutional barriers to contact, participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following six statements: "The prison is located too far away for your partner/you to make regular visits or is too hard to get to because of transportation issues." "Visitor admission rules such as background checks, dress codes, searches, and metal detectors are hard for your partner/you to deal with." "The cost of visiting makes it hard for your partner/you to visit as often as they/you would like to." "Schedule issues, like limited visiting hours and your partner's/your work schedule, make it hard for to find time for visits." "The cost of receiving calls is too high for your partner/you, or your partner/you do not have access to a phone." "The prison is not a pleasant place to visit, or not a place you want your partner to see you/you want to see your partner." A count variable was created to represent the number of institutional barriers each man and woman nested within a couple experienced (range: 0-6).

Controls

To help minimize the effects of confounding variables, models controlled for whether couples were married or romantically involved (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) and their group assignment (1 =

treatment, 0 = *control*). Models also controlled for the level of contact between partners. Couples were asked how often they currently talk on the phone to one another, send mail, receive mail, and visit each other in-person. Responses were rated on a 6-point scale: 0 = *never*, 1 = *only a couple of times*, 2 = *every couple of months*, 3 = *about once a month*, 4 = *a couple of times a month*, and 5 = *one or more times a week*. The mean of the four variables was used to represent the overall average of contact for men and for women.

Statistical Analysis

To account for the nonindependent nature of the data, multilevel modeling (MLM) was used where the scores of the two partners are treated as nested within the same dyad (Hox, 2002). Specifically, the analytic approach is based on the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kashy & Kenny, 1999). The APIM allows for simultaneous and independent modeling of *actor effects*, or how a person's perception of dyadic relationship maintenance is associated with their own level of relationship satisfaction and commitment, and *partner effects*, or how perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance from a person's partner are associated with their own level of relationship satisfaction and commitment. Therefore, this approach allows for the estimation of actor effects while controlling for partner effects, and vice versa (Cook & Kenny, 2005).

Before modeling, the data set was converted into a pairwise structure to allow for dyadic analyses using MLM, where each row contained each actor's and partner's score for a variable. Variables were examined to determine whether the distributional assumptions were violated (i.e., normality (skew < 1), homoscedasticity, multicollinearity). Only commitment (outcome variable) had a mild negative skew and was transformed using the natural log. Once these preliminary

steps were complete, all predictor variables were centered using grand mean centering (Aiken & West, 1991).

The analyses were conducted in SPSS 27 (IBM Corp., 2020) using the SPSS Mixed Models procedure with maximum likelihood estimation. To determine whether to treat the dyads as distinguishable or indistinguishable, null multilevel models were estimated for both outcomes using covariance structures for indistinguishable and distinguishable dyads. For example, a null MLM using relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable with a fixed intercept was estimated using a compound symmetry with correlation parameterization (CSR) covariance structure for indistinguishable dyads. The same null MLM was estimated using a heterogenous compound symmetry (CSH) covariance structure for distinguishable dyads. The difference between the -2 Log Likelihood from each MLM were used to calculate a chi-square difference test. A significant test would indicate that the dyads should be treated as distinguishable.

Next, two separate APIMs were estimated for each outcome to examine the main effects from perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and any moderating effects of institutional barriers to contact. An effect coded gender variable was created that varies within dyads (*Men* = 1; *Women* = -1; Kenny et al., 2006) and used to determine whether the moderating effects of institutional barriers to contact differed across dyad members. Because gender is a within dyad variable (i.e., varies within dyads) and institutional barriers to contact is a mixed moderator variable (i.e., varies within and between dyads), eight moderating effects were added into the two models (Garcia et al., 2015). More specifically, four two-way interactions between the actor and partner effects of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and institutional barriers to contact along with four three-way interactions between actor and partner effects of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance, institutional barriers to contact, and gender were added to

the model. Thus, the model for person *i* in dyad *j* where *X* is the actor variable, *X′* is the partner variable, *M* is the actor moderator, *M′* is the partner moderator, and with gender as the distinguishing variable, *G*, which acts as a moderator, is:

$$Yij = b_0 + b_{1j}X_{ij} + b_2X'_{ij} + b_3M_{ij} + b_4M'_{ij} + b_5G_{ij} + b_6X_{ij}M_{ij} + b_7X_{ij}M'_{ij} + b_8X'_{ij}M_{ij} + b_9X'_{ij}M'_{ij} + b_{10j}X_{ij}G_{ij} + b_{11}X'_{ij}G_{ij} + b_{12}M_{ij}G_{ij} + b_{13}M'_{ij}G_{ij} + b_{14}X_{ij}M_{ij}G_{ij} + b_{15}X_{ij}M'_{ij}G_{ij} + b_{16}X'_{ij}M_{ij}G_{ij} + b_{17}X'_{ij}M'_{ij}G_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

where b_0 is the intercept, b_1 is the coefficient of X_{ij} on Y_{ij} (actor effect), b_2 is the coefficient of X'_{ij} on Y_{ij} (partner effect), b_3 is the actor moderator coefficient of M_{ij} on Y_{ij}, b_4 is the partner moderator coefficient of M'_{ij} on Y_{ij}, b_5 is the gender difference in Y_{ij}, b_6 is the actor interaction with the actor moderator, b_7 is the actor interaction with the partner moderator, b_8 is the partner interaction with the actor moderator, b_9 is the partner interaction with the partner moderator, b_{10} is the actor interaction with gender, b_{11} is the partner interaction with gender, b_{12} is the actor moderator interaction with gender, b_{13} is the partner moderator interaction with gender, b_{14} is the actor interaction with the actor moderator and gender, b_{15} is the actor interaction with the partner moderator and gender, b_{16} is the partner interaction with the actor moderator and gender, b_{17} is the partner interaction with the partner moderator and gender, and e_{ij} represents the residual term. Significance of the first three-way interaction indicates whether the interaction between the actor effect and the actor moderator ($X_{ij}M_{ij}G_{ij}$) is different across dyad members while the significance of the next three-way interaction indicates whether the interaction between the actor effect and the partner moderator ($X_{ij}M'_{ij}G_{ij}$) is different across dyad members. The significance of the last two three-way interactions ($X'_{ij}M_{ij}G_{ij}$ and $X'_{ij}M'_{ij}G_{ij}$) indicate if the moderation is different across dyad members (Garcia et al., 2015). If all four three-way interactions are statistically significant,

we can conclude that the moderation is different across genders. Significant interactions are shown and were probed using simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991).

As a final step, subgroup analyses among Black couples and among White couples were also examined to determine whether perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and institutional barriers to contact may explain heterogeneity in relationship satisfaction and commitment within racialized groups. The results are presented in three sections. First, the means, standard deviations, test statistics, and bivariate correlations are presented for the main analysis variables. Second, the hypothesized associations between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction and commitment are presented. This section also includes findings regarding the moderating role of institutional barriers to contact. Third, findings from the subgroup analyses are presented.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, and test statistics within dyads for all analysis variables are shown in Table 3.1. Paired samples *t* tests indicated men and women differed on several analysis variables. Men's level of satisfaction was higher (M = 6.53, SD = 2.24) than the women's level of satisfaction (M = 5.88, SD = 2.69; $t(1237) = 7.73$, $p < .001$) and men's level of commitment towards the relationship was higher (M = 13.23, SD = 2.73) than the women's level of commitment (M = 12.32, SD = 3.54; $t(1150) = 8.04$, $p < .001$). No significant differences were found between the indicators of perceived dyadic relationship maintenance. Men's perceived level of institutional barriers to contact was lower (M = 1.67, SD = .60) than the women's perceived level of institutional barriers to contact (M = 1.76, .53; $t(1256) = -4.57$, $p < .001$). Regarding controls, men's level of contact (M = 3.84, SD = .95) was higher than the women's

level of contact (M = 3.70, SD = .97; $t(1230) = 6.34$, $p < .001$). Most of the analytic sample reported being in a romantic relationship (~70%) compared to a marital relationship (~30%). Additionally, many of the couples participated in the family programming condition (62%) relative to the control condition (38%).

Table 3.2 summarizes bivariate correlations within each partner and between partners within each couple. The Pearson product-moment correlation – a measure of nonindependence for distinguishable dyads – was significant for both satisfaction ($r = .29$, $p < .001$) and commitment ($r = .34$, $p < .001$). This indicated that the data were nonindependent and suggested that couples' perceptions of satisfaction and commitment were positively correlated. Couples' perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance were also significant, bonding ($r = .25$, $p < .001$) and supportiveness ($r = .18$, $p < .001$), suggesting that perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance were positively correlated. Couples' institutional barriers to contact ($r = .19$, $p < .001$) and contact with partner ($r = .61$, $p < .001$) were significantly and positively correlated. Being married was negatively associated with institutional barriers to contact among men but also positively associated with contact with partner among men. Being married was negatively associated with satisfaction, bonding, and supportiveness among women. Treatment group assignment was negatively associated with institutional barriers to contact among men, positively associated with relationship satisfaction among women, and positively associated with contact with partner among men and women.

Main Analysis

First, to determine whether to treat the dyads as indistinguishable or distinguishable, null multilevel models were estimated for both outcomes with fixed intercepts. Compound symmetry with correlation parameterization (CSR) covariance structures were used for indistinguishable

dyads and heterogenous compound symmetry (CSH) covariance structures were used for distinguishable dyads. The difference between the -2 Log Likelihood from each MLM were used to calculate a chi-square difference test and revealed the dyads should be treated as distinguishable for relationship satisfaction [$\chi^2(1) = 45.21$, $p < .001$] and commitment [$\chi^2(1) = 6.12$, $p = .013$].

Next, to examine whether a person's perception of dyadic relationship maintenance was positively associated with higher levels of their own relationship satisfaction and commitment (H1), and whether institutional barriers to contact moderated these associations (H2), an APIM was used for each outcome. Several controls were added to both models to minimize the effects of confounders, namely (a) partner effect of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance (b) gender, (b) actor effect of contact with partner, (c) partner effect of contact with partner, (d) actor effect of relationship status (married/in a romantic relationship), (e) partner effect of relationship status (married/in a romantic relationship), and (f) group assignment (treatment or control group; level-2 variable). To test for moderation, interaction terms between the actor and partner effects of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and institutional barriers to contact were added to the model. Additionally, the four three-way interactions between the actor and partner effects of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance, institutional barriers to contact, and gender were added to the model.

The results are shown in Table 3.3. The final model for relationship satisfaction fit the data better than the null model [$\chi^2(34) = 1230.03$, $p < .001$]. Similarly, the final model for commitment fit the data better than the null model [$\chi^2(34) = 1474.812$, $p < .001$]. The first APIM revealed that the actor effect of bonding and supportiveness were positively related to relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .29$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .49$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$; respectively).

This suggests that as each person's perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance increased, their own level of relationship satisfaction increased. The second APIM revealed that the actor effect of bonding and supportiveness were positively related to higher levels of commitment (β = .12, *SE* = .01, $p < .001$; β = .24, *SE* = .01, $p < .001$; respectively). This suggests that as each person's perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance increased, their own level of commitment increased. Thus, the hypothesis that a person's perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance would be positively associated with higher levels of their own relationship satisfaction and commitment was supported (H1). The partner effects of bonding and supportiveness were not significantly related to relationship satisfaction (β = .05, *SE* = .03, $p = .062$; β = .09, *SE* = .05, $p = .054$; respectively). The partner effect of bonding was not significantly related to commitment, but the partner effect of supportiveness was positively related to higher levels of commitment (β = .04, *SE* = .01, $p < .001$), suggesting that each person reported greater commitment when their partners felt more supported. Neither of the main effects from actors' or partners' institutional barriers to contact were significantly related to relationship satisfaction or commitment. Gender was positively associated with both satisfaction (β = .23, *SE* = .07, $p < .001$) and commitment (β = .07, *SE* = .02, $p < .001$), suggesting that men were more satisfied and committed to the relationship than were women.

Regarding the interactions, there were no significant two-way interactions between the actor and partner effects of perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance, institutional barriers to contact, or gender in the first APIM predicting relationship satisfaction. One significant three-way interaction emerged between the partner effect of bonding, partner institutional barriers to contact, and gender (β = .15, *SE* = .05, $p = .005$), but the other three-way interactions were not significant, suggesting this moderation effect is not significantly different across dyad members

and was thus not probed. In the second APIM predicting commitment, there was one significant two-way interaction between the actor effect of bonding and actor institutional barriers to contact that was negatively related to commitment (β = -.04, *SE* = .01, *p* = .011). Additionally, a significant three-way interaction between the actor effect of bonding, actor institutional barriers to contact, and gender emerged (β = -.03, *SE* = .01, *p* = .025) but because the other three-way interactions were not significant, the moderation effect is not significantly different across dyad members.

