Navigating Secondary Prisonization: Narratives of Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Julianna Williams

May 2025

Dedication

To Cathy and Rodney: You modeled hard work, dedication, persistence, and resilience. More importantly, you showed me that my worth is not dependent on any one of those things. You have always reminded me that my best is good enough and that you are proud of me and whatever path I choose. I am lucky to have the most unconditionally loving and supportive parents imaginable. I love you.

To the participants in this study: I am immensely grateful for your time, energy, and willingness to share a piece of your life. You all made a lasting impact on me, and your stories will help others feel seen and heard. Thank you.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my committee and chair, Drs. Barrio Minton, Bruner, Diambra, Johnson, and Cain. The dissertation process was riddled with surprises, barriers, and re-routes and your patience and commitment are deeply appreciated. Your collective expertise in research, counseling, and systems of justice and injustice helped bring this study to life. I also want to express my gratitude for Haley Ault and Jenny McMullen for joining my research team. You each strengthened the final product and made the process far more enjoyable.

I am extremely grateful to all the educators who have challenged, inspired, and invested in me. I never would have pursued a PhD without the encouragement of the professors at Radford University, especially Drs. Aspelmeier, Elliott, and Hastings. Thank you for believing in me and giving me my first experiences with research and scholarship. To Drs. Fullen, Lawson, Welfare, Grimes, Biddle, and Farmer, and my classmates in the Counselor Education program at Virginia Tech, you are the foundation of my professional identity as a counselor. Thank you for teaching me what it means to be a counselor first. I have not forgotten!

The challenges of doc-student life would have felt insurmountable without my people. The birds: Beth, Etta, Haley, and Mary, you are some of the most badass, wonderful humans and counselors that ever were, and I am endlessly grateful that I get to call you my cohort, colleagues, and friends. Brunie, thank you for contributing time and effort to my pursuit of licensure alongside the demands of the program, helping me develop as a teacher, and highlighting my value and contributions to a team in ways that others may overlook. And for being our fry chef!

Alex Ritchie, how did I get so lucky? You have been unwaveringly understanding and encouraging of my return to school. What began as a goal of completing my bachelor's degree

became a ten-year journey through multiple universities, states, and addresses. Thank you for staying up well past our bedtime and sleeping on the floor in the living room while I finished my homework. Thank you for always telling me that I would do great, and that it would be ok if I didn't. Thank you taking interest and pride in what I do, for telling me, "go help those kids!" when I go to work, and for supporting the inordinate amount of schooling required to earn a counselor's salary. You are kind, generous, brilliant, and hilarious, and the world is better because you are in it. Now, let's unpack that.

Abstract

More people are incarcerated in the United States than in any other country in the world (Widra & Herring, 2021) and approximately 113 million adults in the US have experienced the incarceration of a family member (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). This study was conducted in two parts. A PRISMA review examining the literature on partners of incarcerated individuals, analyzing 17 peer-reviewed empirical articles published between 2013 and 2022 found that research primarily focused on carceral impacts on incarcerated people and their children. Research on loved ones focused on intrapersonal, interpersonal, coping/interventions and systemic/institutional impacts. Researchers then conducted an original narrative inquiry, grounded in the Secondary Prisonization (Comfort, 2003) framework to explore the stories of three Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners (AIRRP) and how their holistic and systemic experiences with secondary prisonization impact their mental health and wellbeing. Findings share an emotional journey marked by intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic challenges. Notably, AIRRP experiences were traced along a developmental process from their worldview being shattered to a process of reconstruction. These findings provide important context for increasing the understanding and responsiveness of counselors who may work with AIRRP or other individuals impacted by mass incarceration.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: The Impacts of Mass Incarceration on Partners of the Incarcerated: A PRISMA Review 1

Abstract 2

Introduction 3

Carceral Impact on Communities and Families 4

Carceral Impact on Communities and Families 7

Individual and Family Impacts 7

Disproportionate Risks & Impacts 9

Purpose of the Study 11

Method 11

Literature Search and Selection Process 13

Data Extraction Process 14

Results 14

Research Question 1: Study Characteristics 15

Research Question 2: Holistic Impacts 15

Intrapersonal 15

Interpersonal 17

Coping and Interventions 20

Systemic/Institutional 21

Discussion 22

Limitations 23

Implications for Research 24

Implications for Counseling 25

Conclusion 27

References 28

Chapter II: Navigating Secondary Prisonization: Narratives of Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners 39

Abstract 40

Introduction 41

Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners 44

Purpose of the Study 48

Method 48

Theoretical Framework 49

Researcher Description and Positionality 50

Participants 53

Participant Recruitment and Selection 54

Data Collection 56

Data Analysis 57

Methodological Integrity 60

Findings 61
Act 1: Disruption 65
Shattered Worldview 65
Holding Pattern 66
Act 2: Survival Mode 67
Holding Down the Fort 67
Dedication to the Relationship 69
Act 3: Reconstruction 72
Accepting and Adapting to Their New Reality 72
Reflection and Growth 74
Discussion 77
Limitations 80
Implications for Practice 81
Implications for Research 83
Conclusion 84
References 86
Appendix 99
Appendix A 100
Appendix B 101
Appendix C 102

Appendix D 107

Appendix E 109

Appendix F 110

Vita 113

Chapter I: The Impacts of Mass Incarceration on Partners of the Incarcerated: A PRISMA Review

Abstract

With the United States leading the world in incarceration rates, an estimated 113 million U.S. adults have experienced the emotional, relational, and financial impacts related to the incarceration of a loved one. This study utilized a PRISMA review to examine the literature on partners of incarcerated individuals, analyzing 17 peer-reviewed empirical articles published between 2013 and 2022. Four primary themes emerged regarding carceral impacts on loved ones: 1) intrapersonal, 2) interpersonal, 3) coping and interventions, 4) systemic and institutional. We discuss implications for Professional Counseling practice and research.

Keywords: Incarceration, partner, systematic review, carceral contact, counseling

Introduction

The United States incarcerates more people than in any other country (Widra & Herring, 2021). In 2020, approximately 5.5 million people were under correctional supervision (Kluckow & Zeng, 2022). Mass incarceration is complex because the U.S. criminal justice system holds over 1.9 million people across thousands of federal, state, local, and tribal systems as well as juvenile centers, immigration detention sites, and military prisons (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). In the U.S., approximately 113 million adults have experienced the incarceration of a loved one at some point in their lives, and an estimated 6.5 million adults have an immediate family member who is currently incarcerated (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Ultimately, incarceration impacts the lives of millions of people regardless of whether they have ever been incarcerated themselves.

The incarceration of a loved one is connected to myriad collateral consequences. Many loved ones report shame and guilt for being associated with an incarcerated person or for being free while a loved one is behind bars (Kotova, 2019). Family dynamics may shift due to physical and emotional disconnection from the incarcerated member (Arditti, 2003; Comfort et al., 2016). Court costs, phone calls, and visitation can be financially debilitating (Comfort et al., 2016; deVuono-powell et al., 2015). In turn, the compounding effects of these consequences can lead to post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression (deVuono-powell et al., 2015). However, incarceration of a loved one may also lead to positive benefits, including the discovery or honing of personal strengths, ending an abusive or otherwise harmful relationship (Cooper et al., 2014; McKay et al., 2018), building a relational foundation in the absence of physical contact, or having a sense of comfort in knowing a loved one's location (DeShay et al., 2021).

Much of the existing literature regarding the impact of incarceration comes from disciplines such as sociology, criminology, and criminal justice. Across disciplines, literature

appears to be centered on the impact of incarceration on people who are or have been incarcerated (Carda-Auten et al., 2022; Cochran et al., 2016; Heigel et al., 2010; James, 2023), particularly in relation to recidivism (Bouchard & Wong, 2022; Fox et al., 2021), incarcerated parents (Armstrong et al., 2018), or children with an incarcerated parent (Gualtieri et al., 2020; Johnson & Arditti, 2023), thus excluding adults without children from the majority of incarceration research (Patterson et al., 2021).

Given the prevalence of incarceration in the U.S., it is likely that Counselors will provide services to people who have had carceral contact. Yet, there is limited literature rooted in the professional identity and values of counseling to guide responsive counseling interventions. In this manuscript, we provide an overview of carceral impacts on children and families, situating the need for greater attention to adults with incarcerated intimate partners who may or may not have children. Through a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) review, we discuss the characteristics of existing research, summarize holistic experiences of adults with incarcerated intimate partners, and identify implications for Professional Counselors.

Carceral Impact on Communities and Families

Costs incurred by families of the incarcerated are numerous and varied. In addition to practical costs of the criminal justice system, such as court fines and fees, restitution, loss of wages, and commissary (deVuono-powell et al., 2015), there are considerable collateral costs. These costs include reduced political participation (Sugie, 2015), lower household incomes, lower levels of educational attainment, and increased risk of mental and emotional distress (Brown et al., 2016; deVuono-powell et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2022; Patterson et al., 2021; Sugie, 2015; Wildeman & Wang, 2017).

Communities of color and families of lower socioeconomic status are disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration. For example, adults with annual household incomes below $25,000 are 61% more likely to experience the incarceration of a loved one compared to adults with household incomes above $100,000 (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Latinx and White Americans are incarcerated at a rate of 1.3:1 (Nellis, 2021). Black Americans make up only 12% of United States residents yet occupy 38% of the incarcerated population (Sawyer & Wagner, 2022); Black adults are 50% more likely to experience the incarceration of an immediate family member than white adults (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Thus, the disproportionate incarceration of people of color leads to disproportionate impacts of incarceration on communities of color.

Children with incarcerated parents are at increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (Gualtieri et al., 2020), mental and emotional strain, substance misuse, and other social and health inequities (Johnson & Arditti, 2023; Provencher & Conway, 2019). Children may also experience social isolation resulting from perceived or actual stigma related to incarceration (Phillips & Gates, 2011) alongside increased risk for antisocial behavior (Murray et al., 2012). Ultimately, parental incarceration, "can affect every major domain of child development," with both short- and long-term effects (Johnson & Arditti, 2023, p. 439).

Non-incarcerated parents struggle with decisions around visitation and the financial and emotional strain of keeping their children connected with the incarcerated parent (Arditti, 2002; Arditti, 2003; deVuono-powell et al., 2015). Strip searches, loud, overlapping conversations, and hovering correctional workers were all cited as challenges to in-person visitation and family bonding. In some circumstances, prison policies and environment were deterrents for visitation altogether, particularly for parents attempting to protect their children from exposure to potentially traumatizing experiences (Arditti, 2003; Comfort et al., 2016; Kotova, 2019).

Barriers to communication with an incarcerated loved one (i.e., transportation costs, phone call fees, letter pre-screening, and lack of child-friendly spaces in jails and prisons) can intensify feelings of loss and compromise relationships between family members (Comfort et al., 2016). Parent-child relationships were strained when one parent was incarcerated, with some children experiencing decreased trust, comfort, and fear of becoming too attached to the incarcerated parent, particularly when the parent had experienced re-incarceration (Comfort et al., 2016). Some children expressed resentment toward the incarcerated parent, and sometimes toward both the incarcerated and non-incarcerated parent (Comfort et al., 2016), emphasizing strained structural family relationships (Tadros & Ogden, 2020).

Families with an incarcerated relative assume an influx of responsibilities and may face increased familial expectations (Besemer & Dennison, 2018; Comfort et al., 2016). Family roles may change to cope with the absence of a member, and parenting roles may fall solely on a single parent or shift to co-parenting within the larger family system as may be seen in mother-grandparent teams. Such drastic changes to a family system may lead to dissatisfaction in parent-child relationships and complications between co-parents and guardians upon the incarcerated person's release (Besemer & Dennison, 2018).

Numerous negative mental and physical health impacts are associated with supporting an incarcerated relative. Family members cited symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression (deVuono-powell et al., 2015) along with shame and guilt (Kotova, 2019; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Female partners were forced to reconcile with biological implications of prison sentences on fertility and motherhood (Kotova, 2019). The incarceration itself can result in feelings of grief and loss similar to those experienced after the death of a loved one (Fishman, 1981). Losing a loved one to incarceration may include the loss of emotional support, privacy,

and an impaired reputation in the community (Fishman, 1981). Actual or perceived loss of reputation or fear of judgment or stigmatization may interfere with help-seeking behaviors, increase the likelihood of social isolation (Comfort et al., 2016; Phillips & Gates, 2011), and compromise professional opportunities.

Carceral Impact on Communities and Families

The impacts of incarceration extend far beyond the incarcerated individual, and the costs incurred by families of the incarcerated and their communities are numerous and varied. In addition to practical costs of the criminal justice system, such as court fines and fees, restitution, loss of wages, and commissary (deVuono-powell et al., 2015), there are considerable collateral costs. These costs include reduced political participation (Sugie, 2015), lower household incomes, lower levels of educational attainment, and increased risk of mental and emotional distress (Brown et al., 2016; deVuono-powell et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2023; Patterson et al., 2021; Sugie, 2015; Wildeman & Wang, 2017). Further, the associated costs of incarceration are exacerbated for individuals holding marginalized identities and may create rippling effects for individuals and families.