The significant two-way interaction between the actor effect of bonding and actor institutional barriers to contact was probed using simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991), revealing significant differences between slopes (Figure 3.1). The relationship between the actor effect of bonding and commitment was stronger at lower levels of institutional barriers to contact (-1 *SD*, β = .07, *p* < .001) relative to higher levels of institutional barriers to contact, which was not significant (1 *SD*, β = .03, *p* = .388). Therefore, the negative two-way interaction term between the actor effect of bonding and actor institutional barriers to contact provided evidence to support H2, whereby fewer institutional barriers to contact strengthened the association between a person's bonding and their own level of commitment. The first MLM accounted for 33.29% of the variance in relationship satisfaction calculated by the pseudo R^2 (Kenny et al., 2006). The second MLM accounted for 46.38% of the variance in commitment.

Subgroup Analysis

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 3.4 for Black couples and Table 3.7 for White couples. The paired samples *t* tests revealed similar significant mean differences as the overall sample between men and women within racial groups regarding the main analysis variables. The only exception being that Black men reported fewer institutional barriers to contact (*M* = 1.67,

SD = .60) than did Black women (*M* = 1.80, *SD* = .46; *t*(546) = -4.53, *p* < .001). Perceptions of institutional barriers to contact did not differ between White men and White women. Regarding actor and partner effects of perceived dyadic relationship maintenance on relationship satisfaction and commitment, results among Black couples (Tables 3.6) and White couples (Tables 3.9) generally paralleled the overall sample. However, differences did appear within Black Couples and White couples regarding the interactions.

Among Black couples, there were two significant two-way interactions. The first between the actor effect of bonding and gender (β = -.14, *SE* = .05, *p* = .005) and the second between the actor effect of supportiveness and gender (β = .16, *SE* = .08, *p* = .069). Using a test of simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991), the first interaction suggested that the relationship between the actor effect of bonding and relationship satisfaction was stronger among women (β = .39, *p* < .001) than men (β = .14, *p* = .040; Figure 3.2). This meant women's reports of relationship satisfaction were more sensitive to variations in their perceptions of bonding, whereas men's reports of relationship satisfaction were fairly stable regardless of bonding. Simple slope analysis for the second interaction term suggested that the relationship between the actor effect of supportiveness and relationship satisfaction was stronger among men (β = .63, *p* < .001) than women (β = .31, *p* = .008; Figure 3.3). This meant men's reports of relationship satisfaction were more sensitive to their feelings of being supported than were women's reports of relationship satisfaction. The first MLM accounted for 27.35% of the variance in relationship satisfaction and the second MLM accounted for 44.09% of the variance in commitment among Black couples.

Among White couples, there were no significant two-way interactions in the first or second APIM (Table 3.9). Two significant three-way interactions in the first APIM emerged between the actor effect of bonding, actor institutional barriers to contact, and gender (β = -.19,

SE = .09, *p* = .038) and between the partner effect of bonding, partner institutional barriers to contact, and gender (β = .28, *SE* = .10, *p* = .004). However, because the other two three-way interaction terms were not significant, this indicated that the moderation effect was not significantly different across dyad members. The first MLM accounted for 39.94% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. The second MLM accounted for 51.55% of the variance in commitment among White couples.

Taken together, the subgroup analyses among Black couples and White couples suggest there were not any significant differences among racialized groups for the main effects, but gender did moderate the associations between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction among Black couples.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine whether perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance were related to relationship satisfaction and commitment among imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners. This study also examined whether institutional barriers to contact moderated these associations. Findings suggest that a person's perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance was related to their own relationship satisfaction and commitment. Institutional barriers to contact moderated the relationship between a person's perception of bonding and their level of commitment, such that fewer institutional barriers to contact strengthened the relationship between a person's perception of bonding and level of commitment, relative to more institutional barriers to contact. Subgroup analysis among Black couples and White couples suggested that the main effects paralleled the findings from the overall sample. Gender moderated the associations between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction among Black couples.

The significant and positive relationships that emerged between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship satisfaction and commitment are compatible with previous qualitative evidence among couples where one partner has experienced incarceration (De Claire et al., 2019; La Vigne et al., 2005; Nickels, 2020). People who perceived higher levels of bonding (confiding in each other, having calm discussions, sharing tasks, and having fun together) and supportiveness (encouragement and understanding) reported greater relationship satisfaction and commitment towards the relationship. Situating this evidence in the related literatures on long-distance relationships (i.e., military deployment; Merolla, 2010b), periods of separation could allow time for personal reflections regarding the future of the relationship. Recollections of happy bonding memories during a period of separation and anticipating these experiences once reunited can help people manage during difficult periods of separation as well as maintain more positive feelings about the future of the relationship (Merolla, 2010a; Sahlstein, 2004). This evidence supports previous research suggesting that more positive perceptions and engagement in relationship maintenance while men are imprisoned could lead to more positive relationship outcomes (La Vigne et al. 2005; Nickels, 2020; Stockman et al., 2020).

There were no significant partner effects with the exception of partner supportiveness being positively related to commitment. This evidence suggest that higher levels of perceived supportiveness from a person's partner were related to higher levels their own commitment towards the relationship. Hampel and Vangelisti (2008) found that couples' expectations of each other are an important part of relationship maintenance, such as expecting that your partner will encourage you to do things that are important to you and understand what you are going through when problems arise. Even though these expectations are likely to be violated over time,

couples' expectations of each other could be a mechanism for dyadic relationship maintenance while men are incarcerated and should be explored further.

Lower levels of institutional barriers to contact were found to strengthen the relationship between higher levels of perceived bonding and commitment. Because separation due to incarceration is one of the biggest contributors to relationship dissolution (Massoglia et al., 2011), this evidence underscores the importance of removing the financial burden of having to pay costly phone bills to stay in contact (Tewksbury & DeMichele, 2005), reducing scrutiny from guards during visitation (Comfort, 2008), and providing transportation services to help families travel to the facility where an incarcerated partner is held (Mumola, 2000). It is also important to simplify family and conjugal visitation policies that vary across facilities and within states and explore the impact that enhanced visits (e.g., overnight visits, extended visits in a family-like setting; Shlafer et al., 2015) may have on romantic relationships. Regardless, removal of the one consistent oppressive policy that considers family contact a "privilege", often rewarded to those with good behavior while punishing others (Boudin et al., 2013, p. 161), could reduce how institutional barriers may contribute to the erosion of romantic relationships.

The opportunity to share time together in-person creates a more substantive bonding experience (Barrick et al., 2014; Christian & Kennedy, 2011), and early and more frequent visits help reduce misconduct and can lead to positive reentry outcomes among incarcerated men (McLeod & Bonsu, 2018). However, in-person visits are rare (Cochran, 2014; Petersilia, 2005) and institutional barriers to visitation marginalize Black families and those surrounded by community disadvantage (Cochran et al., 2016). Therefore, couples may rely on other more common forms of contact including letter writing and phone calls (Shlafer et al., 2015). More recently, emails and virtual visits have emerged as potential options for couples to remain in

contact, but they are not widely available in U.S. prisons (Shlafer et al., 2015). Moreover, the cost/benefit ratio of video technology is currently being debated. Regarding benefits, video visitation among couples separated farther from each other geographically, which is more common for prison than jail, could allow couples to share more time together (Digard, 2018). Regarding costs, some state policies require family members to go to designated locations, such as a parole office, for video visitation, further creating challenges and contributing to the secondary prisonization of women and families (Comfort 2008; 2019). Additionally, video visitation is considerably less common in prison than jails (Shlafer et al., 2015) and may be cost prohibitive, resulting in even fewer visits if in-person contact is not possible (Digard, 2018, Tartaro, & Levy, 2017). Although the cost/benefit ratio of video visitation is not yet clear, removing as many unnecessary institutional barriers to family contact as possible is not only imperative from a practical standpoint, but morally imperative.

Results from the subgroup analyses among Black couples and White couples paralleled the main analysis. However, interactions between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and gender explain some of the heterogeneity in relationship satisfaction among Black couples. Black women's reports of relationship satisfaction were more sensitive to variations in their perceptions of bonding, whereas Black men's reports of relationship satisfaction were fairly stable regardless of bonding. Black men's reports of relationship satisfaction were more sensitive to their feelings of being supported than were Black women's reports of relationship satisfaction. Regarding Black women, they reported more institutional barriers to contact and were in contact significantly less than Black men. It is possible that to avoid practices of dehumanization within U.S. prison environments (e.g., guards using racially charged and misogynistic language; Shaylor, 1998), they instead maintained their relationship through reminiscing about fond

bonding experiences or recounting these experiences with family and other social network members, which could contribute to higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Sprecher et al., 2020). Additionally, Black men whose partners express more encouragement and understanding as they navigate prison may feel more satisfied with the relationship than the partner who is providing these forms of support. However, supportiveness tends to decrease as men are released (Turney, 2015), revealing potential offsetting effects of supportiveness for relationship satisfaction. Therefore, more research is needed that rigorously investigates how the timing of incarceration and release may affect dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship outcomes within and between racial and ethnic groups.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. First, caution should be given to causal inferences. Second, the generalizability of this evidence is limited to state prisons where men were recruited. Third, although this study hypothesized that perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance would be associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment, the directionality of the hypothesized associations could differ. For example, Stockman et al. (2020) found that relationship satisfaction was positively related to commitment towards the relationship among a sample of romantic partners of male detainees in Belgium. They also found that commitment towards the relationship was positively associated with the number of visits they made to their detained partner. Although this study controlled for the frequency of contact between partners, it is likely that contact frequency plays a more central role and should be conceptualized as a form of relationship maintenance while men are in prison. Fourth, indicators of perceived dyadic relationship maintenance were assessed by a narrowly defined set of measures and this study did not measure social networks as a form of relationship maintenance.

Researchers interested in collecting and analyzing data focused on relationship maintenance should draw upon validated measures such as the Relationship Maintenance Behavior Measure (RMBM; Stafford, 2011). Fifth, given the evidence that emerged in the subgroup analysis regarding gender differences among Black couples, results likely differ within and between racial and ethnic groups. Future work should examine how cultural aspects of relationship maintenance and structural barriers that disproportionately impacts certain racial and ethnic groups over others could affect relationship outcomes. Finally, though models controlled for group assignment (treatment and control group), 62% of the couples participated in the family strengthening condition. Participation in the family strengthening condition likely increased opportunities for couples to connect with each other and potentially increased mean levels of perceived dyadic relationship maintenance and relationship outcomes during baseline interviews. This could also help explain why both institutional barriers to contact and contact between partners were both positively correlated, suggesting that although both partners reported experiencing institutional barriers to contact, they were nonetheless in contact with one another. Thus, couples who participated in the family strengthening condition were perhaps more aware of institutional barriers to contact because they were in contact with each other more frequently than the control group.

Conclusion

This study supports the correspondence between perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance and positive relationship outcomes among imprisoned men and their non-incarcerated women partners. These findings lend support to qualitative inquiries suggesting that more positive perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance while separated may affect relationship satisfaction and commitment towards the relationship (Braman, 2004; Comfort,

2008; De Claire et al., 2019; Nickels, 2020). Significant moderation effects underscore the importance of removing oppressive administrative and state policies that constrain family contact. Doing so could lead to more substantive dyadic relationship maintenance experiences during in-person prison visits (Barrick et al., 2014; Christian & Kennedy, 2011), increase the frequency of other forms of contact, and potentially lead to more positive outcomes as men reenter families once released (McLeod & Bonsu, 2018).

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Appendix

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics (N = 1,257)

Variable	Men *M(SD)*	Women *M(SD)*	Test Statistic Paired samples *t* tests
Outcomes			
Satisfaction	6.53(2.24)	5.88(2.69)	$t(1237) = 7.73^{***}$
Commitment	13.23(2.73)	12.32(3.54)	$t(1150) = 8.04^{***}$
Predictors			
Bonding	10.20(1.85)	10.07(2.20)	$t(1248) = 1.90$
Supportiveness	4.87(1.12)	4.87(1.25)	$t(1241) = .09$
Moderator			
Institutional Barriers	1.67(.60)	1.76(.53)	$t(1256) = -4.57^{***}$
Controls			
Contact with Partner	3.84(.95)	3.70(.97)	$t(1230) = 6.64^{***}$
Married	30%	29%	
Romantic Relationship	70%	71%	
Treatment Group	62%	62%	
Control Group	38%	38%	
Demographics			
Age	33.73(8.92)	32.81(9.80)	
Number of Children	2.63(2.18)	1.97(1.70)	
Race/Ethnicity			
Black/African American	58%	48%	
White, non-Hispanic	27%	38%	
Hispanic	8%	7%	
Another racial/ethnic category	7%	7%	
Education			
Less than High School	33%	24%	
High School Diploma/GED	35%	29%	
Some College	22%	35%	
Advanced Degree	10%	12%	

Note. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 3.2. Correlations Between Men and Women for Analysis Variables

	Satisfaction	Commitment	Bonding	Supportiveness	Institutional barriers	Contact with partner	Married	Treatment group
Satisfaction	**.29*****	.56***	.47***	.42***	-.03	.32***	-.06*	.06*
Commitment	.54***	**.34*****	.59***	.62***	-.06	.32***	-.01	-.00
Bonding	.47***	.57***	**.25*****	.65***	-.02	.34***	-.06*	.01
Supportiveness	.46***	.56***	.60***	**.18*****	-.03	.24***	-.09**	-.01
Institutional barriers	-.10***	-.09**	-.07*	-.06*	**.19*****	-.08**	-.02	-.01
Contact with partner	.32***	.26***	.28***	.22***	-.09***	**.61*****	-.02	.14***
Married	.04	.08**	-.01	-.01	-.03	.00	**.92*****	-.00
Treatment group	.02	-.03	-.02	-.03	-.08**	.10***	-.01	**1.00**

Note. Correlations for men appear below the diagonal; correlations for women appear above the diagonal. Bolded correlations along the diagonal are between dyad members. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 3.3. Moderation Models in Associations with Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment

	Satisfaction			Commitment		
	β	*SE*	*P*	β	*SE*	*p*
Actor Bonding	.29	(.03)	<.001	.12	(.01)	<.001
Partner Bonding	.05	(.03)	.062	.01	(.01)	.212
Actor Supportiveness	.49	(.05)	<.001	.24	(.01)	<.001
Partner Supportiveness	.09	(.05)	.054	.04	(.01)	<.001
Institutional Barriers to Contact						
Actor	-.09	(.08)	.261	-.04	(.02)	.120
Partner	.01	(.08)	.937	.00	(.02)	.969
Gender (1 = Men)	.28	(.04)	<.001	.07	(.01)	<.001
Contact with Partner						
Actor	.36	(.06)	<.001	.09	(.02)	<.001
Partner	.09	(.06)	.091	-.00	(.02)	.999
Marriage (1 = Yes)						
Actor	.26	(.22)	.246	.02	(.06)	.729
Partner	-.13	(.22)	.578	.11	(.06)	.108
Treatment Group (1 = Yes)	.09	(.09)	.326	-.03	(.03)	.426
Actor Bonding*Actor Institutional Barriers to Contact				-.04	(.01)	.011
Partner Bonding*Gender*Partner Institutional Barriers	.15	(.05)	.005			
Actor Bonding*Actor Institutional Barriers to Contact*Gender				-.03	(.01)	.025

Note. Gender was effect coded as men = 1 and women = -1 following Cook and Kenny's (2005) convention.