Individual and Family Impacts

Children with incarcerated parents are at increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (Gualtieri et al., 2020), mental and emotional strain, substance misuse, and other social and health inequities (Johnson & Arditti, 2023; Provencher & Conway, 2019). Children may experience social isolation resulting from perceived or actual stigma related to incarceration (Phillips & Gates, 2011) alongside increased risk for antisocial behavior (Murray et al., 2012). Ultimately, parental incarceration "can affect every major domain of child development," with both short- and long-term effects (Johnson & Arditti, 2023, p. 439).

Non-incarcerated parents struggle with decisions around visitation and the financial and emotional strain of keeping their children connected with the incarcerated parent (Arditti, 2002; Arditti, 2003; deVuono-powell et al., 2015). Strip searches, loud, overlapping conversations, and hovering correctional workers present challenges to in-person visitation and family bonding. In some circumstances, prison policies and environment deter visitation altogether, particularly for parents attempting to protect their children from exposure to potentially traumatizing experiences (Arditti, 2003; Comfort et al., 2016; Kotova, 2019).

Barriers to communication with an incarcerated loved one (i.e., transportation costs, telephone fees, letter pre-screening, and lack of child-friendly spaces in jails and prisons) can intensify feelings of loss and compromise relationships between family members (Comfort et al., 2016). Parent-child relationships are strained when one parent is incarcerated, with some children experiencing decreased trust, comfort, and fear of becoming too attached to the incarcerated parent, particularly when the parent experienced re-incarceration (Comfort et al., 2016). Some children expressed resentment toward the incarcerated parent, and sometimes toward both the incarcerated and non-incarcerated parent (Comfort et al., 2016), emphasizing strained structural family relationships (Tadros & Ogden, 2020).

Families with an incarcerated relative assume an influx of responsibilities and may face increased familial expectations (Besemer & Dennison, 2018; Comfort et al., 2016). Family roles may change to cope with the absence of a member, with parenting roles falling solely on a single parent or shifting to co-parenting within a family system such as mother-grandparent teams. Such drastic changes to family systems may lead to dissatisfaction in parent-child relationships and complications between co-parents and guardians upon the incarcerated person's release (Besemer & Dennison, 2018).

Numerous negative mental and physical health impacts are associated with supporting an incarcerated relative. Family members cited symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression (deVuono-powell et al., 2015) along with shame and guilt (Kotova, 2019; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Female partners may need to reconcile with the biological implications of prison sentences on fertility and motherhood (Kotova, 2019). The incarceration itself can result in feelings of grief and loss like those experienced after the death of a loved one (Fishman, 1981). Losing a loved one to incarceration may include the loss of emotional support, privacy, and an impaired reputation in the community (Fishman, 1981). Actual or perceived loss of reputation or fear of judgment or stigmatization may interfere with help-seeking behaviors, increase the likelihood of social isolation (Comfort et al., 2016; Phillips & Gates, 2011), and compromise professional opportunities.

The negative effects of incarceration extend beyond the individual, influencing families and children who face increased risks of mental health issues, social stigma, and developmental challenges. This broader impact is compounded by the disproportionate rates of prisonization and mistreatment of marginalized identities and communities, who often endure harsher conditions both during and after incarceration.

Disproportionate Risks & Impacts

Within mass incarceration, marginalized groups like communities of color, lower income communities, or the LGBTQ+ community, face disproportionate impacts from incarceration due to systemic inequalities and policies that further compound racial and economic disparities. In the context of centuries of systemic and institutionalized white supremacy (Alexander, 2012; Xinachtli & Ilyés, 2024), Black Americans make up only 12% of United States residents yet occupy 38% of the incarcerated population (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Black adults are 50%

more likely to experience the incarceration of an immediate family member than white adults (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Latinx and White Americans are incarcerated at a rate of 1.3:1 (Nellis, 2023). Thus, the disproportionate incarceration of people of color leads to disproportionate impacts of incarceration on communities of color.

Mass incarceration also has roots in classist and ableist ideals fueled by the Eugenics movement (Appleman, 2018), which persist in modernity. For example, adults with annual household incomes below $25,000 are 61% more likely to experience the incarceration of a loved one compared to adults with household incomes above $100,000 (Elderbroom et al., 2018). People with disabilities make up 15% of the U.S. population but represent 40% of the state prison population (Wang, 2022). One study of the disabled population in prisons found that, "31% had specific learning disabilities, 43% have taken special education classes, 43% 'self-identified' as having a disability, 25% reported vision deficits, and 17% reported hearing problems" (Gonzalez et al., 2016, p. 109).

Disproportionate rates of prisonization also evidence policing and criminalization of LGBT people and communities. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are incarcerated at higher rates and receive longer sentences than straight people (Wang et al., 2022). Once incarcerated, sexual and gender minorities are often subject to higher rates of inhumane treatment, such as solitary confinement and sexual victimization by other incarcerated persons and facility staff (Jones, 2021). Although transgender people are underrepresented in prison data, they often face disproportionate rates of incarceration with nearly half of Black trans people having been incarcerated (Jones, 2021). Additionally, transgender people are more likely to face police harassment, higher life sentences, and denial of medical care while incarcerated (Jones, 2021).

Previous research has identified disproportionate impacts of incarceration on minoritized and marginalized individuals and communities, and situated the magnitude of carceral impacts on child and family relationships. There is a lack of research that addresses the impacts on intimate partnerships alone and on the non-incarcerated partner as an individual. Intimate partners are likely to experience the direct and indirect impacts of incarceration, even when children are not involved. In this study, we aimed to address this population gap through a systematic review of the literature.

Purpose of the Study

Using PRISMA methodology (Page et al., 2021) we examined research regarding the holistic experiences of adults with an incarcerated intimate partner. The study adds to the current literature by exploring the experiences of impacted adults rather than focusing solely on individuals who are or have been incarcerated, children with an incarcerated parent, or caregiving roles of parents with an incarcerated spouse or co-parent. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) What is the nature of the body of research regarding partners of incarcerated individuals? and (2) What are the holistic experiences of adults experiencing the incarceration of their intimate or romantic partner?

Method

As suggested by Page and colleagues (2021), we selected the PRISMA methodology early in our research process as it is an exemplar method for conducting systematic reviews (Zhang et al., 2019), emphasizing transparency and trustworthiness of the results. We outline our process for identifying articles, selecting studies, and extracting data below (**Figure 1**).

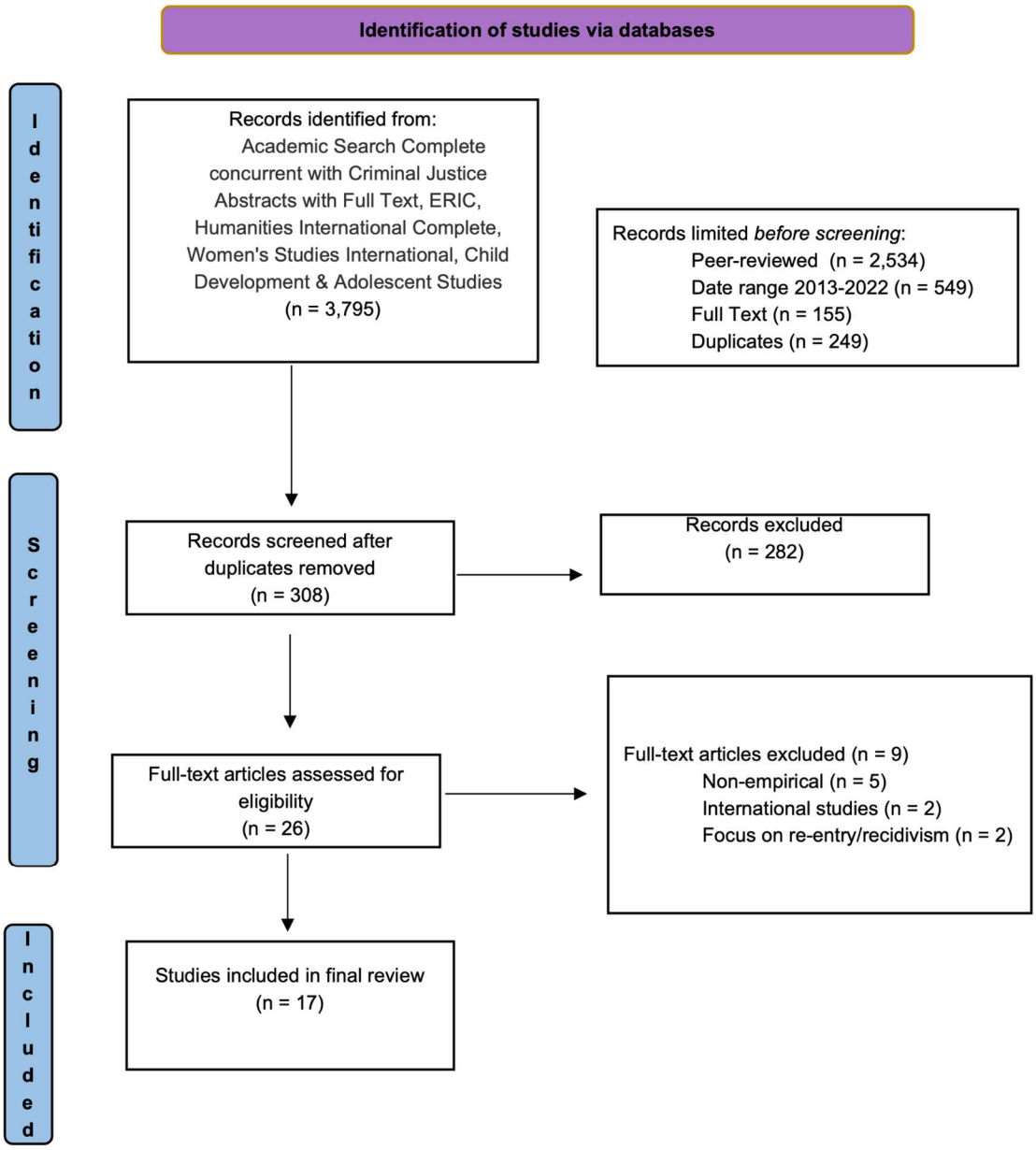


Figure 1: PRISMA Screening and Identification

From: Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., … Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71
For more information, visit: http://www.prisma-statement.org/

Literature Search and Selection Process

We conducted the primary search via EBSCOhost on January 31, 2023, including Academic Search Complete concurrent with Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text, ERIC, Humanities International Complete, Women's Studies International, and Child Development & Adolescent Studies. We searched for peer-reviewed articles published between 2013-2022 using the following search terms: (incarceration or imprisonment or carceral or prison or jail or correctional facilities or detention) AND (spouse or romantic partner or wife or husband or intimate partner or co-parent).

Due to policy, legislation, and the carceral population decline during the COVID-19 pandemic (Nellis, 2023), we elected to include research within 10 years to provide the most current context. Articles that centered on children with incarcerated parents, incarcerated persons, reentry and/or recidivism, community incarceration, international incarceration, or immigration detention were excluded. International articles and articles focused on immigration detention were excluded because systemic differences in justice systems may impact personal experience with that system.

The initial search resulted in 308 articles for possible inclusion. The first author and a graduate student from the author's department conducted independent title and abstract screening. Reviewers met to discuss the inclusion-exclusion criteria, practice reviewing article titles and abstracts, and reach an understanding on screening decisions. Interrater agreement for the first round was 87.01% with Cohen's k = .54 indicating moderate agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). A total of 26 articles met inclusion criteria for full-text review.

The first author conducted a full-text review in consultation with the second author. The first author maintained a spreadsheet of all 26 articles to track decisions, brief explanations for

decisions, and additional notes for clarity, justification, and discussions with the second author to ensure clarity and consistency. Ultimately, nine additional articles were excluded, with 17 remaining for data extraction and analysis. Finally, the first and second author examined the resulting pool of articles to ensure consistency in application during the review process.

Data Extraction Process

The first author extracted data from 17 articles to include: article name, author, sample size, demographics, location of study (national, regional), research question/problem, incarceration type (jail, prison, federal, state, other), study context (reason for incarceration, type of charge/sentence), method, findings, implications for population, implications for counseling, and additional notes. The first author then synthesized key foci and findings of each study into themes. The second author reviewed the resulting themes for clarity and relevance to the research focus and provided insights on synthesis.

Results

Just over one-half (n = 9) of the qualifying articles were secondary dataset analyses from five different large scale studies: Multisite Family Study on Incarceration, Partnering, and Parenting (MSF-IP; Bir & Lindquist, 2017); Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS; Shulman et al., 2018); National Study of American Life (NSAL; Jackson et al., 2004); Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS; Reichman et al., 2001), now Future of Families and Child Wellbeing; and National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth; Harris et al., 2019). Of the remaining studies, six were qualitative and two were explorations of interventions, one quasi-experimental and one program evaluation.

Research Question 1: Study Characteristics

Table 1 includes a summary of study characteristics. There were few clear themes in the literature. The reason for incarceration was reported in one (5.88%) article, and the length of the sentence was referenced in four (23.53%) articles. Samples used in the articles varied, with most articles focused on females with an incarcerated male partner and the remaining articles providing limited information regarding the demographics of either partner or the relationship to the incarcerated person. None of the articles reported data representing transgender, non-binary, or gender expansive identities or same-sex partnerships.