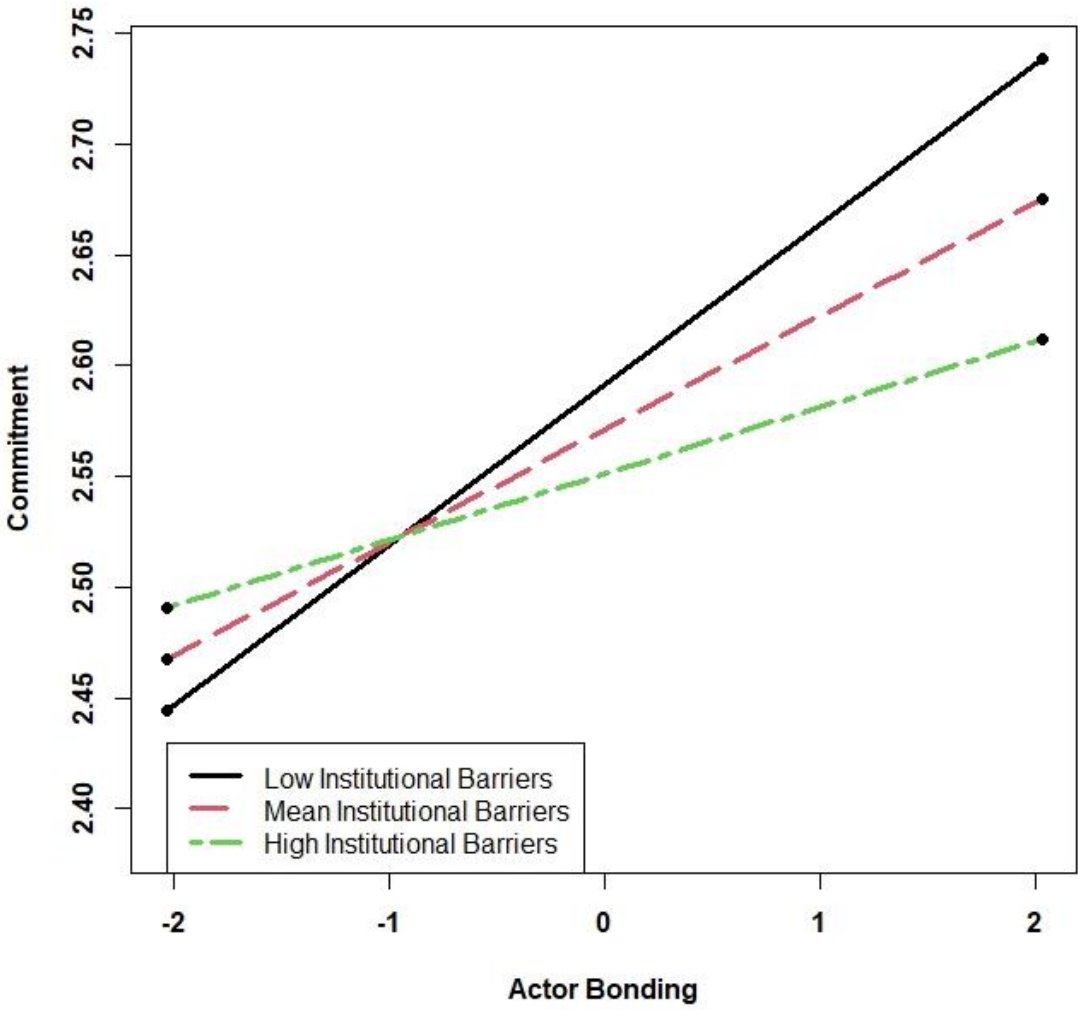


Figure 3.1. Moderation Effect of Actor Institutional Barriers to Contact on the Relationship Between Actor Bonding and Commitment

Table 3.4. Descriptive Statistics for Black Couples (n = 547)

	Men	Women	Test Statistic
Variable	*M(SD)*	*M(SD)*	Paired samples *t* tests
Outcomes			
Satisfaction	6.52(2.26)	6.01(2.76)	$t(539) = 3.76^{***}$
Commitment	13.28(2.61)	12.45(3.46)	$t(497) = 5.27^{***}$
Predictors			
Bonding	10.25(1.83)	10.13(2.13)	$t(543) = 1.13$
Supportiveness	4.94(1.11)	4.99(1.19)	$t(539) = -.85$
Moderator			
Institutional Barriers	1.67(.60)	1.80(.46)	$t(546) = -4.53^{***}$
Controls			
Contact with Partner	3.85(.92)	3.71(.96)	$t(543) = 4.22^{***}$
Married	25%	24%	
Romantic Relationship	75%	76%	
Treatment Group	62%	62%	
Control Group	38%	38%	
Demographics			
Age	33.12(8.37)	32.64(9.02)	
Number of Children	2.91(2.29)	2.09(1.72)	
Education			
Less than High School	37%	23%	
High School Diploma/GED	34%	27%	
Some College	20%	37%	
Advanced Degree	9%	13%	

Note. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 3.5. Correlations Between Men and Women for Analysis Variables among Black Couples

	Satisfaction	Commitment	Bonding	Supportiveness	Institutional barriers	Contact with partner	Married	Treatment group
Satisfaction	**.22*****	.52***	.45***	.37***	-.04	.30***	-.09*	.08
Commitment	.49***	**.28*****	.57***	.59***	-.09*	.26***	-.06	-.02
Bonding	.42***	.58***	**.32*****	.63***	-.08	.27***	-.05	.01
Supportiveness	.44***	.54***	.61***	**.19*****	-.05	.17***	-.08	-.02
Institutional barriers	-.03	-.03	.00	-.02	**.18*****	-.11*	.05	-.03
Contact with partner	.29***	.26***	.32***	.19***	-.07	**.56*****	-.03	.17***
Married	.01	.04	-.03	-.07	.01	.02	**.90*****	.01
Treatment group	-.02	-.06	-.03	-.01	-.07	.08	-.01	**1.00**

Note. Correlations for men appear below the diagonal; correlations for women appear above the diagonal. Bolded correlations along the diagonal are between dyad members. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 3.6. Moderation Models in Associations with Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment among Black Couples

	Satisfaction			Commitment		
	β	*SE*	*P*	β	*SE*	*p*
Actor Bonding	.26	(.05)	<.001	.12	(.01)	<.001
Partner Bonding	.01	(.05)	.759	.00	(.01)	.821
Actor Supportiveness	.47	(.08)	<.001	.22	(.02)	<.001
Partner Supportiveness	.14	(.08)	.077	.05	(.02)	.012
Institutional Barriers to Contact						
Actor	.09	(.14)	.660	-.06	(.04)	.115
Partner	-.09	(.13)	-.700	.01	(.04)	.679
Gender (1 = Men)	.23	(.07)	<.001	.07	(.02)	<.001
Contact with Partner						
Actor	.42	(.08)	<.001	.09	(.02)	<.001
Partner	.05	(.08)	.520	-.01	(.02)	.639
Marriage (1 = Yes)						
Actor	.19	(.33)	.557	-.16	(.09)	.073
Partner	-.15	(.33)	.653	.23	(.19)	.011
Treatment Group (1 = Yes)	-.03	(.14)	.831	-.05	(.04)	.198
Actor Bonding*Gender	-.14	(.05)	.005			
Actor Supportiveness*Gender	.16	(.08)	.036			

Note. Gender was effect coded as men = 1 and women = -1 following Cook and Kenny's (2005) convention.

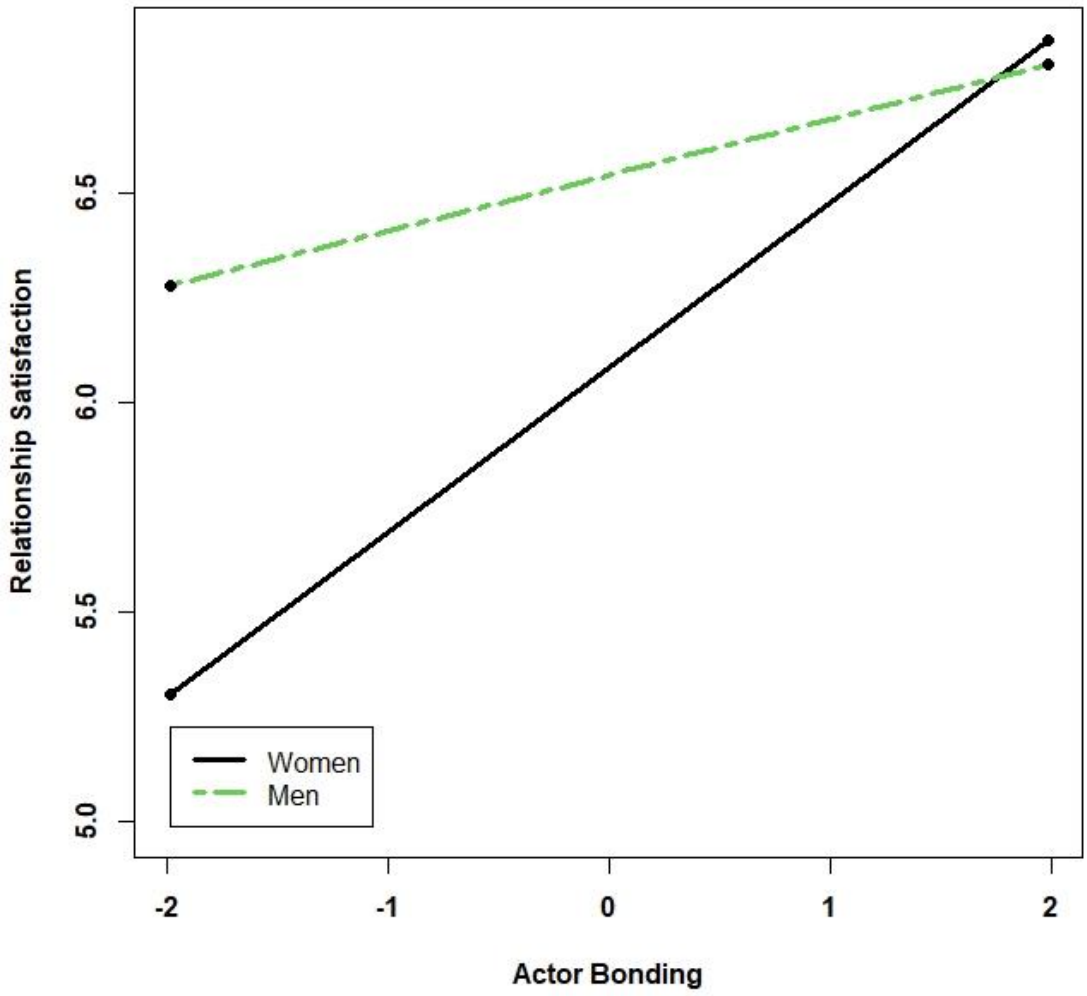


Figure 3.2. Moderation Effect of Gender on the Relationship Between Actor Bonding and Relationship Satisfaction among Black Couples