Research Question 2: Holistic Impacts

Four themes emerged from analysis of findings regarding the holistic impacts of incarceration on non-incarcerated romantic partners: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Systemic/Institutional, and Coping and Interventions. The themes may have a confounding effect in multiple areas of their life and are not mutually exclusive.

Intrapersonal

Intrapersonal impacts refer to the mental and emotional well-being of adults impacted by a partner's incarceration. Findings illustrate clear evidence of risk to well-being (Tadros et al., 2022b). Even after controlling for social roles, never-incarcerated African American women with an incarcerated immediate family member experienced increased psychological distress and depression compared to their counterparts without an incarcerated immediate family member (Patterson et al., 2021), representing a medium effect size in both categories (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012). Women exposed directly or indirectly to incarceration were 1.50 times more likely to experience pre-pregnancy hypertension, 1.95 times more likely to experience pre-pregnancy depressive symptoms, and 1.49 times more likely to experience

Table 1: Study Characteristics

Article	Author Discipline	Journal	Research Type	Research Design	Participant Relationship to Incarcerated	Research Focus
Tadros, et al. (2022b)	Marriage and family therapy	Crime and Delinquency	Qual	Phenomenological	Spouses and significant others	Lived experiences of people who are romantically involved with an incarcerated individual
Bailey (2018)	Criminal justice or criminology	American Journal of Criminal Justice	Qual	Pure naturalistic	Spouses and significant others with partner pre or post-conviction	Presence of and consequences that occur as a result of disenfranchised grief for former and current sex offender significant others and spouses
Hinck et al. (2019)	Communication	Communication Studies	Qual	Grounded Theory	Spouses and significant others with partner in prison	Social support sought and given to members in online support group Prison Talk Online (PTO); social support sought and given by those with incarcerated husbands/boyfriends and those with incarcerated wives/girlfriends.
Hood, B. J., & Gaston, S. (2022).	Criminal justice or criminology	Interdisciplinary journal of applied family science	Qual	24 semistructured interviews, inductive analysis; descriptive coding, analytic coding, and pattern coding	Spouses and significant others, other family members (e.g., adult children, parents, siblings)	Family response to the collateral consequences of incarceration and reentry
DeShay, R. A. et al. (2021).	Criminal justice or criminology	Criminal Justice Studies	Qual	Semi-structured interviews; inductive thematic coding	Female spouses and significant others	Experiences and management of courtesy stigma
Shamblen, S. R. et al. (2013).	Research; substance prevention and education; and social work	Family Process	Quant	Quasi-experimental; surveys completed pre-, immediately post-, and 3 months post-program implementation	Female spouses with male spouse post-release	Effectiveness of a marriage intervention program
Nickels, B. M. (2020).	Communication	Journal of Family Communication	Qual	Questionnaire, Inductive analysis	Female with incarcerated male spouse or significant other	Behaviors utilized by unincarcerated partner to maintain a feeling of connection and barriers to connection
Tadros, E. et al. (2022a).	Counseling; marriage and family therapy	Offender Rehabilitation	Secondary Data Set	Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP); Actor-Partner Interdependence Modeling (APIM)	Female coparening with incarcerated male significant other	Relationship between perceived family support and depressive symptoms
Sugie, N. F. (2015).	Criminology, Law, and Society	Social Problems	Secondary Data Set	Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey	Female coparenting with formerly incarcerated male significant other	Relationship between partner incarceration and diminished political participation
Siennick, S. E. et al. (2014).	Criminal justice or criminology; Sociology	Criminology (American Society of Criminology)	Secondary Data Set	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health	Spouses with one incarcerated spouse	Investigate the association between incarceration and 1) an increased risk of marital dissolution among married young adults, 2) marital problems among these young adults, and 3) marital dissolution via associations with marital problems.
Patterson, E. J. et al. (2021).	Sociology	Journal of Marriage and Family	Secondary Data Set	National Survey of American Life	Immediate family member (unspecified)	Relationships among familial incarceration, social role combinations, and mental health among never incarcerated African American women.
Turney, K., & Schneider, D. (2016).	Sociology; public policy	Demography	Secondary Data Set	Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing survey.	Female coparenting with incarcerated male significant other	Short-term relationship between incarceration and asset ownership (i.e., ownership of a bank account, vehicle, and home)
Testa, A., & Jackson, D. B. (2020).	Criminal justice or criminology	Maternal and Child Health Journal	Secondary Data Set	Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS); logistic regression models	Incarcerated mother or mother with incarcerated partner/coparent	Correlation between exposure to incarceration and food insecurity among pregnant women
Durante, K. A. et al. (2022).	Sociology; communication; marriage and family therapy	Crime and Delinquency	Secondary Data Set	Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MSF-IP); Binomial logistic regression	Females with incarcerated male significant other	Non-incarcerated female partners' perception of relationship quality.
Lee, R. D. et al. (2023).	Public health	Public Health Reports	Secondary Data Set	Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS)	Incarceration of self or spouse/significant other	Frequency of recent direct or indirect carceral contact among women with a recent live birth; relationships among incarceration exposure, maternal health, and infant health
Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2013).	Sociology; demography	American Sociological Review	Secondary Data Set	Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study	Ever-incarcerated fathers; un-incarcerated mothers	Relationships between paternal incarceration and parenting (both parents), mechanisms effecting said parenting, and association between paternal incarceration and maternal repartnering
Mahoney, M. et al. (2013).	Family and community medicine	AIDS Education and Prevention	Program Evaluation	Pilot evaluation of adapted intervention	Female with currently or recently incarcerated male significant other	Acceptability of a pilot HIV intervention program

depressive symptoms, and 1.49 times more likely to experience postpartum depressive symptoms compared to their peers (Lee et al., 2023). Unique to the research conducted by Bailey (2018), sex offenders are often sentenced to some form of community incarceration and may not experience physical separation from family by jail or prison. Though some of the participants may not have experienced physical separation, they still experienced a grieving process describing trauma and distress upon learning of their partner's crimes and mourning the person they thought their partner was.

Given the barriers to maintaining relationships, non-incarcerated women reported that specific cognitions about relational maintenance behaviors, such as positive or future thinking, impacted their feelings of connectedness with their incarcerated partner (Nickels, 2020). One-quarter of participants mentioned maintaining a positive mindset as helpful for maintaining a sense of connectedness, and 10% of women reported intentionally thinking about reunification to ease the discomfort of separation. That is, the non-incarcerated partner's cognitions may influence their feelings about their relationship regardless of the behaviors of the incarcerated partner or the physical distance between them.

Interpersonal

Interpersonal impacts include stigma, social disconnection, and disenfranchised grief that influence relationships, including but not limited to the relationship between the adult and their incarcerated partner. Stigma can negatively impact partners of incarcerated individuals through a process of courtesy stigma, or a presumption that the non-incarcerated partner is guilty by association (DeShay et al., 2021). As a result, the non-incarcerated partner may self-isolate to avoid people who disapprove of them or their relationship (DeShay et al., 2021; Tadros et al., 2022b), directly linking stigma with social disconnection. Participants reported embarrassment in

connection to their loved one's incarceration and feeling disrespected and unsupported by people in their lives. This experience led to disconnection and depression for some participants (Tadros et al., 2022b). As a result of social stigma and a retreat from judgment, adults with incarcerated partners may seek support from people with shared experiences (Hinck et al., 2019).

Disenfranchised grief is "the denial of empathy and social support during the grieving process" (Bailey, 2018, p. 1). In a sample of sex offenders' spouses and partners, Bailey (2018) found that wives who divorced or separated from their husbands did not experience disenfranchised grief. However, partners who stayed in the relationship with their convicted partner experienced disenfranchisement by law enforcement officers, social workers, friends, and family. The interpersonal experiences of disenfranchised grief, in turn, resulted in intrapersonal experiences of "isolation, guilt, and persistent grieving symptoms" (p. 659).

Physical separation caused by incarceration may lead to barriers in communication and intimacy between partners (Durante et al., 2022; Nickels, 2020). Partners described complications of visiting the incarceration facility, such as lack of privacy, physical barriers, or prison restrictions around physical touch as impacting their sense of connectedness with their partner (Nickels, 2020). Partners stated that more flexibility in visitation options, such as overnight visits or preparing a meal together, would benefit their relationships (Tadros et al., 2022b). In Durante and colleagues' (2022) study, most participants agreed that the costs of calls (65.6%) and transportation to the facility (53.8%) contributed to diminished contact with their co-parenting incarcerated partner, a finding reinforced by qualitative interviews in another study (Tadros et al., 2022b) where participants noted that the costs of calls to the facility hindered the quality and quantity of communication.

Beyond physical barriers, the associated challenges of incarceration can lead to emotional dissolution, separation, or divorce. Women in co-parenting relationships reported institutional barriers as predictors of staying connected to their incarcerated male partners (Durante et al., 2022). Specifically, when women reported high costs of receiving calls (OR = 1.9), unpleasant facility environments (OR = 1.5), or scheduling issues (OR = 1.9), they were also more likely to report feeling that they were drifting apart from their partners. Distance from the incarceration facility played some role in feelings of drifting apart (OR = 1.4), though findings were only marginally significant.

Even when controlling for protective and risk factors such as religious affiliation and substance use, incarcerations occurring during a preexisting marriage were associated with a high risk of marital dissolution due to increased relationship violence, decreased marital love, and increased extramarital sex (Siennick et al., 2014). Although these are common problems for couples not impacted by incarceration, these factors contributed to 40% of the association between divorce and incarceration (Siennick et al., 2014). When examining co-parenting relationships between nonincarcerated women and incarcerated men who were cohabitating prior to incarceration, women were 3.23 times more likely to end the relationship with the father and stay single or 7.01 times more likely to break up and repartner than they were to stay with the father (Turney & Wildeman, 2013).

When examining the interpersonal impacts of parenting, mothers who co-parented with incarcerated male partners reported negative impacts on the level of engagement between the incarcerated father and their children (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). This negative association between paternal incarceration and parenting was explained by the relationship with the mother,

with status of the relationship explaining 58% and changes in mother's trust explaining 33% of the variance in the decreased level of engagement.

Coping and Interventions

Several studies explored responses to and management of impacts of familial incarceration. Partners described intentional communication efforts to maintain a sense of relational connection (Nickels, 2020). More than half (61.9%) of women reported using sensory objects, such as letters, photos, or items, to find comfort and connection to their partners. Women described using self-disclosure (94.8%), assurances (92.8%), and future planning (80.4%) as strategies for building emotional and relational intimacy. Participants also discussed the benefits of engaging in small physical touch, sharing sexual fantasies, or facilitating a sense of togetherness with shared hobbies and tasks of daily living.

Non-incarcerated partners described strategies for coping with inter- and intrapersonal impacts of courtesy stigma by avoiding individuals who were judgmental of their relationship and embracing the full benefits of the relationship (DeShay et al., 2021). Women partners described the need to withhold information or withdraw from relationships with friends, family members, and associates who judged or offered negative responses to being in a relationship with an incarcerated individual (DeShay et al., 2021; Hood & Gaston, 2022). However, most of the women described their way of managing courtesy stigma as embracing the decision to enter or maintain an incarceration relationship. They reported the benefits of being with an incarcerated man such as distance from relational stressors (Hood & Gaston, 2022), intentionality and depth of communication (Tadros et al., 2022b), and finding new ways to connect via quality written and verbal communication (DeShay et al., 2021).

Families emphasized the necessity of healthy support networks for managing the strains of incarceration (Hood & Gaston, 2022; Nickels, 2020). Families utilized their spirituality or prayer practices to mitigate stress and intrapersonal conflicts, sometimes relying on their church for a social support network (Hood & Gaston, 2022). In a study of Prison Talk Online (PTO), an online social support forum for individuals who have an incarcerated loved one, members utilized the group for advice, self-disclosure, community invitation, non-specific support, listening support, and reality confirmation (Hinck et al., 2019). Although depression is a significant concern for incarcerated individuals and their loved ones (Lee et al., 2023; Patterson et al., 2021), both incarcerated men and their non-incarcerated female partners reported lower levels of depression when there were higher levels of perceived social support, specifically through emotional closeness and communication with family (Tadros et al., 2022a).

Community intervention is another strategy for developing skills and coping strategies. Participants rated an evidence-based HIV prevention program adapted for women with incarcerated partners highly, noting a module on intimate partner violence and cited empowerment as most influential to their change in behavior (Mahoney et al., 2013). A didactic marital enhancement program focused on cognitive change and skill development also resulted in improved relational skills, including communication, conflict resolution, and emotional awareness and expression for both husbands and wives (Shamblen et al., 2013).

Systemic/Institutional

It is no surprise that research investigating a complex criminal justice system uncovered systemic and institutional effects of incarceration. Mothers exposed to incarceration were at significantly higher risk for food insecurity (OR 2.65; Testa & Jackson, 2020) and diminished asset ownership and asset accumulation over time (Turney & Schneider, 2016). When

controlling for demographic factors alongside risk and protective factors (e.g., prior hardship, unemployment, public assistance), incarceration exposure increased the odds of food insecurity by 1.74 (Testa & Jackson, 2020), indicating a small to medium effect size (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012). Food insecurity, asset loss, and reduced asset accumulation may increase the risk of generational poverty (Hamad et al., 2024), compounding the impacts of incarceration.

Compared to mothers without partner incarceration, mothers who have experienced partner incarceration had decreased voting behaviors (OR = .74), voter registration (OR = .70), and voting importance (OR = .80) (Sugie, 2015). These findings held even after controlling for male partner characteristics, financial resources, and other social engagement activities (e.g., religious participation), leading the author to suggest that partners intentionally withdrew from political and governmental bodies due to the political socialization they experience while navigating the criminal justice system (Sugie, 2015). Withdrawal from political and government bodies means not having a voice in the very systems that lead to adverse political socialization. As such, the political effects of incarceration may perpetuate a cycle of disenfranchisement for adults with incarcerated partners.

Discussion

Discussion of the findings is difficult, given the nature of available data. There was a heavy reliance on broad-scale data sets that do not provide a depth of understanding. Seven of the seventeen studies were based on primary data sets that only sampled parents (Durante et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023; Sugie, 2015; Tadros et al., 2022a; Testa & Jackson, 2020; Turney & Schneider, 2016; Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Additionally, some broad-scale data sets were

completed over fifteen years ago, potentially skewing the timeline and subsequent relevance of secondary data analyses.

Other research regarding non-incarcerated adults frequently centered around their roles regarding parenting or guardianship of a child (Armstrong et al., 2018; Correa et al., 2021; Tadros, 2022a). A small emergent body of literature using small samples was focused on specific, nuanced aspects of partner incarceration, such as adapted HIV-prevention interventions (Mahoney et al., 2013) and sex-offender populations (Bailey, 2018), which limits the generalizability and transferability of findings. Overall, this population and subject matter are under-researched, representing a clear and plausible gap that Professional Counselors should address.

There is clear evidence of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and systemic consequences of partner incarceration that include and transcend the relational partner. Partners navigated threats to fundamental human needs such as nutrition (Testa & Jackson, 2020) and financial security (Turney & Schneider, 2016). Partners were active agents in moving away from negative institutional and social systems (DeShay et al., 2021; Hood & Gaston, 2022; Tadros et al., 2022b) and toward supportive resources and behaviors (Hinck et al., 2019; Hood & Gaston, 2022; Nickels, 2020). Preliminary evidence shows promise for interventions mitigating the adverse effects of partner incarceration (Mahoney et al., 2013; Shamblen et al., 2013). Thus, the findings of this systematic review provide a catalyst for informing Professional Counselors about the experiences of partners impacted directly and indirectly by incarceration.

Limitations

Transparency in the PRISMA search process makes some limitations easily identifiable. Although our process was rigorous, full-text reviews and data extraction were conducted by the

first author in consultation with the second author. Rigor may have been increased by having multiple reviewers throughout. Inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in the elimination of significant topics under the larger umbrella of mass incarceration. For example, this review does not provide insight into immigration detention.

Since we started this study in 2023, policies and legislation have influenced the landscape and statistics of the US justice system. Mass Incarceration was also affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 (Jossie et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2022), including a reduction in total prison population and conflicts of reducing exposure (Collica-Cox & Molina, 2020). While time is an unavoidable limitation, it is worth noting for future research, scholarship, and practice that centers a population so profoundly influenced by political and societal changes.

Implications for Research

More research is needed to understand carceral experiences for adults with incarcerated romantic partners. Moreover, there is a clear gap in Professional Counselor contribution to scholarship regarding the impacts of incarceration. Future researchers should center the experiences of adults with carceral contact, whether or not they have children. That might include a holistic assessment of wellness and mental health to inform the development of responsive counseling interventions designed to meet the unique needs of the population. New, original research such as outcome measurement, pilot studies, and interdisciplinary studies are all necessary to inform practice regarding this topic and population.

This population may be less likely to seek help from Professional Counselors because of incarceration stigmatization (Hinck et al., 2019; Tadros et al., 2022b), experiences of courtesy stigma (DeShay et al., 2021), and disenfranchisement from social systems (Sugie, 2015; Turney & Schneider, 2016). Research is needed regarding barriers and facilitators of help-seeking

alongside its impact on health and wellness (Testa & Jackson, 2020). Knowledge of help-seeking behaviors may help counselors find new ways to engage with this population.

The literature provides preliminary evidence of how mental health interventions may mitigate the adverse effects of partner incarceration. Some reports indicate failures by mental health professionals (Bailey, 2018), underscoring the need for a more nuanced examination of the role of counselors. Existing research focuses on hardship, which is important and may also have disempowering or discouraging consequences. Professional Counselors emphasize internal strength and protective factors (Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Lawson, 2016) and should conduct strengths-based research, such as investigating post-traumatic growth to inform preventive care and intervention practices.

Implications for Counseling

Disenfranchisement from social systems (Sugie, 2015; Turney & Schneider, 2016) and incarceration stigma (DeShay et al., 2021; Hood & Gaston, 2022; Tadros et al., 2022b) may impact help-seeking behaviors, impede therapeutic alliance development (Bailey, 2018, p. 654), and stunt overall health and wellness outcomes (Testa & Jackson, 2020). The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016) may help Counselors understand the culture or shared experiences of the population. This includes acknowledging personal bias regarding mass incarceration and being careful not to impose personal values or opinions regarding how a client should respond to the incarceration of a loved one. Counselors can engage in discussion and clinical consultation about incarceration, evaluating various aspects of mass incarceration and ways individuals may experience carceral contact.

There is evidence that partners of incarcerated men desire opportunities to participate in support groups, individual counseling, and/or couples counseling, explicitly citing a need for

support in communicating about the trauma each partner and their children experienced during and after incarceration (Comfort et al., 2016). Psychoeducation may prove beneficial in helping individuals understand the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic impacts of incarceration, thereby increasing self-awareness and clarity in communicating experiences. The four experience themes may provide a starting point for Professional Counselors to conceptualize and apply existing theories and frameworks for culturally responsive care. For example, participants in the HIV prevention intervention for women with incarcerated partners cited empowerment as the most significant predictor of behavioral change (Mahoney et al., 2013). Counselors may consider Feminist interventions, including consciousness-raising (Bozkur & Yetim, 2024) and power analysis (Han & Lee, 2023), to assist clients in coping with romantic partner incarceration and navigating an inherently oppressive system (Durante et al., 2022; Sugie, 2015; Turney & Schneider, 2016).

Trauma-informed approaches may be particularly valuable for understanding and treating families with incarcerated loved ones (Bailey, 2018; Lee et al., 2023; Tadros et al., 2022a). Grief frameworks such as Ambiguous Loss Theory (Boss, 2007), Disenfranchised Grief (Doka, 1989), and The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) may be helpful tools, given findings from Bailey (2018) regarding the grief and loss experienced by people with incarcerated loved ones.

Counselors may also consider cognitive approaches to increase positive reframing for relational satisfaction, decrease feelings of loneliness (Nickels, 2020), and improve relationship quality (Shamblen et al., 2013). Couples, relationship, and family counseling may improve communication and increase feelings of connectedness among individuals and family systems struggling with barriers to communication and emotional expression (Tadros et al., 2022b).

Clinicians may be able to suggest conversation starters, communication skills such as "I" statements, and shared activities such as writing to the same journal prompts or creating intimacy through boudoir photos (Nickels, 2020).

Counselors can explore the broader social systems at play in the lives of partners impacted by incarceration, including but not limited to financial costs, parole, probation, and offender registries. Experiencing universality through group work may also help to mitigate isolation (DeShay et al., 2021; Hinck et al., 2019; Tadros et al., 2022a), self-stigmatization, and shared ideas and suggestions for coping and managing carceral contact (DeShay et al., 2021; Hinck et al., 2019) in a safe and accepting space.

Conclusion

An estimated 6.5 million adults in the United States have an immediate family member who is incarcerated, and one in seven has experienced the incarceration of a spouse or co-parent (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Most research about this population utilizes secondary data sets and lacks depth of attention to holistic experiences and needs, specifically concerning mental health and wellbeing. Professional Counselors have dedicated preparation in social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, and group counseling (Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2024) and are qualified to help with the impacts of incarceration. Elucidating this information may increase Counselor awareness, provide a baseline from which to conduct research, and inspire the development and utilization of responsive Counseling interventions.

References

Alexander, M. (2012). *The new Jim Crow: mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness* (Revised edition.). New Press.

Appleman, L. I. (2018). Deviancy, dependency, and disability: The forgotten history of eugenics and mass incarceration. *Duke Law Journal*, *68*(3), 417–478.

Arditti, J. (2002). Doing family research at the jail: Reflections of a prison widow. *The Qualitative Report, 7*(4), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2002.1967

Arditti, J. A. (2003). Locked doors and glass walls: Family visiting at a local jail. *Journal of Loss & Trauma, 8*(2), 115–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020305864

Armstrong, E., Eggins, E., Reid, N., Harnett, P., & Dawe, S. (2018). Parenting interventions for incarcerated parents to improve parenting knowledge and skills, parent well-being, and quality of the parent-child relationship: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 14*(3), 279–317. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9290-6

*Bailey, D. J. S. (2018). A life of grief: An exploration of disenfranchised grief in sex offender significant others. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 43*(3), 641–667. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9416-4

Besemer, K. L., & Dennison, S. M. (2018). Family imprisonment, maternal parenting stress and its impact on mother-child relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 27*(12), 3897–3908. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1237-7

Bir, A., & Lindquist, C. (2017). *Multi-site family study on incarceration, parenting and partnering, 5 U.S. states, 2008-2014* (ICPSR 36639, Version VI) [Dataset]. ICPSR. https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36639.V1

Boss, P. (2007). Ambiguous loss theory: Challenges for scholars and practitioners. *Family Relations, 56*(2), 105–111. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00444.x

Bouchard, J., & Wong, J. S. (2022). Seeing the forest and the trees: Examining the impact of aggregate measures of recidivism on meta-analytic conclusions of intervention effects. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 24*(1), 226-248. https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958221090577

Bozkur, B., & Yetim, Ü. (2024). The effect of feminist therapy-based group counseling program on women's psychological empowerment and internalized sexism. *Archives of Women's Mental Health, 27*(1), 77–87. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-023-01393-2

Brown, T. N., Bell, M. L., & Patterson, E. J. (2016). Imprisoned by empathy: Familial incarceration and psychological distress among African American men in the National Survey of American Life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 57*(2), 240–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146516645924

Carda-Auten, J., Dirosa, E. A., Grodensky, C., Nowotny, K. M., Brinkley-Rubinstein, L., Travers, D., Brown, M., Bradley-Bull, S., Blue, C., & Rosen, D. L. (2022). Jail health care in the southeastern United States from entry to release. *The Milbank Quarterly, 100*(3), 722–760. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12569

Cochran, J. C., Mears, D. P., Bales, W. D., & Stewart, E. A. (2016). Spatial distance, community disadvantage, and racial and ethnic variation in prison inmate access to social ties. *The Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 53*(2), 220–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427815592675comfort

Collica-Cox, K., & Molina, L. (2020). A case study of the Westchester County New York's jail response to COVID-19: Controlling COVID while balancing service needs for the

incarcerated-A national model for jails. *Victims & Offenders, 15*(7–8), 1305–1316. https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.1820923

Comfort, M., McKay, T., Landwehr, J., Kennedy, E., Lindquist, C., & Bir, A. (2016). The costs of incarceration for families of prisoners. *International Review of the Red Cross, 98*(903), 783–798. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383117000704

Cooper, H. L., Clark, C. D., Barham, T., Embry, V., Caruso, B., & Comfort, M. (2014). "He was the story of my drug use life": A longitudinal qualitative study of the impact of partner incarceration on substance misuse patterns among African American women. *Substance Use & Misuse, 49*(1–2), 176–188. https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2013.824474

Correa, N. P., Hayes, A. K., Bhalakia, A. M., Lopez, K. K., Cupit, T., Kwarteng-Amaning, V., Keefe, R. J., Greeley, C. S., & Van Horne, B. S. (2021). Parents' perspectives on the impact of their incarceration on children and families. *Family Relations*, *70*(1), 162–170. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12529

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2024). *2024 Standards*. https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/

*DeShay, R. A., Vieraitis, L. M., Copes, H., Powell, Z. A., & Medrano, J. (2021). Managing courtesy stigma: Women and relationships with men in prison. *Criminal Justice Studies, 34*(3), 251–267. https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2021.1966628

deVuono-powell, S., Schweidler, C., Walters, A., & Zohrabi, A. (2015). *Who pays? The true cost of incarceration on families.* Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, and Research Action Design. https://ellabakercenter.org/who-pays-the-true-cost-of-incarceration-on-families/

Doka, K. J. (1989). Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow. Lexington Books.