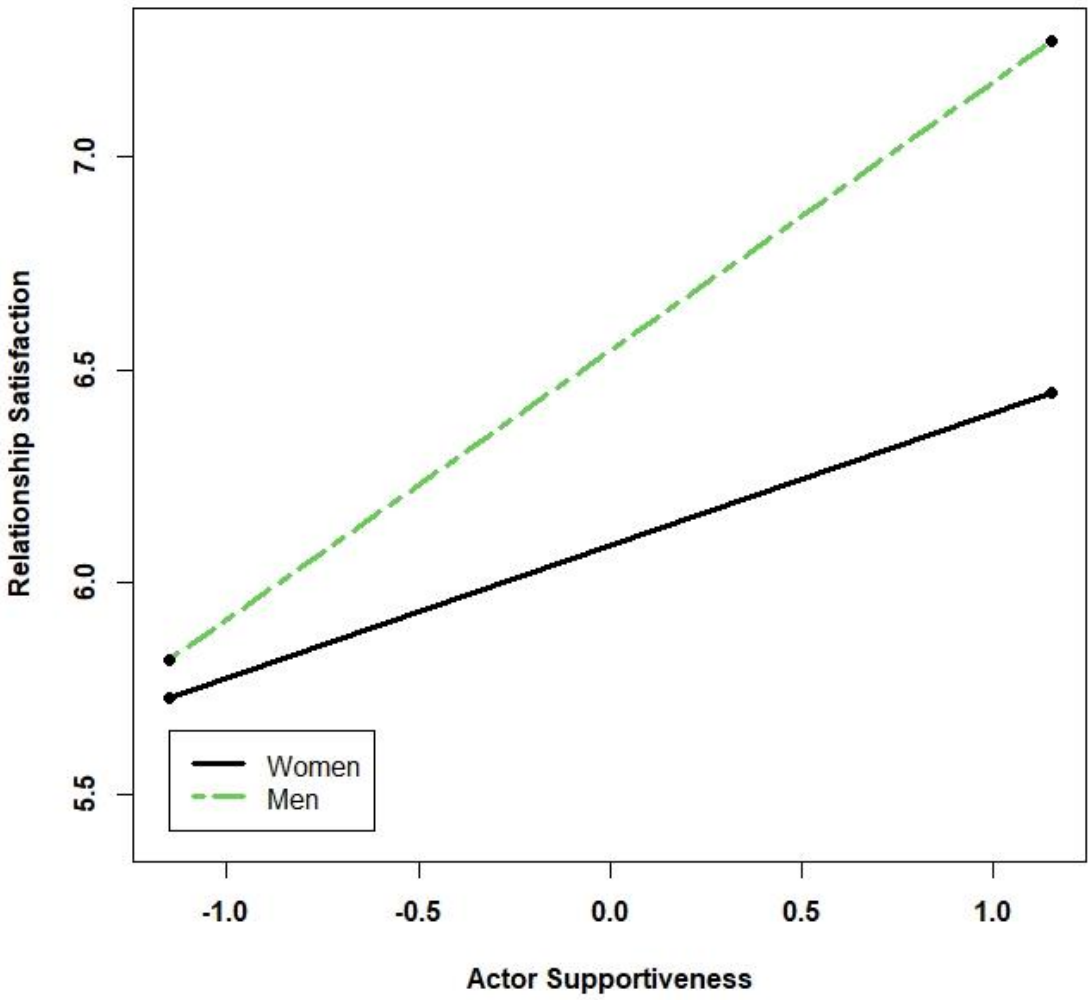


Figure 3.3. Moderation Effect of Gender on the Relationship Between Actor Supportiveness and Relationship Satisfaction among Black Couples

Table 3.7. Descriptive Statistics for White Couples (n = 305)

	Men	Women	Test Statistic
Variable	*M(SD)*	*M(SD)*	Paired samples *t* tests
Outcomes			
Satisfaction	6.54(2.08)	5.78(2.65)	$t(301) = 4.79^{***}$
Commitment	13.23(2.79)	12.25(3.69)	$t(387) = 4.44^{***}$
Predictors			
Bonding	10.11(1.89)	10.02(2.28)	$t(303) = .63$
Supportiveness	4.78(1.13)	4.76(1.32)	$t(301) = .19$
Moderator			
Institutional Barriers	1.68(.58)	1.69(.64)	$t(304) = -.23$
Controls			
Contact with Partner	3.86(.99)	3.73(.99)	$t(296) = 2.81^{**}$
Married	34%	34%	
Romantic Relationship	66%	66%	
Treatment Group	56%	56%	
Control Group	44%	44%	
Demographics			
Age	34.79(9.67)	33.56(11.21)	
Number of Children	2.00(1.73)	1.59(1.43)	
Education			
Less than High School	27%	26%	
High School Diploma/GED	35%	35%	
Some College	26%	28%	
Advanced Degree	12%	11%	

Note. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 3.8. Correlations Between Men and Women for Analysis Variables among White Couples

	Satisfaction	Commitment	Bonding	Supportiveness	Institutional barriers	Contact with partner	Married	Treatment group
Satisfaction	**.31*****	.60***	.54***	.46***	-.04	.30***	-.07	.11
Commitment	.69***	**.40*****	.62***	.69***	.01	.38***	-.03	.02
Bonding	.54***	.52***	**.21*****	.68***	.04	.41***	-.12*	.09
Supportiveness	.52***	.59***	.55***	**.27*****	-.02	.33***	-.10	.04
Institutional barriers	-.15**	-.10	-.12*	-.06	**.25*****	-.07	-.02	-.03
Contact with partner	.32***	.25***	.22***	.25***	-.07	**.71*****	-.04	.10
Married	.06	.11	.06	-.01	-.04	-.06	**.96*****	-.02
Treatment group	.11*	.04	.05	-.03	-.05	.18**	-.01	**1.00**

Note. Correlations for men appear below the diagonal; correlations for women appear above the diagonal. Bolded correlations along the diagonal are between dyad members. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 3.9. Moderation Models in Associations with Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment among White Couples

	Satisfaction			Commitment		
	β	*SE*	*P*	β	*SE*	*p*
Actor Bonding	.35	(.05)	<.001	.09	(.02)	<.001
Partner Bonding	.03	(.05)	.503	.01	(.02)	.465
Actor Supportiveness	.47	(.08)	<.001	.29	(.03)	<.001
Partner Supportiveness	.10	(.08)	.229	.06	(.03)	.028
Institutional Barriers to Contact						
Actor	-.19	(.14)	.173	-.02	(.04)	.713
Partner	.04	(.14)	.769	-.01	(.04)	.750
Gender (1 = Men)	.36	(.07)	<.001	.09	(.02)	<.001
Contact with Partner						
Actor	.13	(.11)	.228	.05	(.03)	.164
Partner	.20	(.11)	.064	.03	(.03)	.319
Marriage (1 = Yes)						
Actor	.72	(.63)	.253	.12	(.19)	.507
Partner	-.54	(.63)	.389	.00	(.19)	.992
Treatment Group (1 = Yes)	.30	(.17)	.060	.00	(.05)	.990
Actor Bonding*Actor Institutional Barriers to Contact*Gender	-.19	(.09)	.038			
Partner Bonding*Partner Institutional Barriers to Contact*Gender	.28	(.10)	.004			

Note. Gender was effect coded as men = 1 and women = -1 following Cook and Kenny's (2005) convention.

CHAPTER 4 LINKS BETWEEN CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONTACT AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE AND FUNCTIONING AMONG BLACK WOMEN

Abstract

Criminal justice contact increases the risk of relationship dissolution, but it remains unclear how it influences other indicators of relationship violence and functioning, particularly among women. Previous evidence suggests that psychological aggression and physical violence are important indicators of women's relational health and well-being that warrant consideration. Additionally, indicators of relationship functioning such as consensus regarding relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breaking up may also be central to understanding components of relational health. This study uses survey data from 331 Black women in romantic relationships to examine whether having ever been arrested or having ever been incarcerated was associated with five measures of relationship violence and functioning: (a) psychological aggression, (b) physical violence, (c) consensus about relationship issues, (d) relationship satisfaction, and (e) proneness to breakup. After controlling for selection factors associated with criminal justice contact, results show that women with a history of arrest reported greater exposure to physical violence. No other associations between criminal justice contact and relationship violence and functioning were found. This evidence underscores how an arrest is a consequential form of criminal justice contact that could increase exposure to physical violence. Recommendations for changing policing in low-income neighborhoods and curtailing women's exposure to physical violence are discussed.

Introduction

Incarceration rates have declined in recent years after a dramatic increase during the last three decades of the twentieth century (Carson, 2018). However, Black women represent a growing share of those arrested (Prison Policy Initiative, 2019) and incarcerated (Guerino et al., 2011; Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). These disproportionate rates are concerning for a variety of reasons, including the fact that many women who experience contact with the criminal justice system occupy intimate roles within family systems as mothers and romantic partners. Moreover, a convincing body of literature documents the risk that criminal justice contact poses for romantic relationship dissolution (Apel et al, 2010; Skipper et al., 2020; Turney, 2015a; Turney & Sugie, 2021), and any changes to family structure could be particularly burdensome for Black women due to racial, social, and economic marginalization (Brown et al., 2016; Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Lehrer & Son, 2017).

Although investigators have identified harms to romantic relationships while people are incarcerated, such as lower relationship quality, less marital love, and greater odds of extramarital sex (Siennick et al., 2014; Turney, 2015b), relatively little is known about how criminal justice contact histories may affect exposure to relationship violence and relationship functioning, especially among women. Theory and evidence suggest that psychological aggression and physical violence are key indicators of formerly incarcerated women's well-being and relational health (Newman et al., 2020; Vergruggen et al., 2020). Additionally, indicators of relationship functioning such as consensus regarding relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breaking up may also be central to understanding how criminal justice contact may affect relational health (Turney, 2015b). Examining these associations among Black women who have experienced criminal justice contact is important because Black

women could face greater exposure to relationship violence and harms to relationship functioning due to gendered and racialized oppression, compared to other groups (Hairston & Oliver, 2005; Lacey et al., 2013). Therefore, this study uses survey data of Black women in romantic relationships to examine whether having ever been arrested or having ever been incarcerated increases exposure to relationship violence and poorer relationship functioning. This information could extend what is known about how criminal justice contact histories may affect Black women's relational health.

Background

The imprisonment rate of Black women has steadily declined over the past two decades, but they are still incarcerated at higher rates than other groups of women (Sawyer & Wagner, 2020). Moreover, Black women are more likely to be arrested during police stops (Prison Policy Initiative, 2019) and are also overrepresented in other carceral spaces, such as house arrest while on probation, parole, or treatment facilities, compared to other women (Heiner & Tyson, 2017; Kruttschnitt et al., 2013). The disproportionate rate of criminal justice contact among Black women is troubling because criminal justice contact histories are especially stigmatizing for women of color (Richie & Eife, 2020; Ritchie, 2017). For example, experimental designs with formerly incarcerated women have shown that Black and Latina women who disclose their parole status through online dating profiles get matched significantly less often with new relationship partners, compared to White women (Evans, 2019). Additionally, Black women reuniting with their families and children are often under surveillance from multiple post-release agencies (e.g., Child Protective Services; Gursami, 2019; Roberts, 2003), and often do not feel embraced by their community (Richie, 2001).

Racial disparities in criminal justice contact are also troubling because recent investigations have shown that criminal justice contact can increase exposure to relationship violence (McKay et al., 2018) and poorer relationship functioning (Comfort et al., 2018; Siennick et al., 2014; Turney, 2015b), both of which are key indicators of women's relational health and well-being (Agnew et al., 2008; Newman et al., 2020). However, these investigations were among men who have experienced criminal justice contact and their women partners and it is not yet clear whether these associations would be similar, or worse, among Black women who have experienced criminal justice contact. Richie (2012) described how "America's prison nation reorganizes social structures and relationships in society in ways that disadvantage Black women who have fewer economic resources, less social capital, more social stigma, and who also experience male violence" (p. 102). Moreover, because the criminal justice system is highly racialized, even being stopped by police (not including a minor traffic stop, being picked up, or arrested) has been shown to be associated with notable harms to relationship quality and co-parenting among Black families (Williams & Perry, 2019).

It is worth noting that romantic relationships among Black women who have experienced criminal justice contact can be influenced by other personal and contextual factors, such as lower educational attainment, poor employment prospects, mental health challenges, substance use, family and community violence, and financial strain – all of which could increase exposure to relationship violence and poorer relationship functioning (Bryant et al., 2006; Conger et al., 2002; Cutrona et al., 2003; Hardie & Lucas, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Kogan et al., 2013). Although these personal and community factors are prevalent in impoverished neighborhoods (Conger et al., 2002), similar to where the sample was drawn for the current study, contact with the criminal justice system could intensify exposure to relationship violence and poorer relationship among

Black women because of gendered and racialized oppressive practices within the criminal justice system (Camp & Heatherton, 2016; Hairston & Oliver, 2005; Shaylor, 1998).

Relationship Violence

The prevalence rate of relationship violence among Black women has generally been shown to be higher than other racialized groups of women (Cambell et al., 2003; Hairston & Oliver, 2005; Lacey et al., 2013). Black women who experience criminal justice contact are particularly vulnerable because of the combined stress felt from social, racial, and economic factors (Hairston & Oliver, 2005; Mugoya et al., 2017; Richie & Eife, 2020). According to the Office on Violence Against Women (2018) at the U.S. Department of Justice, there are a lack of adequate services and policies for Black women who experience relationship violence, and this oversight carries over to the period when women are released from incarceration and are at risk of further violence. To contextualize relationship violence exposure among Black women who have experienced criminal justice contact, Richie and Eife's (2020) Violence Matrix conceptual model illustrates how exposure to relationship violence – psychological, physical, and sexual – can occur and coincide within homes, communities, and the broader social context of Black women. The model also describes how relationship violence can be pervasive and persistent because Black women with criminal justice contact histories are significantly more likely to have experienced domestic abuse, rape, or other violent experiences prior to criminal justice contact, compared to other groups of women (Dichter, 2015; Gilfus, 2002).

High rates of relationship violence among Black women are disturbing and women who experience criminal justice contact could be exposed to more relationship violence over the life-course (Allen, 2018; Taylor et al., 2021; Verbruggen et al., 2020). Yet only a handful of investigations have assessed whether criminal justice contact histories are associated with

relationship violence among women (Browne et al., 1999; Newman et al., 2020). These studies suggest that women are exposed to more relationship violence, which in turn increases the risk of more severe forms of psychological distress. For instance, using a sample of 201 men and women who had ever spent time in a county, state, or federal carceral facility for two weeks or longer, Newman et al. (2020) found that higher levels of sexual and interpersonal violence exposure were associated with an increased risk of psychological distress and suicidal ideation. Although this evidence extends what is known regarding how relationship violence may increase the risk of psychological challenges among formerly incarcerated people, it is still unclear whether arrest histories independent of incarceration histories may also increase exposure to relationship violence among women.

Relationship Functioning

According to family stress models, criminal justice contact is a primary stressor that can directly affect relationship functioning (Arditti, 2016; Hill, 1958; Turney & Sugie, 2021). These models are supported by other research demonstrating links between criminal justice contact and poorer relationship functioning. For example, Comfort and colleagues (2018) used a mixed-methods design to examine partnerships after imprisonment among incarcerated men and their non-incarcerated women partners and found that during the reentry period, couples reported less relationship happiness and more incidents of intimate partner violence. The interview data further reveal that relationship functioning issues such as distrust, infidelity, and lack of communication could play a central role in each partner's dissatisfaction. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (FFCWS), Williams and Perry (2019) examined associations between law enforcement contact (i.e., police stop, previous incarceration) and Black fathers' ($N = 967$) familial relationships and found that father's law enforcement contact

was associated with lower levels of relationship quality for fathers. For mothers, father's previous incarceration was associated with lower levels of relationship quality and both forms of law enforcement contact were associated with lower levels of co-parenting.

Considering this evidence, it is reasonable to expect that Black women who have experienced criminal justice contact could face similar challenges to other known indicators of relationship functioning, such as the ability to reach consensus about relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breaking up (Bryant et al., 2006; Hardie & Lucas, 2010; Kogan et al., 2013). The ability to reach consensus on relationship issues is conceptualized as how often partners agree with each other on issues such as such as handling finances, family activities, parenting, extended family, and shared relationship goals (Spanier, 1976). It is well known that criminal justice contact can negatively affect many of these issues (Comfort, 2008; Nickels, 2020; Pager, 2003; Turney & Wildeman, 2013; Western, 2006) and Black women may be particularly vulnerable to disagreements about these relationship issues given the potential additive stress felt from various social, racial, and economic factors (Mugoya et al., 2017).

Relationship satisfaction has been conceptualized as a multi-dimensional evaluation of overall satisfaction with a relationship (Fincham & Beach, 2006; Fowers, 1990; Snyder, 1997). Previous work has shown that men and women report lower relationship satisfaction when men are released from incarceration and face challenges of unemployment (Pager, 2003), maternal gatekeeping (Roy & Dyson, 2005), and infidelity (Comfort et al., 2018). Although similar challenges could decrease relationship satisfaction among women who have experienced criminal justice contact, there are other reasons why women may be less satisfied. For example, women are usually the primary caretaker of children when men are incarcerated, but it is usually a grandmother or other relative that becomes primary caretaker of children when women are

incarcerated (Ruiz, 2002). Even if contact with the criminal justice system is brief (e.g., an arrest, a short jail stay), caregiving changes could cause notable harms to women's relationship satisfaction if men are perceived as unable to care for children or defer caregiving responsibilities to grandparents or other relatives (Strozier et al., 2011).

Proneness to breaking up refers to relationship instability, or the propensity to dissolve a relationship even if dissolution is not the final outcome (Booth et al., 1983). This construct could include whether a person has seriously considered ending the relationship and having a discussion with close friends about ending the relationship. Research focused on relationship instability among Black couples suggest that contemporary risk factors such as financial strain (Barton & Bryant, 2016) and racial discrimination (Lavner et al., 2018) are predictors of relationship instability. Because criminal justice contact is associated with these stressors among Black women (Comfort, 2007; Kilpatrick et al., 2021), it is possible that criminal justice histories may exacerbate Black women's proneness to breaking up with a romantic partner.

Current Study

The goal of the current study is to examine whether criminal justice contact is associated with relationship violence and poorer relationship functioning among Black women. By examining these associations among a sample of Black women that are more homogenous in terms of socioeconomic factors, this study is able to control for unobserved heterogeneity associated with these variables (Bolland, 2003) and build on previous research in two important ways. First, it is becoming clear that contact with the criminal justice system increases the risk of relationship dissolution (Apel et al., 2010; Lopoo & Western, 2005; Massoglia et al., 2011; Turney, 2015a), but the enduring impact criminal justice contact histories may have among Black women involved in romantic relationships remains unclear. Theory and evidence suggest

that psychological aggression and physical violence are key indicators of formerly incarcerated women's well-being and relational health (Newman et al., 2020; Vergruggen et al., 2020). Additionally, indicators of relationship functioning such as consensus regarding relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breaking up may also be central to understanding relational health (Agnew et al. 2008), and this study examines these indicators as outcomes. Second, this study broadens the conceptualization of criminal justice contact to include those that have ever been arrested but not incarcerated or those that having been arrested and incarcerated and considers whether either form of criminal justice contact is associated with relationship violence and functioning. Broadening criminal justice contact to include arrest without incarceration is important because scholars have asserted that experiencing criminal justice contact can have "repercussive effects" (Comfort, 2007, p. 287) that can further harm family relationships.

To examine these associations while controlling for rich set of sociodemographic characteristics, the following research questions were tested: 1) Are indicators of criminal justice contact associated with more psychological aggression?; 2) Are indicators of criminal justice associated with more physical violence?; 3) Are indicators of criminal justice contact associated with less consensus about relationship issues?; 4) Are indicators of criminal justice contact associated with less relationship satisfaction?; and 5) Are indicators of criminal justice contact associated with being more prone to breaking up?

Methods

Sample

The present study uses survey data from adults living in extreme poverty who participated in the Mobile Youth and Poverty Study (MYPS). The MYPS is an extension of the

Mobile Youth Study (MYS), a multiple cohort, longitudinal study of poverty and adolescent risk that began in 1998 and involved annual waves of survey data collected through 2011 (see Bolland et al., 2016 for a description of the MYS methodology). The MYS began in the 13 most impoverished neighborhoods in the Mobile, Alabama Metropolitan Statistical Area and by 2011, it had expanded to nearly 50 neighborhoods as participants moved to new neighborhoods and new participants were recruited from those neighborhoods. The initial 13 neighborhoods had a median household poverty rate of 70%, and the mean annual household income in these neighborhoods was approximately $5,000.

Adult caregivers of the original MYS participants were invited to participate in the MYPS (n = 1,046, 180 men, 866 women). This portion of the study involved completion of a cross-sectional survey – Adult and Family Dynamics Questionnaire (AFDQ) – collected between 2001 and 2010 that captured demographics characteristics of the participants and self-reports of their romantic relationships, personal lifestyles, health and wellness, household composition, neighborhood characteristics, and risk behaviors. Although the AFDQ did not assess the race of most participants, roughly 99% of the MYS participants were African American (Bolland et al., 2016), and study investigators have inferred that the majority of the adult participants in the MYPS were also African American. This study focuses on the women who reported being currently involved in a romantic relationship (N = 357). There were 509 women who indicated that they were not currently involved in a romantic relationship, of which roughly 19% had ever been arrested and nearly 10% had ever been incarcerated. After dropping 18 duplicate cases and 8 cases that were missing data on the indicators of criminal justice contact among the 357 women involved in romantic relationships, the final analytic sample consists of 331 women. Of

the women in the analytic sample, 23% had ever been arrested and 15% had ever been incarcerated.

Measures

Criminal justice contact. The focal variable was created by two dichotomous indicators (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) to determine whether women had ever experienced criminal justice contact. First, *Arrest* was measured by responses to, "Have you ever been arrested?" Second, *Incarceration* was measured by responses to, "Since you turned 19, have you spent time in jail or prison?" These two measures were used to create a variable with three mutually exclusive categories: (1) No Contact with the Criminal Justice System - those who have never been arrested or incarcerated, (2) Arrest - those who have ever been arrested, but have never incarcerated, and (3) Incarceration - those who have ever been both arrested and incarcerated. The reference group was no contact with the criminal justice system.

Psychological aggression. To assess whether women experienced psychological aggression from their current romantic partner, three items were used from the psychological aggression subscale derived from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979). Participants were asked whether their current romantic partner had ever done any of the following three things to them: a) insulted or swore at you, b) shouted or yelled at you, or c) said something to try and make you mad. Items were summed to indicate how many dimensions of psychological aggression women experienced from their current romantic partner ($\alpha = .74$; range: 0 - 3).

Physical violence. Similar to psychological aggression, physical violence items were derived from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979). The women were asked whether their current romantic partner had ever expressed any of the following physically violent behaviors: a) threw something at you that could hurt, b) twisted your arm or hair, c) pushed or

shoved you, d) pulled a knife or gun on you, e) used a knife or gun on you, f) punched you or kicked you, g) choked you, h) slammed you against the wall, i) grabbed you, j) slapped you, or k) burned or scalded you on purpose. Items were summed to indicate how many types of physically violent behaviors women experienced from their current romantic partner (α = .82; range: 0 - 11).

Consensus about relationship issues. To assess how often women felt they were able to reach consensus regarding common relationship issues with their partner, 10 items were used that were adapted from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). The women were asked, "How often do you and your partner disagree about things such as…" regarding the following options: a) handling finances, b) recreational and leisure time activities, c) religious matters, d) demonstration of affection, e) friends, f) ways of dealing with parents, g) ways of dealing with your children, h) aims, goals, and things that are important, i) household tasks, and j) employment. Response options ranged from 0 = *often* to 3 = *never*. Items were reverse coded and summarized where higher scores indicated more consensus about relationship issues (α = .88; range: 0 - 30).

Relationship satisfaction. Conceptually, perceptions of relationship satisfaction can be multi-dimensional and are sensitive to holistic relationship assessments at a moment in time (Fincham & Beach, 2006; Fowers, 1990; Snyder, 1997). Therefore, to capture a broader assessment of women's perceptions of relationship satisfaction, a summary scale of four items was created. These items include: 1) "How happy are you, all things considered with your relationship?" (0 = *extremely unhappy* to 5 = *extremely happy*), 2) "All in all, how satisfied are you with your partner?" (0 = *not at all satisfied* to 5 = *completely satisfied*), 3) "How much do you want your relationship with (partner) to be a success?" (0 = *I do not want our relationship to*

succeed to 5 = *I want desperately for our relationship to succeed*), and 4) "How hard are you willing to work to make your relationship with (partner) succeed?" (0 = *I have given up trying to make it succeed* to 5 = *I would go to any length to make is succeed*). Higher scores reflected more satisfaction (α = .72; range: 0 - 20).

Proneness to breakup. A series of four questions adapted from the Marital Instability Index (Booth et al., 1983) were used to capture whether the women had ever considered ending their relationship with their partner. They were as follows: 1) "Have you and (partner) seriously suggested ending your relationship or getting a divorce?", 2) "Have you talked with a close friend about breaking up with (partner)?", 3) "Has the thought of breaking up with (partner) crossed your mind?", and 4) "Have you thought your relationship with (partner) might be in trouble?" Response options were dichotomous (0 = *yes* and 1 = *no*) and summed where higher scores indicated more proneness to breakup (α = .84; range: 0 - 4).

Controls. Analyses include controls for several theoretically relevant sociodemographic characteristics, indicators of psychological distress, and relationship factors (Bradbury et al., 2000; Booth et al., 1983; Conger et al., 1990; Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Wakefield & Uggen, 2010).

Sociodemographic characteristics. Age in years, number of children, and the number of years of education were continuous measures. Ages ranged from 19 – 75 years old and because of such a large age range, a squared age term was also added to examine whether the effect of age was stronger (positive effects of age and age squared) or weaker among older women (positive effect of age and negative effect of age squared). Employment status was dichotomous (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) and assessed by responses to "Are you currently employed outside the home?" Substance use was measured using two separate binary items asking whether participants have

gotten drunk or used street drugs (e.g., marijuana, crack, cocaine) in the past three months (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*).