*Durante, K. A., Phillips Meertins, J. R., & Tadros, E. (2022). Institutional relational

maintenance barriers and perceptions of relationship quality among women with incarcerated partners. *Crime & Delinquency, 70*(3), 788-811. https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287221113304

Elderbroom, B., Bennett, L., Gong, S., Rose, F., & Towns, Z. (2018). *Every second: The impact of the incarceration crisis on America's families.* Every Second. https://everysecond.fwd.us

Fishman, S. H. (1981). Losing a loved one to incarceration: The effect of imprisonment on family members. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal, 59*(6), 372–375. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1981.tb00572.x

Fox, B., Miley, L. N., Kortright, K. E., & Wetsman, R. J. (2021). Assessing the effect of mental health courts on adult and juvenile recidivism: A meta-analysis. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 46*(4), 644–664. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-021-09629-6

Gonzalez, J. M., Cannell, M. B., Jetelina, K. K., & Froehlich-Grobe, K. (2016). Disproportionate prevalence rate of prisoners with disabilities: Evidence from a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *27*(2), 106–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207315616809

Gualtieri, G., Ferretti, F., Masti, A., Pozza, A., & Coluccia, A. (2020). Post-traumatic stress disorder in prisoners' offspring: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health, 16*(1), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.2174/1745017902016010036

Hamad, R., Addo, F., & Montez, K. (2024). Reducing intergenerational poverty: An essential driver of health. *JAMA Pediatrics, 178*(4), 333-334. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.6510

Han, E., & Lee, I. (2023). Empowering women in counseling by dismantling internalized sexism: The Feminist-Multicultural Orientation and Social Justice Competencies. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 45*(3), 213–230. https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.45.3.03

Harris, K. M., Halpern, C. T., Whitsel, E. A., Hussey, J. M., Killeya-Jones, L. A., Tabor, J., & Dean, S. C. (2019). Cohort profile: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health). *International Journal of Epidemiology*, *48*(5), 1415–1415k. https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyz115

Heigel, C. P., Stuewig, J., & Tangney, J. P. (2010). Self-reported physical health of inmates: Impact of incarceration and relation to optimism. *Journal of Correctional Health Care, 16*(2), 106–116. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078345809356523

*Hinck, A. S., Hinck, S. S., Smith, J., & Withers, L. A. (2019). Connecting and coping with stigmatized others: Examining social support messages in Prison Talk Online. *Communication Studies, 70*(5), 582–600. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2019.1658611

*Hood, B. J., & Gaston, S. (2022). How families respond to the collateral consequences of incarceration and prisoner reentry. *Family Relations, 71*(3), 1175-1190. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12616

Jackson, J. S., Torres, M., Caldwell, C. H., Neighbors, H. W., Nesse, R. M., Taylor, R. J., Trierweiler, S. J., & Williams, D. R. (2004). The National Survey of American Life: A study of racial, ethnic and cultural influences on mental disorders and mental health. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research, 13*(4), 196–207. https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.177

James, J. E. (2023). “We’re not patients. We’re inmates”: Older Black women’s experience of

aging, health, and illness during and after incarceration. *The Gerontologist, 64*(4). https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnad114

Johnson, E. I., & Arditti, J. A. (2023). Risk and resilience among children with incarcerated parents: A review and critical reframing. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 19*(1), 437–460. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-080921-081447

Jones, A. (2021, March). *Visualizing the unequal treatment of LGBTQ people in the criminal justice system.* Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/03/02/lgbtq/

Jossie, M. L., Blumstein, A., & Miller, J. M. (2022). COVID, crime & criminal justice: Affirming the call for system reform research. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 47*(6), 1243–1259. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-022-09721-5

Kaplan, D. M., & Gladding, S. T. (2011). A vision for the future of counseling: The 20/20 principles for unifying and strengthening the profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 89*(3), 367–372. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00101.x

Kluckow, R., & Zeng, Z. (2022). *Correctional populations in the United States, 2020 – Statistical tables.* Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/correctional-populations-united-states-2020-statistical-tables

Kotova, A. (2019). 'Time … lost time': Exploring how partners of long-term prisoners experience the temporal pains of imprisonment. *Time & Society*, *28*(2), 478–498. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X18763688

Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics, 33*(1), 159–174. https://doi.org/10.2307/2529310

Lawson, G. (2016). On being a profession: A historical perspective on counselor licensure and accreditation. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy, 3*(2), 71–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2016.1169955

*Lee, R. D., D'Angelo, D. V., Dieke, A., & Burley, K. (2023). Recent incarceration exposure among parents of live-born infants and maternal and child health. *Public Health Reports, 138*(2), 292-301. https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549221081808

*Mahoney, M., Bien, M., & Comfort, M. (2013). Adaptation of an evidence-based HIV prevention intervention for women with incarcerated partners: Expanding to community settings. *AIDS Education and Prevention, 25*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1521/aeap.2013.25.1.1

McKay, T., Landwehr, J., Lindquist, C., Feinberg, R., Comfort, M., Cohen, J., & Bir, A. (2018). Intimate partner violence in couples navigating incarceration and reentry. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 57*(5), 273–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2018.1487897

Miller, E., Martin, B. D., & Topaz, C. M. (2022). New York City jails: COVID discharge policy, data transparency, and reform. *PLoS ONE, 17*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262255

Murray, J., Farrington, D. P., & Sekol, I. (2012). Children's antisocial behavior, mental health, drug use, and educational performance after parental incarceration: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 138*(2), 175–210. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026407

Nellis, A. (2023). *Mass incarceration trends.* The Sentencing Project. https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/mass-incarceration-trends/

*Nickels, B. M. (2020). Love locked up: An exploration of relationship maintenance and perceived barriers for women who have incarcerated partners. *Journal of Family Communication, 20*(1), 36–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2019.1674853

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., … Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ (Online), 372*(n71), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71

*Patterson, E. J., Talbert, R. D., & Brown, T. N. (2021). Familial incarceration, social role combinations, and mental health among African American women. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 83*(1), 86–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12699

Phillips, S. D., & Gates, T. (2011). A conceptual framework for understanding the stigmatization of children of incarcerated parents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 20*(3), 286–294. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-010-9391-6

Provencher, A., & Conway, J. M. (2019). Health effects of family member incarceration in the United States: A meta-analysis and cost study. *Children and Youth Services Review, 103*, 87–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.05.029

Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *44*(1), 28–48. https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035

Reichman, N. E., Teitler, J. O., Garfinkel, I., & McLanahan, S. S. (2001). Fragile families:

Sample and design. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *23*(4-5), 303-326.

Sawyer, W., & Wagner, P. (2024). *Mass incarceration: The whole pie 2024.* Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024.html#bigpicture

*Shamblen, S. R., Arnold, B. B., Mckiernan, P., Collins, D. A., & Strader, T. N. (2013). Applying the Creating Lasting Family Connections Marriage Enhancement Program to marriages affected by prison reentry. *Family Process, 52*(3), 477–498. https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12003

Shulman, H. B., D'Angelo, D. V., Harrison, L., Smith, R. A., & Warner, L. (2018). The Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS): Overview of design and methodology. *American Journal of Public Health, 108*(10), 1305–1313. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304563

*Siennick, S. E., Stewart, E. A., & Staff, J. (2014). Explaining the association between incarceration and divorce. *Criminology, 52*(3), 371–398. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12040

Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies, 23*(3), 197–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/074811899201046

*Sugie, N. F. (2015). Chilling effects: Diminished political participation among partners of formerly incarcerated men. Social Problems (Berkeley, Calif.), 62(4), 550–571. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spv017

Sullivan, G. M., & Feinn, R. (2012). Using effect size—or why the p value is not enough. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education, 4*(3), 279–282. https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-12-00156.1

Tadros, E., & Ogden, T. E. (2020). Conceptualizing incarcerated coparenting through a structural family theory lens. *Marriage & Family Review, 56*(6), 535–552. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2020.1728007

*Tadros, E., Durante, K. A., Morgan, A. A., & Hutcherson, R. (2022a). An actor-partner interdependence model analysis of family support and depression among coparenting couples with an incarcerated partner. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 61*(7), 390–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2022.2116521

*Tadros, E., Presley, S., & Gomez, E. (2022b). "Not for the weak": The lived experience of women in romantic relationships with incarcerated individuals. *Crime & Delinquency, 68*(12), 2274–2297. https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287221077657

*Testa, A., & Jackson, D. B. (2020). Incarceration exposure and maternal food insecurity during pregnancy: Findings from the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), 2004–2015. *Maternal and Child Health Journal, 24*(1), 54–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-019-02822-4

*Turney, K., & Schneider, D. (2016). Incarceration and household asset ownership. *Demography, 53*(6), 2075–2103. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-016-0519-1

*Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2013). Redefining relationships: Explaining the countervailing consequences of paternal incarceration for parenting. *American Sociological Review, 78*(6), 949–979. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413505589

Wang, L. (2022, June). *Chronic Punishment: The unmet health needs of people in state prisons.* Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/chronicpunishment.html#disability

Wang, L., Sawyer, W., Herring, T., & Widra, E. (2022, April). *Beyond the count: A deep dive*

into state prison populations. www.prisonpolicy.org. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/beyondthecount.html

Widra, E., & Herring, T., (2021, September). *States of incarceration: The global context 2021.* Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html

Wildeman, C., & Wang, E. A. (2017). Mass incarceration, public health, and widening inequality in the USA. *The Lancet (British Edition), 389*(10077), 1464–1474. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30259-3

Xinachtli, & Ilyés, E. (2024). Repression breeds resistance: A call for a methodology of radical solidarity and love to respond to the prison industrial complex and academia's eugenic tendencies. *Human Geography*. https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786241235155

Zhang, J., Han, L., Shields, L., Tian, J., & Wang, J. (2019). A PRISMA assessment of the reporting quality of systematic reviews of nursing published in the Cochrane Library and paper-based journals. *Medicine*, *98*(49), e18099. https://doi.org/10.1097/MD.0000000000018099

Note: Articles with an asterisk* were included in the PRISMA review.

Chapter II: Navigating Secondary Prisonization: Narratives of Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners

Abstract

More people are incarcerated in the United States than in any other country in the world (Widra & Herring, 2021) and approximately 113 million adults in the US have experienced the incarceration of a family member (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Most research explores carceral impacts on incarcerated people and their children, with minimal focus on the impacts of incarceration on adults with incarcerated loved ones. This narrative inquiry, grounded in the Secondary Prisonization (Comfort, 2003) framework explores the stories of three Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners (AIRRP) and how their holistic and systemic experiences with secondary prisonization impact their mental health and wellbeing. Findings share an emotional journey marked by intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic challenges. Notably, AIRRP experiences are traced along a developmental process from their worldview being shattered to a process of reconstruction. These findings provide important context for increasing the understanding and responsiveness of counselors who may work with AIRRP or other individuals impacted by mass incarceration.

Keywords: secondary prisonization, wellbeing, incarceration, mental health, counseling

Introduction

Mass Incarceration is pervasive in the United States. Nearly two million people are incarcerated, representing a rate of 583 incarcerated persons per 100,000 residents; 113 million adults in the US have experienced the incarceration of a family member (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Despite a 24% decrease in the incarcerated population between 2009-2022 (Ghandnoosh et al., 2024), there are still more people incarcerated in the US than in any other country in the world (Widra & Herring, 2021).

The US justice system is rooted in classism, ableism (Appleman, 2018), heterosexism (Jones, 2021), and white supremacy (Alexander, 2010; Davis, 2003). The focus of this research is not the discrimination of incarceration, but it is important to acknowledge the system as it is: wrought with injustice. People earning under $25,000 annually are 61% more likely to face a loved one's incarceration compared to those earning above $100,000 (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Additionally, people with disabilities, who constitute 15% of the population, represent 40% of state prison inmates (Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.). LGBT individuals face higher incarceration rates and harsher treatment, with sexual and gender minorities often enduring inhumane conditions (Jones, 2021). Transgender people, though underrepresented in prison data, experience high incarceration rates and severe mistreatment, particularly among Black trans individuals (Jones, 2021).

Imprisonment rates among Black men and women are 5.8 and 1.8 times higher than their respective white counterparts (Nellis, 2021), and 44% of Black women experience family member imprisonment compared to 12% of White women (Lee et al., 2015). In 2018, Black and Latinx American adults, respectively, comprised 33% and 23% of the prison population but only 12% and 16% of the total adult population. White adults, who accounted for 63% of the total

adult population made up only 30% of the prison population (Gramlich, 2020). As a result of racially disproportionate rates of incarceration and racialized reentry (Western & Sorois, 2019), people of color are also more likely to experience the ripple effects of mass incarceration (Western & Wildeman, 2009).

The practical costs associated with incarceration are extensive and, in many cases, debilitating. In one large-scale study of families with an incarcerated member, respondents reported an average of $13,607 in debt incurred from court fines and fees alone, and the financial costs increase when restitution, commissary, phone calls, and travel are included (deVuono-powell et al., 2015). Such figures are particularly significant because most incarcerated individuals are indigent. In fact, the median annual income of incarcerated males prior to their incarceration was $19,650 compared to the median annual income of $41,250 among non-incarcerated males (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Families who are indigent prior to criminal justice system involvement are then faced with the loss of the incarcerated members' income, and 65% of families with an incarcerated member struggle to meet their basic needs (deVuono-powell et al., 2015).

Incarceration has been linked to worse mental and physical health outcomes during and after the incarceration period. The incarcerated population has higher occurrences of diabetes, hypertension, and sexually transmitted infections (Wildeman & Wang, 2017). Barriers to healthcare access post-release such as unemployment, uninsurance, and inability to pay for care compound the health effects of incarceration (Schnittker et al., 2015). Recently released individuals have a higher prevalence of mental health problems than the never-incarcerated population and are more likely to use emergency medical facilities for healthcare needs (Wildeman & Wang, 2017).

An estimated 5 million children in the US have had at least one parent incarcerated at some point in their lives (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). Studies have shown that parental incarceration contributes to childhood aggression (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014), depression (Dallaire et al., 2015), and learning and developmental disabilities (Turney, 2014). Children with current or past parental incarceration received lower academic grades and increased school disciplinary involvement than their peers (Schlafer, 2017). Children were observed by researchers and clinicians as having a range of maladaptive emotional expressions, from flat affect to aggression, and demonstrated emotional and social avoidance as a way of coping with their experiences (Bockneck et al., 2009).