Psychological distress. Models also control for women's current assessment of psychological distress that may alter the associations between criminal justice contact and relationship violence and relationship functioning. Depressive symptoms were measured using the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977). The scale ranges from 0 to 60 with higher scores indicating a greater number of depressive symptoms ($\alpha = .83$). Loneliness was measured using the revised UCLA loneliness scale (Russell et al., 1980). The scale consisted of 20 items and was summarized so higher scores reflect more loneliness ($\alpha = .84$). Traumatic stress was measured using the traumatic stress subscale from the Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN; Titus et al., 2008). The 12-item subscale was summarized where higher scores reflect more traumatic stress ($\alpha = .89$). Hopelessness was measured using all 20-items from The Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974) and six items that were reversed scored from the State Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996). These 26 items were summarized where higher scores indicate more hopelessness ($\alpha = .77$).

Relationship. Models control for the number of months involved in the relationship and whether women describe their current relationship as a dating relationship or a more firmly committed relationship (i.e., privately committed to marriage, engaged, or married). Models also controlled for current living arrangements – date and keep separate residences, live together most of the time but keep separate residences, or live together at one residence – and whether or not they have moved in the past three years (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). Finally, models control for women's experiences of psychological aggression and physical violence from a previous relationship using the same summary scales from the CTS (Straus, 1979) as described above.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using Stata Version 15 (StataCorp, 2017). Prior to modeling, data were assessed for patterns of missingness, skewedness, and kurtosis. Results of Little's (1988) MCAR test suggested that data were not missing completely at random, χ^2 (241) = 367.76, p < .001; therefore, multiple imputation by chained equations was implemented to handle missing data (White et al., 2011). Multiple imputation is considered best practice to preserve power and to control for bias, particularly with smaller datasets (Sterner, 2011), and generally yields more accurate results compared to complete case analysis (Cook, 2021). To reduce bias, 50 imputations were used according to the proportion of participants with any missing data (Bodner, 2008). All analysis variables were included in the imputation model (Rubin, 1987; Von Hippel, 2009). The proportion of variance explained (R^2) was retrieved by using the "mibeta:" command in front of the regression equation (Harel, 2009). Regarding skewedness and kurtosis, physical violence was positively skewed and demonstrated kurtosis and was log transformed (Von Hippel, 2009).

Means and standard errors reported are based on raw, nontransformed data (for interpretation purposes) between groups of women who had no contact with the criminal justice system, had ever been arrested, or had ever been incarcerated in terms of the main variables of interest. Means for continuous variables were compared using ANOVAs and chi-square analyses were used for group comparisons with dichotomous variables. Next, bivariate correlations were examined to determine the strength and direction of any significant correlations among the main analysis variables. Finally, OLS regression models were conducted separately for each outcome variable to examine associations between criminal justice contact and psychological aggression, physical violence, consensus about relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to

breakup. Supplementary analyses using complete case analyses were conducted to compare results.

Results

Group Differences Between Relationship Violence and Relationship Functioning

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 4.1. Approximately 62% (n = 206) of women reported having no contact with the criminal justice system, 23% of women (n = 76) reported having ever been arrested, and 15% of women (n = 49) reported having ever been incarcerated. Regarding the main outcome variables, post-hoc tests using estimated marginal means (Klein, 2014) revealed that the mean levels of psychological aggression among women who have ever been arrested (M = 1.67, SE = .13, p = .008) and those who have ever been incarcerated (M = 1.67, SE = .16, p = .024) were significantly higher than women with no criminal justice contact (M = 1.26, SE = .08; F(2, 326) = 5.01, p = .007, η2 = .03). Regarding physical violence, the mean level of physical violence among women who have ever been arrested (M = 1.32, SE = .25, p = .002) and have ever been incarcerated (M = 1.18, SE = .16, p = .009) were significantly higher than women who had no contact with the criminal justice system (M = .62, SE = .10; F(2, 326) = 6.77, p = .001, η2 = .04). Groups did not differ significantly in terms of relationship functioning outcomes: consensus about relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breakup.

Group Differences Between Sociodemographic Characteristics, Indicators of Psychological Distress, and Relationship Factors

Although the women were relatively homogenous in terms of socioeconomic conditions, there was variability in women's background experiences, suggesting women who had experienced criminal justice contact faced significant challenges compared to women who had

no criminal justice contact. For instance, women who have ever been arrested and have ever incarcerated reported more financial strain (M = 6.38, SE = .34, p = .035; M = 6.84, SE = .45, p = .008; respectively) than women who had no criminal justice contact (M = 5.46, SE = .23; F(2, 325) = 4.81, p = .009, η2 = .03). Additionally, only 28% of women who have ever been incarcerated were currently employed compared to 46% of women who had no criminal justice contact (χ^2(1) = 4.29, p = .038, Cramer's V = .14). About 37% of women who have ever been arrest and 43% of women who have ever been incarcerated were more likely to have gotten drunk in the past three months (χ^2(1) = 4.90, p = .018; χ^2(1) = 7.14, p = .008; respectively) compared to 23% of women who had no criminal justice contact (Cramer's V = .18). Roughly 32% of women who have ever been incarcerated used street drugs in the past three months, compared to 9% of women who had no criminal justice contact (χ^2(1) = 16.43, p <.001) and 16% of women who have ever been arrested (χ^2(1) = 3.95, p = .046, Cramer's V = .23). Women who have ever been arrested and have ever been incarcerated were more likely report higher levels of traumatic stress (M = 10.05, SE = .86, p = .011; M = 11.12, SE = 1.11, p = .002; respectively), than women who had no criminal justice contact (M = 7.57, SE = .49; F(2, 326) = 6.57, p = .002, η2 = .04). Women who have ever been arrested and have ever been incarcerated were more likely report experiencing more psychological aggression from a previous relationship (M = 2.00, SE = .13, p = .001; M = 2.22, SE = .15, p < .001; respectively), than women who had no criminal justice contact (M = 1.43, SE = .09; F(2, 322) = 11.41, p < .001, η2 = .07). Women who have ever been arrested (M = 3.31, SE = .44, p = .003) or have ever been incarcerated (M = 4.48, SE = .54, p < .001) were more likely to report experiencing physically violent behaviors from a previous relationship compared to women who had no criminal justice contact (M = 1.90, SE = .22; F(2, 308) = 13.75, p < .001, η2 = .08). Moreover, those who have ever been arrested were

less likely to report experiencing different types of physically violent behaviors from a previous relationship than those that have ever been incarcerated ($p = .036$).

Bivariate Correlations

Bivariate correlations are shown in Table 4.2. Regarding associations between relationship violence and functioning, psychological aggression was positively associated with physical violence ($r = .55$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.48, .62]) and proneness to breakup ($r = .37$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.29, .46]), but negatively associated with consensus about relationship issues ($r = -.26$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [-.19, -.34]). Physical violence was negatively associated with consensus about relationship issues ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-.12, -.28]) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-.13, -.29]), but positively associated with proneness to breakup ($r = .37$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.29, .46]). Consensus about relationship issues was positively associated with relationship satisfaction ($r = .21$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [.13, .29]) and negatively associated with proneness to breakup ($r = -.24$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-.16, -.32]). Relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with proneness to breakup ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-.29, -.45]). Regarding associations between criminal justice contact and relationship violence and functioning, only having ever been arrested was positively associated with psychological aggression ($r = .12$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.05, .19]) and physical violence ($r = .14$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.07, .21]). Having ever been arrested was negatively associated with having ever been incarcerated ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-.15, -.31]).

Estimating Relationship Violence and Relationship Functioning

Results from OLS regression models are displayed in Table 4.3. Models were examined separately for each outcome to determine whether indicators of criminal justice contact significantly predicted relationship violence or functioning. After controlling for sources of

selection bias associated with criminal justice contact, Model 2 indicated that only having ever been arrested was significantly and positively associated with physical violence (β = .17, p = .042), whereas the association between physical violence and having ever been incarcerated was not significant (β = .06, p = .547; R^2 = .18, $F(21, 306) = 2.99$, $p < .001$). No other significant associations were found between the main variables of interests (Models 1, 3, 4, and 5), thereby rejecting the hypotheses that indicators of criminal justice contact would be associated with psychological aggression, consensus about relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breakup.

Supplementary Analyses

In supplementary analyses using complete case analysis (Tables 4.4 to 4.6), means, group comparisons, and effect sizes between women who had no contact with the criminal justice system, had ever been arrested, or had ever been incarcerated were similar to multiply imputed data. Regarding bivariate associations and OLS regression models, coefficient estimates were similar in size and flowed in the same direction. Standard errors were larger than models using multiply imputed data likely because multiple imputation procedures generally yield more accurate parameter estimates, including reducing standard errors (McKnight et al., 2007).

Discussion

This study investigated whether contact with the criminal justice system was associated with exposure to relationship violence and harms to relationship functioning among Black women. Nearly 40% of the women reported having ever been arrested or incarcerated and results suggest that having ever been arrested was associated with an increased exposure to physical violence. No evidence was found to suggest that criminal justice contact was associated with psychological aggression or with consensus about relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, or

proneness to breakup. These findings raise important questions regarding how being arrested, a common form of criminal justice contact, increases exposure to physical violence among Black women.

Models linking arrest histories with increased exposure to physical violence extend previous work linking convictions and violent offending behaviors to intimate partner violence (Verbruggen et al., 2020). This is concerning because exposure to violence among women who have experienced criminal justice contact could increase their risk of psychological distress and suicidal ideation (Newman et al., 2020). This finding also extends recent evidence demonstrating how women's arrest can exacerbate family stress. For example, using a sample of 2,201 mothers and fathers who participated in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, Turney & Sugie (2021) found that the primary stressor of a mother's recent arrest, but not a father's arrest, was associated with an increased risk of separation, poorer relationship quality, and poorer cooperative parenting, particularly among residential partnerships. Collectively, these findings illustrate how consequential arrest histories can be for women and their overall relationship health and personal well-being.

Furthermore, nearly 1 in 4 women in the analytic sample reported having ever been arrested and any contact with the criminal justice system can reduce the network of available prosocial romantic relationships (or people without criminal justice contact histories who adhere to law-abiding norms) among women (Leverentz, 2006; Volker et al., 2016). This could increase the odds of becoming or staying involved in relationships where violence is present. This underscores the need to reach further than criminal justice reform, which has not disrupted the persistence of violence experienced by Black women (Richie & Eife, 2020), and divert more resources into services specifically for women who experience violence (e.g., counseling, legal

assistance, housing, health care, employment; Thuma, 2019). Such measures would not only provide women with potentially lifesaving resources following an arrest but could also reduce the risk of coming in contact with the criminal justice system in the first place.

There was no evidence to support the hypothesis that having ever been incarcerated would be associated with relationship violence. This finding diverges from previous work linking incarceration to relationship violence (Turney, 2015b), and raises substantive and methodological questions. Substantively, women who have entered jails or prisons may receive reprieve from violent relationships (Fishman, 1990) and access to treatment and educational resources they might not have otherwise received if only having ever been arrested (Goodey et al., 2019). Thus, the possibility of receiving social services and educational resources during incarceration could help raise awareness and mitigate the risk of returning to violent relationships once women are released. This possibility further underscores the need to provide women who experience an arrest with similar resources. Methodologically, this evidence is likely limited by issues of power and selection effects and should therefore be replicated using more robust designs to account for these issues in larger samples.

Regardless, the significant association between having ever been arrested and an increased exposure to physical violence among Black women points to three areas for strategic investment. First, researchers have been justifiably focused on harms associated with incarceration in jails and prisons, but arrests are more common and potentially no less traumatizing for Black women (Richie, 2012). Therefore, scholars should continue to examine how an arrest may affect relationships among Black women by moving beyond controlling for race or considering racialized groups as moderators (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), and more carefully examining within-group variability among Black women at the intersections of racism

and family life (Bryant et al., 2010; Marks et al., 2008). Second, clearly the criminal justice system is not a rehabilitation institution but rather a punishment structure that disproportionality impacts people of color, which is why several activists and advocates promote abolition (Davis, 2003). However, many consider abolition radical or unthinkable, so instead focusing efforts on policies that divert resources into social services that could actually reduce the risk of criminal justice contact and gender-based violence are more feasible goals in the short-term. Finally, scholars, activists, policy makers, and other interested stakeholders should more carefully consider the concerns of Black women who have experienced relationship violence, criminal justice contact, or both. Using scholarship and policy recommendations to demand investments into communities most impacted by criminalization and exposure to violence would reduce harms that Black women experience and bring about real transformative social justice.

There was no evidence linking criminal justice contact to indicators of relationship functioning – consensus regarding relationship issues, relationship satisfaction, and proneness to breakup. Although hypotheses regarding indicators of relationship functioning were not supported, models of family stress (Arditti, 2016; Hill, 1958; Turney & Sugie, 2021) reveal two possible explanations. First, stressors that criminal justice contact may engender, or intensify, such as mental health, economic hardship, and parenting stress, could serve as mechanisms that indirectly affects relationship functioning. Therefore, the null evidence could suggest that secondary stressors may play a larger role for current relationship functioning, and the direct effect of criminal justice contact may be felt less, or become insignificant, as more time passes following criminal justice contact.

Second, applying an intersectional lens (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991) over models of family stress reveals other potential constructs that may confound this

relationship. For example, punishment regimes (Foster & Hagan, 2015) occur at all levels of society and more often permeate and compound stress among Black women, compared to other racialized groups (Gurusami, 2019; Ritchie, 2017). These include larger policy regimes that disenfranchise Black women who have experienced criminal justice contact from civic participation, such as having to identify criminal histories on employment applications (Pager, 2003) or barriers to voting (Sugie, 2017), to more proximal community regimes such as school policies that punish and marginalize mothers over children's delinquency (i.e., anti-truancy punishment policies that reinforce the school to prison pipeline, Skiba et al., 2014). These intersecting punishment regimes are co-created and upheld by racist, classist, and misogynistic ideologies that are particularly harmful to Black women. Thus, punishment regimes likely confound and intensify the family stress process, which in turn could be more consequential to relationship functioning and stability among Black women who have experienced criminal justice contact.

Limitations

This study extends previous work by capturing evidence of having ever been arrested being positively associated with exposure to physical violence among Black women. However, results should be interpreted relative to several limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data does not provide causal evidence. Second, measures used as indicators of criminal justice contact do not capture the duration, frequency, or length of time since contact occurred. These are important considerations to help isolate when and how relationships are at the greatest risk from harms associated with criminal justice contact. Moreover, participant experiences during an arrest (e.g., treatment by police) or while incarcerated (e.g., solitary confinement, treatment by guards, violence, etc.) likely present considerable variability regarding personal reactions and

how relationship may be affected. Third, though subscales from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979) have well established psychometric properties and have been widely used among heterosexual couples to capture relationship violence, the binary responses (*yes*/*no*) on the physical assault scale used in this study do not capture the frequency of physical violence (Dobash et al., 1992; Sillito, 2012). Moreover, taking into account the dyadic nature of relationship violence is the best method to treat and prevent relationship violence against women and by women (Straus, 2012). Finally, though multiple imputation methods are considered best practices to preserve power and to control for bias, particularly with smaller datasets (Sterner, 2011), there are concerns about the validity of results given that pooled data have undergone numerous statistical calculations and results may differ from the original dataset (van Ginkel et al., 2020). However, results from complete case analysis are also biased if data are not missing completely at random (MCAR), which was the case here, and multiple imputation techniques, in general, will yield more accurate results (Cook, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes to research on the consequences of criminal justice contact for romantic relationships among Black women. Results suggesting that having ever experienced an arrest could increase exposure to physical violence underscores the importance of considering arrest as a consequential form of criminal justice contact for romantic relationships. These results should be replicated and scholars should also examine how other forms of criminal justice contact that enter family homes (e.g., police encounters, house arrest, parole, or probation) may impact romantic relationships among Black women.

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Appendix

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics Categorized by Criminal Justice Contact (N = 331)

	No Contact with the Criminal Justice System (n = 206)	Arrest (n = 76)	Incarceration (n = 49)	Effect Size
Variable	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*η2 and Cramer's V*
Outcomes				
Psychological Aggression	1.26(.08) $_a$	1.67(.13) $_b$	1.67(.16) $_b$	.03**
Physical Violence	.62(.10) $_a$	1.32(.25) $_b$	1.18(.24) $_b$	.04**
Consensus About Relationship Issues	19.25(.53)	17.52(.85)	19.18(1.03)	.01
Relationship Satisfaction	11.73(.19)	11.62(.37)	11.82(.37)	.00
Proneness to Breakup	1.23(.11)	1.54(.18)	1.61(.22)	.01
Controls				
Age	36.13(.79) $_a$	33.39(1.04)	32.80(1.27) $_b$	.02*
Age Squared	1428.94(64.36) $_a$	1193.56(73.26) $_b$	1153.25(91.54) $_b$	.02*
Education	11.67(.10) $_a$	11.23(.18) $_b$	11.14(.24) $_b$	.02*
Number of Children	3.30(.14)	3.72(.23)	3.24(.28)	.01
Financial Strain	5.46(.23) $_a$	6.38(.34) $_b$	6.84(.45) $_b$	.03**
Employed (1 = Yes)	46% $_a$	37%	28% $_b$	.13*
Drunk (1 = Yes)	23% $_a$	37% $_b$	43% $_b$	.18**
Street Drugs (1 = Yes)	9% $_a$	16% $_a$	32% $_b$	.23***
Depressive Symptoms	16.02(.72)	17.48(1.18)	17.58(1.43)	.01
Loneliness	19.30(.67)	20.57(.99)	21.83(1.64)	.01
Traumatic Stress	7.57(.49) $_a$	10.05(.86) $_b$	11.12(1.11) $_b$	.04**
Hopelessness	8.92(.27)	9.94(.50)	9.82(.76)	.01
Length of relationship in Months	82.91(6.46)	77.43(8.72)	68.80(8.37)	.00
Relationship Status				.05
Dating	60%	55%	62%	
Married	40%	45%	38%	
Living Arrangements				.08
Date and Keep Separate Residences	57%	46%	56%	
Live Together but Keep Separate Residences	23%	28%	24%	
Live Together in the Same Residence	20%	26%	20%	
Recently Moved (1 = Yes)	34%	34%	44%	.07
Prior Psychological Aggression	1.43(.09) $_a$	2.00(.13) $_b$	2.22(.15) $_b$	.07***
Prior Physical Violence	1.90(.22) $_a$	3.31(.44) $_b$	4.48(.54) $_c$	.08***

Note. Groups with different subscripts are significantly different from each other. Effect sizes are reported using η^2 for continuous measures and Cramer's V for categorical measures.
$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 4.2. Bivariate Correlations among the Analytic Sample (N = 331)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.	21.	22.	23.	24.
1. Psychological Aggression	1																							
2. Physical Violence	.55**	1																						
3. Consensus	-.26**	-.20**	1																					
4. Relationship Satisfaction	-.15*	-.22**	.21**	1																				
5.Proneness to Breakup	.37**	.37**	-.24**	-.37**	1																			
6. Arrest	.12*	.14*	-.10	-.02	.06	1																		
7. Incarceration	.09	.11	.02	.02	.07	-.23**	1																	
8. Age	-.10	-.06	.06	-.11	-.17**	-.08	-.09	1																
9. Education	-.02	-.15*	.08	.04	-.05	-.09	-.09	.07	1															
10. Number of Children	.02	.02	-.03	-.06	-.07	.09	-.03	.34**	-.18**	1														
11. Financial Strain	.16**	.12*	-.20**	-.13*	.23**	.09	.13*	.02	-.06	.05	1													
12. Employed	.02	-.07	.08	.10	-.06	-.05	-.11	-.12*	.22**	-.08	-.08	1												
13. Drunk	.06	.03	-.04	.01	.04	.09*	.13	-.10	-.13*	.01	.06	-.05	1											
14. Street Drugs	.12*	.19**	-.03	-.05	.13*	.04	.23**	-.14*	-.20**	-.07	.11	-.14*	.09	1										
15. Depressive Symptoms	.05	.11	-.16**	-.16**	.28**	.05	.04	.04	-.16**	-.05	.25**	-.20**	.08	.11	1									
16. Loneliness	.05	.17**	-.26**	-.22**	.23**	.03	.08	-.09	-.16**	.05	.14*	-.19**	.03	.03	.46**	1								
17. Traumatic Stress	.13*	.17**	-.22**	-.05	.22**	.10	.14**	-.07	-.14*	.03	.21**	-.19**	.16**	.09	.50**	.49**	1							
18. Hopelessness	-.03	.08	-.10	-.15*	.19**	.09	.05	.07	-.19**	.13*	.12*	-.29**	.17**	.03	.39**	.42**	.29**	1						
19. Months Involved	.07	.08	.04	.05	-.08	-.02	-.05	.45**	-.03	.32**	-.11	-.08	-.12*	-.07	-.12*	-.05	-.06	-.07	1					
20.Married	.09	.04	-.06	.21**	.01	.05	-.03	.09	.10	-.03	-.03	.03	-.11	-.04	-.07	-.03	-.01	-.14*	.27**	1				
21. Residence	.10	.04	.01	.22**	.11	.09	-.02	-.03	.05	.06	-.03	.04	.02	.03	-.03	.05	.11	-.04	.30**	.43**	1			
22. Recently Moved	.05	.09	-.05	-.09	.11	-.02	.07	-.20**	.03	-.14*	-.04	-.02	.05	.07	.03	.09	.06	.03	-.13*	.02	.07	1		
23. Prior Psychological Aggression	.27**	.08	-.06	.06	.09	.14*	.18**	-.07	.09	-.11	.20**	.12*	.09	.08	.10	.04	.22**	.02	-.26**	.13*	.04	.05	1	
24. Prior Physical Violence	.12*	.22**	-.05	.04	.11	.10	.24**	-.02	-.02	-.09	.20**	.05	.07	.13*	.19**	.11	.27**	.06	-.18**	.11	.04	.14*	.71	1

Note. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

Table 4.3. Regression Coefficient of Criminal Justice Contact on Relationship Violence and Functioning

	Model 1 Psychological Aggression		Model 2 Physical Violence		Model 3 Consensus		Model 4 Relationship Satisfaction		Model 5 Proneness to Break Up	
Predictors	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*
Arrest [1]	.17	.15	.17*	.08	-.93	1.04	-.30	.37	.03	.20
Incarceration [1]	.13	.19	.06	.10	1.10	1.27	.16	.45	.01	.24
Age	.03	.03	.01	.02	.06	.23	-.00	.08	-.06	.04
Age Squared	-.00	.00	-.00	.00	-.00	.00	-.00	.00	.00	.00
Education	-.01	.05	-.03	.02	-.17	.30	-.04	.11	.02	.06
Number of Children	.01	.04	-.02	.02	-.18	.24	-.05	.09	-.01	.05
Financial Strain	.04†	.02	.01	.01	-.37**	.14	-.10*	.05	.09**	.03
Employed (1 = Yes)	.03	.14	-.01	.07	.45	.93	.12	.33	-.00	.18
Drunk (1 = Yes)	.04	.14	-.02	.07	-.36	.93	.04	.33	-.07	.18
Street Drugs (1 = Yes)	.26	.20	.23*	.11	.33	1.39	-.44	.50	.30	.27
Depressive Symptoms	.00	.01	-.00	.00	-.01	.05	-.01	.02	.02*	.01
Loneliness	.00	.01	.01	.00	-.16**	.05	-.07***	.02	.01	.01
Traumatic Stress	.01	.01	.00	.01	-.10	.07	.03	.03	-.00	.01
Hopelessness	-.01	.02	.00	.01	.05	.12	-.00	.04	.04†	.02
Months Involved	.00**	.00	.00*	.00	.00	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00
Married [2]	.01	.15	-.02	.08	-1.65†	.97	.85*	.34	-.06	.19
Separate Residences [3]	.33*	.17	.19*	.09	.11	1.12	-.19	.39	.88***	.21
Reside Together [3]	-.03	.18	-.09	.09	1.79	1.19	1.29**	.42	.21	.23
Recently Moved (1 = Yes)	.10	.13	.06	.07	-.62	.89	-.74*	.32	.19	.17
Prior Psychological Aggression	.34***	.08	-.07†	.04	-.09	.50	.03	.18	-.02	.10
Prior Physical Violence	-.22*	.10	.17**	.05	.35	.66	.21	.24	.02	.12
Constant	.17	.80	.25	.42	25.69***	5.20	14.60***	1.86	.57	1.00
R^2	.19		.18		.13		.20		.22	

Note. β = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error. Several predictors are represented by dummy variables: [1] No contact with the criminal justice system is the excluded category, [2] Dating is the excluded category, [3] Date but keep separate residences is the excluded category. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 4.4. Supplementary Analysis – Descriptive Statistics Categorized by Former Incarceration (N = 206)