Incarceration literature tends to focus on impacts on the incarcerated persons, children with incarcerated parents, and co-parenting, excluding a large population of adults at risk of psychological maladjustment resulting from secondary incarceration (Patterson et al., 2021, p. 96). Many publications and existing interventions come from the disciplines of criminology, sociology, social work, and other humanities and social sciences (Arditti, 2003; Besemer & Dennison, 2018; Jahn, 2020; Kotova, 2019; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Thus, counselors are largely absent from this body of work to which they are competent to contribute. In this manuscript, we provide an overview of a small, emerging body of research regarding the impacts of incarceration on Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners (AIRRP), situating the need for additional research. We then provide the rationale and design for a research study that aimed to more deeply understand the holistic experiences of AIRRP as a first step toward informing counseling practice responsive to this population.

Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners

One in seven adults in the US has experienced the incarceration of a spouse or co-parent (Elderbroom et al., 2018). Exposure to the justice system via the incarceration of a loved one can increase the risks of negative physiological (Patterson et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022) and mental health (deVuono-powell et al., 2015; Kotova, 2019; Phillips & Gates, 2011) outcomes. "Secondary prisonization" (Comfort, 2003) is a theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing the ripple effects of an individual's incarceration on their non-incarcerated loved ones such as changes to daily activities, speech, behaviors, and hopes. To date, there is a limited body of literature regarding the impact of secondary prisonization on AIRRP. Research on the population is predominantly secondary data analyses of large-scale studies, some of which required participant status as a parent (e.g., Sugie, 2015; Testa & Jackson, 2020; Turney & Wildeman, 2013). A small subset of the research explores the management of secondary prisonization experiences, providing minimal guidance for counseling practice (Williams et al., 2025). Together, the evidence suggests that secondary prisonization impacts intrapersonal, interpersonal, systemic, and coping experiences (Williams et al., 2025).

Because incarceration is embedded within complex social and political systems, secondary prisonization experiences are inherently rooted in multilayered contexts. Through a process of political socialization via the US justice system, AIRRP may disengage from political and governmental bodies, including decreased voting behavior and voter registration (Sugie, 2015). Women with incarcerated male partners are at increased risk of food insecurity (Testa & Jackson, 2020), unemployment, lower wages (Craigie, 2021), and decreased asset ownership and accumulation over time (Turney & Schneider, 2016). Thus, the practical and systemic costs of

secondary incarceration may create a cycle of community disenfranchisement and increase the risk of intergenerational poverty (Foster & Hagan, 2015; Hamad et al., 2024).

Research findings suggest an overall negative impact on AIRRP wellbeing. AIRRP may experience increased psychological distress, depression (Patterson et al., 2021), and trauma (Bailey, 2018). Women exposed to incarceration are at greater risk of pre-pregnancy hypertension and pre-pregnancy and postpartum depression (Lee et al., 2022). AIRRP may experience trauma in connection with learning of their partner's crimes (Bailey, 2018) or complying with invasive visitation protocols (Comfort et al., 2016; Kotova, 2019). Partners may also grieve the physical separation, mourning a changed perception of their partner (Bailey, 2018), or the loss of a shared future (Kotova, 2019).

Stigma plays a significant role in the process of secondary incarceration. Partners may experience courtesy stigma, a perceived or actual judgment or presumption of guilt by association with the incarcerated partner (DeShay et al., 2021). Non-incarcerated partners may experience embarrassment, disrespect, and lack of support from loved ones because of their partner's incarceration. AIRRP may then withdraw from social connections to avoid courtesy stigma, compounding experiences of disconnection and isolation (DeShay et al., 2021; Tadros et al., 2022b).

Courtesy stigma lends itself to disenfranchised grief, which is "the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (Doka, 1989, p. 4). Partners who opted to remain in relationships with their incarcerated partner were denied empathy and support from law enforcement officers, social workers, and loved ones. Disenfranchised grief increases feelings of isolation and guilt (Bailey, 2018) and may prolong grieving symptoms.

Barriers to communication and intimacy may also impact the sense of connectedness between AIRRP and their partners (Durante et al., 2022; Nickels, 2020). Lack of privacy, partitions, and restricted touch during visitation impeded intimacy and interpersonal connection (Nickels, 2020). Practical implications such as distance, cost of calls, and transportation to the detention center interfere with the quality and quantity of communication between partners (Durante et al., 2022; Tadros et al., 2022b).

The challenges of secondary incarceration may lead to separation or divorce. AIRRP who reported high prices for phone calls, dissatisfaction with visitation facilities and environments, and scheduling issues, were more likely to report emotional dissolution from their partner (Durante et al., 2022). Preexisting marriages interrupted by incarceration had a higher association with relationship violence, decreased marital love, and increased extramarital sex, increasing the risk of marital dissolution (Siennick et al., 2014). Women co-parenting and cohabitating with men prior to incarceration were more likely to dissolve the relationship and stay single or re-partner than stay with the incarcerated co-parent (Turney & Wildeman, 2013).

Although current research points to a number of problematic consequences for AIRRP, there is also clear evidence that AIRRP actively engage in navigating experiences of secondary incarceration. Research findings suggest that cognitions may impact interpersonal relationship maintenance behaviors between partners (e.g., positive and future-oriented thinking, thoughts of reunification), providing comfort and increased feelings of connectedness (Nickels, 2020). To facilitate a sense of connection, partners reported intentional efforts such as exchanging letters, photos, or other sensory items (Nickels, 2020). Women emphasized the importance of sharing intimate details, providing romantic and emotional reassurance, and communicating hopes and dreams to build emotional and relational intimacy (Nickels, 2020). Women reported benefits of

maintaining the relationship such as separation from relational stressors (Hood & Gaston, 2021), intentionality, and depth and quality of communication (Tadros et al., 2022b; DeShay et al., 2021). Embracing their decision and the benefits of their relationship served to manage and cope with the experience of courtesy stigma (DeShay et al., 2021).

AIRRP may also manage courtesy stigma by seeking connection and support from people with similar experiences. Online social support groups such as Prison Talk Online (PTO) may be utilized for social support, advice, and reality confirmation (Hinck et al., 2019). Spiritual communities and practices may also be used as a source of social support and coping (Hood & Gaston, 2021). Ultimately, AIRRP may experience a decrease in depressive symptoms when they perceive satisfactory levels of social support and emotional closeness (Tadros et al., 2022a).

There is an emerging body of research that highlights evidence of the holistic impacts of mass incarceration on AIRRP that surpass their parenting roles. Much of the information we know or assume about this population is over 10 years old, and the story of mass incarceration in the United States is ever-evolving with new politicians, policies, and rhetoric. These articles illuminate problems many people experience with the justice system, but few suggest ways of addressing the negative effects aside from policy change and political advocacy. More work is needed with foci on the holistic impacts on mental and emotional well-being with a pathway to application in counseling.

Intimate partners of incarcerated individuals directly expressed a need for more mental health and wellness resources for families of offenders (Comfort et al., 2016). Symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, grief and loss resulting from carceral experiences (Comfort et al., 2016; Fishman, 1981; Link et al., 2019; Wakefield et al., 2016) can be understood through the lens of the human growth and development which includes understanding the impact of systemic and

environmental factors on human behavior and functioning, the effects of crisis and trauma, and promoting resilience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and meaning-making of individuals who have or have had incarcerated romantic partners. Specifically, this narrative inquiry focused on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and systemic effects of incarceration on holistic well-being. The study adds to the current research on the impacts of incarceration by exploring the experiences of AIRRP in a holistic manner with attention to strengths and adaptive coping. The results of this study may illuminate the holistic and systemic experiences of mass incarceration and support counselors in conceptualizing client experiences. Results may also inform effective and culturally responsive diagnoses and interventions. The specific research questions guiding the study were:

1. What do the stories of AIRRP tell us about their holistic and systemic experiences?
2. How do AIRRP make meaning of and cope with their experiences?

Method

Storytelling is ingrained in the human experience to communicate, process, and make meaning of our worlds (see Jones et al., 2022; Riessman, 2008) across time periods, events, and settings. Stories can emerge through oral or written narratives as well as art, music, and performance (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry allows researchers and participants to explore human experience over time, place, and within multilayered contexts (Trainor & Graue, 2013) utilizing various methods of analysis to capture and interpret individual, group, and institutional stories (Riessman, 2008).

In addition to a focus on individual experience, narrative inquiry emphasizes "the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). Given that existing research has identified that mass incarceration is embedded within multilayered contexts of social, cultural, and institutional influence (e.g., Bailey, 2018; DeShay et al., 2021; Hood & Gaston, 2021; Sugie, 2015), narrative inquiry can help illuminate the nuanced experiences of AIRRP. The impacts of mass incarceration extend beyond the individual, and it is imperative for the investigation of such to include holistic attention to cultural and contextual influences. Further, narrative inquiry is an approach previously utilized by counseling researchers in exploring the complex experiences of individuals with marginalized identities (see McKinney & Storlie, 2021; Thacker et al., 2021). This multi-dimensional framework can provide layered insights to shape culturally sustaining counseling practice.

Theoretical Framework

In 2003, Megan Comfort conducted an ethnographic study observing and interviewing women visiting their incarcerated male partners at the San Quentin State Prison. Building on Clemmer's (1940) conception of prisonization, Comfort (2003) coined the term secondary prisonization, noting how the impacts of penitentiary contact extended beyond those incarcerated, capturing the ripple effects of incarceration in the lives of loved ones who are not incarcerated. Visitors encounter physical inspections, surveillance, and adhere to strict dress codes and conduct restrictions to earn access to their loved ones, thus undergoing a process of transformation and adaptation to the mores of the institution. The secondary prisonization framework grounded this research as it "provides analytical insight into how and why people who are legally free can undergo profound transformations of their conduct, speech, physical

appearances, daily activities, sexual behaviours, and hopes through their relationships with those held behind bars" (Comfort, 2019, p. 67), experiencing disruption in their personal, domestic, and social lives.

Although the original application of secondary prisonization focused on visitation and direct, physical contact with the penitentiary, research has illuminated the lasting effects of various forms of contact with the criminal justice system. Even without visitation to a carceral facility, AIRRP must interact with and adapt to institutions to deposit money in commissary accounts, receive phone calls, or exchange letters. Though this study is not limited to understanding experiences with visitation, this study aims to explore the impacts of secondary prisonization that transcend the walls of the institution and influence AIRRP holistic and systemic experiences over time.

Researcher Description and Positionality

The research team consisted of three counselors. The first author is a cisgender, White woman from a working-class background pursuing a doctoral degree in counselor education. The second author is a counselor educator and department chair who identifies as a cisgender, multiethnic woman from a working-class background. The third author is a White, cisgender, Queer woman from a low SES background who holds a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling and school counseling and is working toward licensure as a professional counselor. The first and third authors have experience providing counseling services to justice-involved clients. The second author has extensive experience with research in counseling, and clinical experience serving justice-involved youth, many of whom were impacted by incarceration. All three researchers have multiple privileged and oppressed identities, prominently sharing attainment of higher education and "upward social mobility".

My (JW) identities informed this study starting with how I searched and processed the literature; my salient identities mirrored the 'salient' gaps in the literature. For example, as a woman without children, I could not help but notice the research focus on coparents or children impacted by parental incarceration, and the lack of attention to the impact of incarceration on the self of the parent in addition to their parenting. Far less research investigated the impact of partner incarceration on adults who had no children. Since I am non-religious, I was struck by the dearth of secular programming and interventions. Where does a non-religious person go for financial resources and support while their loved one is incarcerated? Would non-religious AIRRP seeking mental health and wellness support feel comfortable receiving services from a prison ministry program? These gaps and unanswered questions were foundational to the research purpose and design.

I journaled extensively regarding the intersections of my identities and their potential impact on the study and each participant. Journaling also helped me to remain conscious of me and my fellow researchers' non-membership in the population of focus and the power differentials between researchers and participants. Some of us have experience with carceral contact through the incarceration of a loved one and others have experience working as professional counselors within a carceral system and/or with AIRRP. As first author, I sought information from individuals within population (see Arditti, 2002, 2003), philosophers, scholars, activists (see Michelle Alexander, Angela Davis, Michel Foucault), organizations well-established within prison-related work (see Prison Policy Initiative, Bureau of Justice Statistics) and completed a course (Race, Ethnicity, Crime, & Justice) to increase my knowledge of the nuances of the carceral system. Although I intentionally sought various sources and perspectives, most aligned with my belief in the need for justice system reforms.

I reviewed my journal entries to identify potential biases and to understand how my experience of participant stories influenced analysis and restorying. I noticed parallels in my experience of my partner travelling biweekly for work and the emptiness expressed by AIRRP from the absence of their partner. I journaled about the disorientation of my partner being out of state a week at a time and adjusting my routines, daily activities, and behaviors week to week. I also journaled about the stark differences between my experiences and those of AIRRP such as being able to contact my partner via phone or text any time I wanted, the affordability and flexibility of that contact, the limited duration of our time apart, and the essential element of freedom and choice our situation.