	No Contact with the Criminal Justice System (n = 118)	Arrest (n = 58)	Incarceration (n = 30)	Effect Size
Variable	*M(SD)*	*M(SD)*	*M(SD)*	η^2 *and Cramer's V*
Outcomes				
Psychological Aggression	1.24(1.12)	1.64(1.15)	1.60(1.16)	.03
Physical Violence	.58(1.32) $_a$	1.31(2.07) $_b$	1.07(1.57)	.04*
Consensus	19.69(7.47)	17.03(7.46)	19.74(5.97)	.03
Relationship Satisfaction	12.05(2.58)	11.48(3.08)	11.67(2.72)	.01
Proneness to Breakup	1.31(1.53)	1.59(1.57)	1.53(1.55)	.01
Controls				
Age	34.43(10.50)	33.66(9.27)	33.90(9.45)	.00
Age Squared	1294.86(809.53)	1217.14(655.17)	1235.57(699.75)	.00
Education	11.67(1.51)	11.24(1.60)	11.27(1.78)	.02
Number of Children	3.16(1.97)	3.71(2.04)	3.07(1.89)	.02
Financial Strain	5.48(3.37)	6.35(2.91)	6.77(3.04)	.03
Employed (1 = Yes)	51% $_a$	31% $_b$	17% $_b$	.27***
Drunk (1 = Yes)	19% $_a$	38% $_b$	40% $_b$	.22**
Street Drugs (1 = Yes)	8% $_a$	16%	30% $_b$	.22**
Depressive Symptoms	15.49(9.69)	18.36(10.12)	17.46(11.06)	.02
Loneliness	20.12(9.39)	20.03(8.96)	21.04(10.88)	.00
Traumatic Stress	7.43(6.64) $_a$	10.66(7.71) $_b$	12.40(8.08) $_b$	.07***
Hopelessness	8.89(3.60)	10.12(4.07)	10.63(5.20)	.03*
Length of relationship in Months	80.10(83.79)	74.88(66.64)	64.10(50.40)	.01
Relationship Status				.03
Dating	57%	55%	60%	
Married	43%	45%	40%	
Living Arrangements				.05
Date and Keep Separate Residences	50%	45%	47%	
Live Together but Keep Separate Residences	25%	29%	23%	
Live Together in the Same Residence	25%	26%	30%	
Recently Moved (1 = Yes)	40%	29%	43%	.11
Prior Psychological Aggression	1.48(1.25) $_a$	1.97(1.11) $_b$	2.30(.88) $_b$	.07***
Prior Physical Violence	2.02(2.99) $_a$	3.14(3.71)	4.47(3.75) $_b$	.07***

Note. Effect sizes are reported using η^2 for continuous measures and Cramer's V for categorical measures. $^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 4.5. Supplementary Analysis – Bivariate Correlations among Complete Case Sample (N = 206)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.	21.	22.	23.	24.
1. Psychological Aggression	1																							
2. Physical Violence	.56**	1																						
3. Consensus	-.30**	-.29**	1																					
4. Relationship Satisfaction	-.09	-.21**	.17*	1.00																				
5.Proneness to Breakup	.35**	.41**	-.25**	-.29**	1																			
6. Arrest	.13	.18**	-.16*	-.08	.07	1																		
7. Incarceration	.07	.07	.04	-.03	.03	-.26**	1																	
8. Age	-.13	-.06	.04	-.12	-.20**	-.03	-.00	1																
9. Education	.02	-.13	.04	.07	-.06	-.10	-.06	.12	1															
10. Number of Children	.02	.01	-.03	-.04	-.10	.13	-.05	.34**	-.24**	1														
11. Financial Strain	.19**	.19*	-.20**	-.13	.24**	.08	.11	.09	-.06	.05	1													
12. Employed	.00	-.11	.10	.13	-.03	-.12	-.20**	-.07	.23**	-.10	-.09	1												
13. Drunk	.03	.06	-.05	.03	.01	.15*	.12	-.12	-.09	.01	.07	-.06	1											
14. Street Drugs	.16*	.24**	-.07	-.03	.17*	.04	.20**	-.13	-.11	-.05	.08	-.12	.04	1										
15. Depressive Symptoms	.05	.21**	-.17*	-.10	.30**	.11	.04	.00	-.14*	-.07	.32**	-.24**	.03	.07	1									
16. Loneliness	.14*	.16*	-.22**	-.21**	.18*	-.01	.04	-.03	-.16*	.12	.07	-.21**	-.01	.01	.43**	1								
17. Traumatic Stress	.16**	.24**	-.19**	-.02	.24**	.14	.19**	-.10	-.11	.04	.21**	-.21**	.13	.12	.47**	.48**	1							
18. Hopelessness	-.05	.20**	-.12	-.18*	.23**	.10	.12	.12	-.19**	.09	.11	-.31**	.14*	-.05	.40**	.47**	.32**	1						
19. Months Involved	.11	.09	-.01	-.01	-.04	-.01	-.07	.40**	-.07	.34**	-.04	-.00	-.17*	-.04	-.10	.00	-.07	.01	1					
20.Married	.15*	.02	-.14	.18**	.05	.02	-.03	.12	.12	-.06	.00	.04	-.11	-.00	-.04	-.05	-.01	-.17*	.28**	1				
21. Residence	.13	.08	.03	.23**	.14*	.02	.03	-.07	.01	.10	-.02	.03	.00	.07	-.04	.06	.06	-.04	.31**	.38**	1			
22. Recently Moved	.06	.10	-.04	-.06	.11	-.10	.05	-.19**	.08	-.14*	-.04	-.00	.02	.05	-.01	.04	.03	.03	-.06	.06	.12	1		
23. Prior Psychological Aggression	.23**	.13	-.11	.09	.03	.12	.19**	.02	.17*	-.13	.21**	.05	.13	.09	.13	.04	.27**	.01	-.19**	.18*	-.01	.02	1	
24. Prior Physical Violence	.07	.23**	-.14*	.06	.08	.07	.22**	.10	.08	-.12	.21**	.00	.13	.09	.25**	.13	.32**	.17*	-.15*	.14*	.02	.08	.70**	1

Note. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

Table 4.6. Supplementary Analysis – Regression Coefficient of Criminal Justice Contact on Relationship Violence and Functioning

	Model 1 Psychological Aggression		Model 2 Physical Violence		Model 3 Consensus		Model 4 Relationship Satisfaction		Model 5 Proneness to Break Up	
Predictors	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*	β	*SE*
Arrest [1]	.21	.19	.18†	.10	-1.71	1.24	-.80†	.37	.03	.20
Incarceration [1]	.15	.25	-.00	.13	1.51	1.63	-.47	.45	-.12	.24
Age	.00	.05	.01	.03	.05	.34	.03	.08	-.12†	.04
Age Squared	-.00	.00	-.00	.00	.00	.00	-.00	.00	.00	.00
Education	.03	.06	-.02	.03	-.09	.36	.03	.11	.01	.06
Number of Children	.03	.05	-.01	.03	-.16	.31	.06	.09	-.01	.05
Financial Strain	.05*	.03	.02	.01	-.39*	.17	-.14*	.05	.11**	.03
Employed (1 = Yes)	.03	.17	-.02	.09	.73	1.15	.32	.33	.21	.18
Drunk (1 = Yes)	-.00	.18	-.01	.09	-.69	1.18	.14	.33	-.14	.18
Street Drugs (1 = Yes)	.33	.23	.33**	.12	-1.07	1.52	-.37	.50	.56†	.27
Depressive Symptoms	.00	.01	.00	.01	.01	.06	.01	.02	.02†	.01
Loneliness	-.01	.01	.00	.01	-.16*	.07	-.08**	.02	.00	.01
Traumatic Stress	.01	.01	.01	.01	-.04	.09	.04	.03	.01	.01
Hopelessness	-.00	.02	.02	.01	-.03	.16	-.02	.04	.09**	.02
Months Involved	.00*	.00	.00*	.00	-.01	.01	-.00	.00	-.00	.00
Married [2]	.19	.18	-.03	.09	-2.76*	1.19	.71†	.34	.12	.19
Separate Residences [3]	.12*	.21	.13	.11	.20	1.36	-.46	.39	.91**	.21
Reside Together [3]	-.01	.21	-.02	.11	2.85	1.38	1.52**	.42	.29	.23
Recently Moved (1 = Yes)	.10	.16	.10	.08	-.45	1.07	-.72†	.32	.16	.17
Prior Psychological Aggression	.28**	.09	-.02	.05	.21	.62	.18	.18	-.09	.10
Prior Physical Violence	-.24†	.12	.13†	.06	-.67	.81	.18	.24	.00	.12
Constant	.17	1.00	-.02	.52	25.60***	6.55	13.11***	2.36	1.53	1.23
R^2	.19		.22		.16		.23		.29	

Note. β = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error. Several predictors are represented by dummy variables: [1] No contact with the criminal justice system is the excluded category, [2] Dating is the excluded category, [3] Date but keep separate residences is the excluded category. $^{\dagger}p < .10$. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLSION

Although the number of people incarcerated has declined after a dramatic increase during the last few decades of the twentieth century, the impact continues to be felt among millions of families (Wakefield & Uggen, 2010; Wildeman & Western, 2010). This three-part dissertation extends the body of scholarship focused on the effects of criminal justice contact on adult romantic relationships in several important ways. The first study found that multiple forms of criminal justice contact (arrest, conviction, jail, prison) are associated with marital and non-marital relationship dissolution. The second study demonstrates how perceptions of dyadic relationship maintenance can be used as a relationship maintenance strategy that increases relationship satisfaction and commitment while one partner is incarcerated, and this association may be stronger among those with fewer institutional barriers to contact. The third study found that arrest histories can increase exposure to physical violence among women. Taken together, these findings illustrate the enduring impact that criminal justice contact can have on romantic relationships and underscore the importance of reducing our reliance on the criminal justice system (Brown & Schept, 2017; Davis, 2011) and moving towards preventative justice (McLeod, 2015; Harvard Law Review, 2021).

Future work should attend to several important issues. First, this dissertation defined criminal justice contact as an arrest, conviction, and incarceration in jails and prison. Future work should broaden this definition to *any* form of criminal justice contact because even law enforcement contact (i.e., a traffic stop) is associated with harms to relationship quality, especially among Black families (Williams & Perry, 2019). Second, because the effects of women's criminal justice contact on family relationships are less well understood, future work should continue to focus on the experiences and needs of women as they represent a growing share of those arrested and incarcerated (Prison Policy Initiative, 2019; Sawyer & Wagner,

2020). Third, because a core punishment component of incarceration is separation (Cochran & Mears, 2013; Windzio, 2006), researchers should continue the line of inquiry that investigates how institutional constraints obstruct relationship maintenance and contribute to relationship dissolution (Massoglia et al., 2011). Relatedly, researchers interested in collecting and analyzing data focused on relationship maintenance should draw upon validated measures such as the Relationship Maintenance Behavior Measure (RMBM; Stafford, 2011), and consider the central role frequency of contact may play for relationship maintenance (Cochran & Mears, 2013). Fourth, more qualitative inquiries are need to help reveal obscured variability in how romantic relationships are impacted by criminal justice contact (Ellis, 2021). Finally, based on the evidence from the second and third study, moving beyond controlling for race or considering racialized groups as moderators and more carefully examining within-group variability among racialized groups should become standard practice (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Inferences or empirical questions regarding racialized groups that are not grounded in theory when investigating the effects from the U.S. criminal justice system, an institution that has caused great harm to communities of color, further contributes to white normality and racial inequity.

The subgroup analyses among Black couples and White couples from the second study suggests that researchers should not only consider the cultural aspects of relationship maintenance, but also how institutional constraints disproportionately obstruct Black couples attempts to maintain their relationships (Cochran et al., 2016). For example, the combination of economic disadvantage that cannot overcome the costs of staying in contact along with the fear of law enforcement can be significant barriers that keep Black couples separated, and contributes to the erosion of romantic relationships when one partner is incarcerated. Moreover, Black men experience lengthier incarceration terms relative to White men (Spohn, 2000), and even Black

men in prison near their home face significant disparities in the frequency of visitation and contact from their romantic partner, compared to other racialized groups (Cochran et al., 2016). Therefore, removing institutional barriers such as costly phone bills, complicated administrative rules, scrutiny from guards during in-person visits, and the oppressive policy that considers family contact a "privilege" (Boudin et al., 2013, p. 161) are not only imperative from a practical standpoint, but morally imperative.

Because the criminal justice system is a punishment structure grounded in racialized oppression, several activists and advocates promote abolition (Brown & Schept, 2017; Davis, 2003; McLeod, 2015). For example, McLeod (2015) described how "prisons and punitive policing produce tremendous brutality, violence, racial stratification, ideological rigidity, despair, and waste" (p. 1156), and neither remedy the sort of harms they were meant to address, such as mental health challenges, substance abuse, intimate partner violence, along with others. One alternative for preserving public safety while eliminating punitive policing procedures and mass incarceration is called preventative justice (McLeod, 2015). The goal of preventative justice is to remove the presence of criminal law enforcement and instead invest in the social services to improve human welfare (McLeod, 2015). This also includes creating a robust infrastructure of counselors, therapists, and caseworkers to help people suffering from mental health challenges as well as sexual and substance addiction receive more targeted help (Harvard Law Review, 2021). Even if efforts to shrink our reliance on the criminal justice system are incremental, continuing to demand that policy makers and other stakeholders invest in social services and poverty reduction initiatives would not only reduce harms to communities that have been devastated by criminalization, but improve the human condition for millions of families.

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VITA

Colton Tanner Kilpatrick is from Abilene, Texas and born to parents Billy and Gaila Kilpatrick. Tanner earned a Master's degree in Child and Family Studies in May 2018. He joined the doctoral program in Fall 2018 and upon approval of this dissertation, will receive a Doctorate of Philosophy in May 2021. Tanner's program of research broadly investigates family member interactions with the U.S. criminal justice system with an emphasis on the intersections of criminal justice contact, race, and family life. His research is organized around two general themes: (1) individual mental health and well-being and (2) couple relationship functioning and stability. Tanner is committed to the study of social and racial justice and making a difference through education and leadership. He contributes to civic engagement and advances the field of study through partnership on publications, presentations, and research projects. Tanner aims to enrich people's lives through instruction, mentorship, outreach, and inclusion.