While relating to AIRRP, I acknowledged my emotions including empathy, sadness, and frustration and avoided overidentification. Instead, I used the similarities and differences to highlight the shared human elements of connection, emotions, coping, adaptation, and the daily activities that can easily be taken for granted. These elements informed the construction of the final story and the use of emotional experiences as a superordinate theme rather than a primary or subtheme to emphasize the non-linear, cyclical emotional journey across time.

The third author was active in applying a critical lens to our reflexive process and we openly and repeatedly discussed our co-construction of reality throughout data analysis. The first and third authors consistently engaged in conversation to avoid centering our own experiences and expectations or unfairly influencing our analysis and findings. Conversations often began with a pause followed by teasing our identities and positions apart from our analyses of AIRRP experiences, noting areas of overlap or divergence and justifying decisions with multiple quotes across participants. My hope is that the final product is fair and representative of the meaning and essence of each participant's story.

The stories of people experiencing secondary prisonization are deeply personal and impacted by multilayered systems and institutions. Counselors have an opportunity to play a positive and effective role in a broken system as practitioners, educators, researchers, and scholars. My long-term goal is to create and implement culturally responsive and sustaining mental health and wellness interventions for families who experience carceral contact. This study will provide the insight and understanding needed to design and deliver responsive interventions.

Participants

The storytelling nature of narrative inquiry includes three-dimensionality which requires that participants have proximity to the experience and richness of memories (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). For this study, AIRRP was defined as an adult, 18 years or older, who self-identified as being in a committed, intimate, and/or romantic relationship with someone who was incarcerated at some point during their relationship. Incarceration included federal and state prisons or jails within the US justice system and excluded community incarceration (e.g., parole, probation, house arrest, or halfway housing), immigration detention, and juvenile detention. To facilitate recruitment and data saturation, the call for participants was not limited by region, demographic, or marital status; participants were required to be English-speaking.

Three participants agreed and qualified to be part of this study. Each participant completed a self-report, open-ended demographic survey. To protect the identities of the small participant pool, demographic reporting is shared in aggregate. All the participants identified as heterosexual female or woman; their ages ranged from 34 to 55. One participant identified as Black, and two participants identified as White or Caucasian. All the participants' partners were sentenced to five or more years in jail or prison. Two participants had carceral contact separate from their partner's incarceration; one participant was formerly incarcerated herself, and another

experienced parental incarceration in childhood. Two participants were married to their incarcerated partner at the time of interview, and one was no longer in the relationship with the incarcerated partner. Two participants were parents, and one was a non-parent. All the participants knew their partner prior to their partner's incarceration. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Upon approval from the institutional review board (IRB), I used purposive, chain sampling (Cain et al., 2022) by recruiting through community organizations and utilizing personal connections and colleagues across the United States. Purposive, chain sampling is appropriate for this study as this population is notoriously difficult to reach (Arditti, 2016; Browne, 2005). Exposure to punitive systems through secondary incarceration may decrease trust and create doubt in the purpose of participation that may serve yet another set of systems (e.g., higher education, social services) (Davis, 2021; DeShay et al., 2021; Sugie, 2015). Potential participants may also decline participation to avoid exposure to courtesy stigma (DeShay et al., 2021; Hinck et al., 2019) and disenfranchised grief (Arditti, 2002). Connecting to participants through existing relationships with colleagues may reassure participants about confidentiality and risk mitigation.

Qualitative research studies in professional counseling typically include five to twenty participants (Thacker et al., 2021). Narrative inquiries often have fewer participants because of the depth and nuance of the interviews and data (Reissman, 2008). I aimed to recruit four to eight participants, but due to difficulties recruiting within this population, three participants were deemed appropriate for this study.

The first author shared recruitment materials including eligibility criteria and an initial call for participants directly with legal services agencies Community Defense of East Tennessee and Legal Aid of East Tennessee; social services and non-profit organizations Amachi Knoxville, KnoxWorx, Fourth Purpose Foundation, and Family Reconciliation Center; University of Tennessee colleagues in the Forensic Social Work Certificate and the UT Legal Clinic; and Morgan County Correctional Complex clinical leadership. I also shared my recruitment flyer with personal and professional contacts via email. Inclusion criteria originally required the partner to be currently incarcerated or released within the past six months. After 45 days of recruitment, the researchers amended the study to include partner incarceration that occurred at any point during the relationship to increase the potential pool of participants due to known challenges with recruitment of justice-involved populations (Arditti, 2016; Browne, 2005).

Interested parties scanned a QR code or clicked a link that directed them to an eligibility screening survey through Qualtrics (See Appendix 4). Eligible participants were then prompted to complete an informed consent form, respond to a demographic survey, and provide their preferred method of contact for scheduling the interview. Once potential participants completed all three steps, the first author verified completion and contacted participants to schedule an interview. (See Appendix 6).

AIRRP often take on extra jobs or pursue social support resources to balance the lost wages of the incarcerated partner and to fund their needs while incarcerated (Bruns, 2019). Additionally, 60-90 minutes is a significant request because it may detract from the limited time they have to spend with their incarcerated partner or attend to family responsibilities (Arditti, 2003; Comfort et al., 2016; Tadros et al., 2022b). Participants who completed a full 60-90-

minute interview received $40 to compensate for time and potential lost wages. An additional $10 was given to those who provided an artifact and a corresponding description of the artifact before the interview. Participants received a gift card to their choice of Walmart or Amazon within five days of completion of the interviews; all participants received the full $50.

Data Collection

Data collected for this study included a pre-interview artifact and one 60-90 minute semi-structured interview with each participant. At the time of scheduling and before the interview, the interviewer requested at least one artifact from each participant (See Appendices 6 & 7) representative of an aspect of their experience as an AIRRP. Participants could choose one artifact that was meaningful throughout their experience or multiple artifacts that were representative of their experience across time (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). The artifact provided a data point to increase the researcher's depth of understanding regarding the experience of being an AIRRP, which helped the researcher understand the nuances of how AIRRP cope with their experience. Participants could choose to share any item that fits the criteria above, including but not limited to a photograph, art they created or received, a piece of clothing, journal/journal entries, or song/album(s) that served a purpose or were meaningful during their experience. Participants were prompted to share the artifact and a paragraph describing it beforehand to allow time for consideration and reflection and to create space for participants to prepare mentally and emotionally for discussion about their experiences.

Participants were provided options to complete interviews in-person or by video, and each participant opted for video interviews via HIPAA-compliant Zoom. Interviews ranged from 68 - 94 minutes long, with an average of 78 minutes. The interview protocol consisted of two primary open-ended prompts, discussion of the artifact, and optional probing questions. The two

guiding interview prompts were intended to elicit personal narratives of AIRRP experiences and meaning-making processes: (1) Please share your story of how partner incarceration came into your life; and (2) Tell me how your journey with partner incarceration has unfolded for you over time. Because the paragraph was completed ahead of time, the interviewer had flexibility in the amount of time dedicated to discussing the item during the interview, allowing the discussion to occur as organically as possible. During the interview, the researcher asked participants to share the story and meaning of their artifact(s) and how they connected to their experience as an AIRRP. Probes were used as needed for clarity and richness of storied data (e.g., Tell me about a time that felt most vulnerable, or particularly difficult; Tell me about how you coped, and how you worked through it; How has this experience impacted your well-being over time?).

All interviews were recorded using software embedded in Zoom and a digital MP3 recording device to ensure all data were collected, audio was clear, and interviews could be transcribed accurately. Interviews were transcribed verbatim via Zoom software, and the researcher verified accuracy before data analysis. The first author shared a copy of the interview transcript with the research participants for their review so they could clarify or mask stories prior to analysis (Reissman, 2008) (See Appendix 9). None of the participants responded with changes. All recordings were stored on a password-protected device and will be deleted upon study completion.

Data Analysis

We utilized Braun and Clarke's (2020) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis and Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis frameworks when analyzing the data to organize, code, and identify themes and increase consistency across researchers. Reflexive thematic analysis is a constructivist approach to the researchers' active role in data analysis that requires

the researcher to utilize reflexivity and creativity (Byrne, 2022). Thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) is especially suitable for inquiries in identity development, psychological, social and cultural meanings and values, and documentation of life course (Saldaña, 2021). Centering narrative "as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (Bruner, 1991, p. 6) enhances the understanding and interpretation of meaning-making. These frameworks informed the analysis of AIRRP experiences such as interpersonal impacts, coping, and the effect of temporality on meaning-making.

The first author created deductive codes based on definitions and descriptions of the secondary prisonization framework (Comfort, 2008, 2019; Aiello & McCorkel, 2018). Comfort highlighted the application of secondary prisonization for analyzing how and why non-incarcerated individuals may experience "profound transformations of their **conduct, speech, physical appearances, daily activities, sexual behaviours,** and **hopes**" (Comfort, 2019, p. 67), and disruptions and changes in their *personal*, *domestic*, and *social lives*. **Routines, emotions, appearance,** and **worldview** pulled from Aiello and McCorkel's (2018) description of secondary prisonization as these terms are relevant to the research purpose and questions exploring the holistic, systemic, meaning-making, and coping experiences of AIRRP. We used each bolded term as a code and each italicized term as a category by which to organize the codes.

The three-member research team met before data collection to discuss the purpose and method of the study. The first and third authors read each transcript and noted initial observations and analyses to familiarize ourselves with each data item and the data set as a whole (Braun & Clark, 2019). The first and third authors independently utilized Delve software to code transcripts using inductive and deductive coding. Both coders had a copy of the deductive codebook which included definitions of each code, and noted patterns within the data that were

not aligned with deductive codes. Researchers discussed similarities and differences in identified key concepts and agreed upon consistent descriptions of codes through a series of code negotiation meetings (Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2020).

We then engaged in a second round of coding to examine and capture the depth of participant experiences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016) relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2019) and theoretical framework. The coders independently examined and identified patterns, then jointly identified and discussed areas of convergence and divergence. The first author printed, highlighted, and cut transcripts into quote segments, then organized them by categories and codes to create an outline for the overarching story.

The first author reviewed the themes in two parts, first checking consistency between codes and themes within individual narratives, then for coherence of themes across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thacker et al., 2021). The second and third authors reviewed themes for clarity and consistency with the research questions and purpose. The first author used the final themes to extract bounded segments of interview text (Riessman, 2008), quoted with attribution to pseudonyms. Artifacts and their corresponding descriptive paragraphs were also analyzed, interpreted (Riessman, 2008), and integrated into the research findings. The first and third authors met thirteen times during the study, including introduction to the study and analysis process, code negotiation, and ongoing, iterative reviews of data interpretation and the retelling of the final story. The second author reviewed themes across the data set before finalization.

The first author (JW) constructed the final narrative by adapting Freytag's Pyramid (1895) and a three-act narrative structure. The three-act structure can be traced back to ancient Greek storytelling, specifically Aristotle's book *Poetics* (nd/1997). I decided to refer to each phase of participants' stories as acts one, two, and three to allow space for the messiness of life

(Andrews, 2018) and the continuation of each person's story beyond the bounds of this study while organizing the stories for consumption and application (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Additionally, there is a longstanding connection between the training and practice of professional counseling and the arts, including clinical theories and techniques such as narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1969), role-play, and improvisation. Participants' quotes were edited for clarity, and artifacts that do not reveal the participants' identities are shared in the final retelling.

Methodological Integrity

Reciprocity (Lincoln, 1995), credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010), reflexivity (Peshkin, 1988), positionality (Lincoln, 1995), and sacredness (Lincoln, 1995) were quality determinants utilized for this research. I aimed to contribute to reciprocity (Lincoln, 1995; McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993) with intentionality and consideration of the needs and wellbeing of the AIRRP population. Incentive amounts were determined with respect to participants' time, potential risk and sacrifice, and contributions to the research. I developed trust by sharing my inspiration, purpose, and intent for researching AIRRP experiences with each interviewee. Aligning with my professional counselor identity, I approached each interview and interviewee with authenticity and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957) and offered empathy and validation in response to the interviewees' stories, demonstrating care (Cain et al., 2022).

Member checking and reflexivity were data-checking techniques used to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cain et al., 2022) in combination with positionality (Lincoln, 1995) to emphasize co-construction, reducing the power dynamic in the researcher-participant relationship. The first and third authors conducted positionality interviews with each other to acknowledge and explore our identities and beliefs in relation to the research design, population,

data, and multilayered systems of mass incarceration. After each participant interview, the first author used reflexive journaling to address biases, personal feelings, and reflections (Glass, 2015) and track the research process to increase dependability, confirmability (McKinney & Storlie, 2021), and transparency.

Findings are presented multivocally (Clandinin & Caine, 2013) to demonstrate quality interpretation and "empathic understanding" of the data set (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). The first author designed the study as such because, "Narratives do political work. The social role of stories—how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world—is an important facet of narrative theory" (Riessman, 2008, p. 21). Honoring sacredness (Lincoln, 1995) through storytelling, findings can become action.

Findings

It is important to remember that life journeys are not linear, nor do we experience mutually exclusive "acts." As we live, tell, and retell our stories, they may shift and assume new forms as we make sense of and draw meaning from our experiences. This analysis is one iteration, among many possibilities, that unifies three unique stories. Because of the emotional experiences shared by each participant, and the focus of this study on holistic wellbeing, the affective experiences of each participant serve as an undercurrent, or superordinate theme throughout the entire story and within each of its component parts.

Each participant's story depicted a journey laden with myriad emotions spanning across acts. Participants referenced feelings of grief, isolation, and stress that cycled throughout their experience with partner incarceration. Cheyenne noted the overwhelming impact of incarceration on multiple levels of wellbeing, and coping with substances, stating:

> But it's just it's so much, and it's so deep. Not only with the physical, but with the emotional and spiritual, and just all of it. …And I can remember how I would miss him, and those things would make me feel better, or what I thought would make me feel better. Because if you're taking Adderall and you're drinking beer, you want to talk on the phone longer, and you wanna do all the things. But it it was just a, it was a mask of, you know, just wanting and yearning for him to come home and being together, and what that looked like.

As impactful as their own emotional experiences were, the AIRRP invested emotional labor in managing the emotions of their partners. Anne explained managing her partner's feelings and beliefs about gender roles during the time between arrest and sentencing:

> So it was just a lot of it was a lot of stress, and me having to not, I wouldn't say walking on eggshells, but having to learn a new way to support him as he's being agitated as a man not able to do the thing that he…to live the life that he was living prior to that incident.

Anne later described ongoing emotional labor after her partner was incarcerated, stating "It was emotionally a lot, but I think me wanting to prioritize his comfort since he was in jail only worsened, like, my people pleasing…"

Betty shared similar emotional labor in holding both her own and her husband's emotions and the impact that had on their communication:

> But the depression, depression's hard. And I can hear his depression on his end, too, you know, 'cause he's sad 'cause he's not home. So, I kind of like try to…I don't tell him anything that's like *fun fun,* because it just makes him depressed because he's not here. I

have to take care, you know, and watch for his feelings. Consider his feelings. So that's what I do. It's a balancing act [laughter] you know.

The setting of the story represents the felt sense of stagnation across time: Purgatory. Participants described their experiences with words like "limbo," emphasizing the "the meaning assigned to events within" the bounds of time (Bruner, 1991, p. 6). Entering the purgatory of secondary prisonization began with a drastic shift in life's journey away from one's own plans, hopes, and dreams toward a labyrinth of convoluted rules and restrictions in a sentence served alongside their loved one. In Betty's words, "I think anybody who has somebody that's incarcerated feels it's their sentence, too. You know what I mean, like, their…, their lives are put on hold, too, you know."

Uncertainty abounds from the imposed dependence on systems outside of societal norms and expectations, defying standard methods of navigation. Betty shared a realization she had about supporting her husband in prison while maintaining their formerly shared responsibilities:

> That's one of our main things is to keep him in touch with reality out here. Sometimes they forget because they are in those four walls, but you know… I might not be able to send you $40 this week, because I have a bill that needs to be paid, or insurance needs to be paid. But you know, they are not thinking of that. There, everything is that prison. Yeah, that's the mindset. They're in that little box. And that's hard for people on the outside to make that realization that that is your life. That's you know, they're not thinking about what's bad out here, because they're not out here. …And, you know, that was hard because the first three or four months I'm like, "What about me?"

Therefore, adaptation is necessary for finding or forging a sustainable path forward. Through persistence and resilience, some semblance of stability may be restored.

The participants storied their experiences of navigating Purgatory, and the researchers categorized these experiences into three dimensions, or acts. Each act is a primary theme that represents a time period marked by specific experiences and behaviors, or subthemes. Act 1 featured *disruption* with subthemes of *holding pattern* and *shattered worldview*. In Act 2, *survival mode* was represented by subthemes of *holding down the fort* and *dedication to the relationship*. Act 3, *reconstruction*, included subthemes *accepting and adapting to a new reality* alongside *reflection and growth*. The following narrative retelling is an invitation to participate and live vicariously to understand the experiences of AIRRP (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). **Figure 2** is an adaptation of Freytag's Pyramid (1895) as it applies to the interpretation of AIRRP participants' stories.

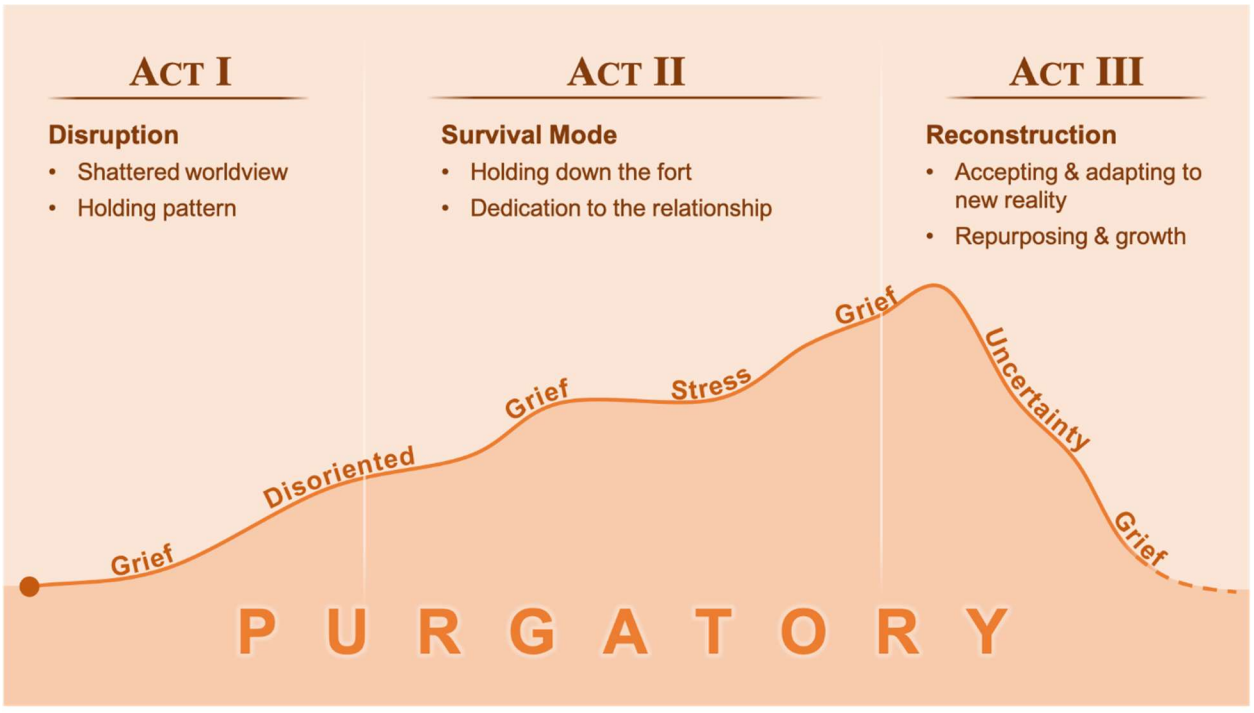


Figure 2: AIRRP Story Arc

Act 1: Disruption

Each participant shared the story of how partner incarceration came into their lives. Amidst stories of criminal charges, sentences, and lockup was a significant disruption to life as they knew it. They described their partners being in and out of jail, posting bond, scheduling and waiting for court dates. Anne offered the following song as a representation of her early experience with partner incarceration:

> The song *Goodbye (2001)* by *Jagged Edge* really captured the initial heartbreak and feeling of emptiness. It was hard to accept that things had changed, and I felt abandoned and lonely. I looked at old photos to cope, holding onto the good times.

The initial effects of incarceration significantly impacted the way the participants viewed themselves, their partners, and their relationships and often led to feelings of isolation and despair. Participants felt disillusionment and grief over the sudden life changes and anticipating the losses to come.

Shattered Worldview

The long arm of the law shattered the lens through which each participant perceived reality. Participants were disoriented by partner incarceration and forced to challenge or shift their perception of their partner, their relationship, and their sense of self. Their stories also illuminated foundational beliefs and expectations about gender roles. Cheyenne explained the intensity of her husband's absence and the shift in her roles:

> Yeah, that was a direct impact, you know, us having a business and then, usually, you know, the father provides for the majority of bills and things like that. But it was just a domino effect of just, you know, I had to get back into corporate America. I was grieving

> the loss of my husband because it's like a death. Really. You know, it's just…[he's] here, and then [he's] gone.

Anne also shared her experience in response to the upheaval. She described being stripped of personal and relational autonomy and grieving the impending changes in her relationship:

> I feel like the, the grief in the beginning wasn't necessarily grieving him and our relationship, it was moreso grieving our reality. Or reality was going to change. You know, I'm not gonna be able to just go see him just because I want to, or I won't be able to talk to him or just call him whenever I want to. Moreso our access to each other was going to change.

While managing confusion, participants were left assessing the damage to holistic and systemic aspects of their lives and trying to make sense of their new circumstances. Participants carried the burden of their partners' former responsibilities and roles within the relationship while also losing businesses, jobs, and structure in daily routines. Through their grief, they found themselves stuck, unable to make decisions, from ordinary needs to long-term relational goals.

Holding Pattern

Finding themselves in an impossible situation, participants struggled to imagine a path forward. Anne shared the changes in her life in the time between the initial charge and sentencing, when her partner was home awaiting trial:

> We still live our day to day, and I'm not saying like every moment was like a nerve racking thing, but it was always something that, the good moments were short lived because either a payment was due for the lawyer or some new update was coming, or he was having a hard time making money that he needed because…it's hard for a business to

> wanna hire you when you're on the charge for robbery. …It was in limbo for a very long time, so it was kind of hard to fully imagine a future.

Betty shared a similar experience of life being put on hold:

> Yeah, you know I'm not going out buying a new house, and you know I'm not doing any of that. I'll wait for him to come home, you know. You're doing time with him. Because you hear about, because they don't have anything else to say, about what's going on in that prison because that's their…that's all they have to talk about. So yes, you're doing time right along with them.

For all participants, life came to a screeching halt. Still prevented from making major life decisions, waiting for the other shoe to drop, and emotionally despondent, participants now needed to act because the world kept moving around them.

Act 2: Survival Mode

When participants lost their partner to incarceration, they dedicated themselves to maintaining the households and lives they shared. For two participants, barriers already endemic to lower socioeconomic status were amplified as participants scrambled to hold all the pieces of their previous lives together. Participants also highlighted their devotion to the relationship and committed to the many sacrifices required to maintain a connection with an incarcerated partner.

Holding Down the Fort

The instinctive force to push through seemingly insurmountable circumstances invoked feelings of anxiety and overwhelm. Cheyenne described the all-consuming impact of partner incarceration and the struggle to make ends meet:

> But in a survival situation like having an incarcerated husband, it's more of like survival and overwhelming than it is for me to go work 40 hours a week. …I got back into

> corporate America, but just struggled. I mean, my house was in foreclosure, I had to file bankruptcy. You know, I was educated which was a huge blessing, but I lost jobs, corporate jobs. Just from the having to find resources. And people don't understand how incredibly hard that is. I'll give you an example. I would have to get up and go to work, and then I would leave work at lunch to go get a food box, and I don't know if you've ever had experience with the food bank, but it's not just come and go. It's come and sit for 45 minutes, so I would never make it back to lunch on time. There were times I couldn't afford the internet and I would have to drive to McDonald's, and then you've got four screaming kids that you're trying to tell, 'Go play', but three are too big for the play area, just trying to put in applications…

Cheyenne provided a collage as her artifact (**Figure 3**), along with a list of some of the most difficult pieces of her experience and words she used to "describe the season."

Juggling multiple roles and responsibilities was frustrating and laborious. Balancing pragmatic and emotional stressors further complicated their experiences. Betty emphasized the loss of practical and emotional support her husband provided before his incarceration:

> I miss him. Not seeing him is hard, you know. I can't yell at him [chuckles], I can't bitch at him for anything 'cause he's not here. I can't yell on him for the grass not being cut or the dog not being fed or whatever. I can't yell at him. He's not here. …It's stressful. there's emotional times. There's ups and downs. It's a rollercoaster you're on by yourself. You're on this ride by yourself, I mean you have. I mean, I'm out here doing everything by myself right now. The process of holding down the fort highlighted participants' dedication to upholding their shared realities while awaiting their partners' return.



ALONE

ASHAMED

LESS THAN

ANGRY

HURT

STRUGGLE

OVERWHELMED

HARDSHIP

RESILIENCE

ENDURANCE

Figure 3: "Describing the Season"

Dedication to the Relationship

Participants navigated barriers to connection including inconsistent communication, disrupted routines, and lack of physical contact in order to preserve relational connection. In spite of unavoidable obstacles, each participant was determined to keep their relationships intact. Anne described her devotion to her relationship despite multiple interpersonal and systemic

challenges, and provided another song, *We Belong Together (2005) by Mariah Carey*, that resonated with her:

> I want to say every 2 weeks I would go visit, more so because of work schedule, and also understanding, like, you know, sharing his visitations with family and his daughter. …For me in my perspective I felt like your physical location doesn't negate the commitment that we made to each other. So, regardless of you physically being accessible to me or not, I'm still going to move in a way to where I'm committed to the relationship, and I won't entertain other men. Versus he had a different perspective for him. I feel like that song was very reflective of the space I felt like we were in when things got rough while he was in prison. And you know him talking to other women and feeling like I love this person. I feel like this is something we can overcome. We can be together. But it's such a challenge to make it work.

Coping with new relationship dynamics, participants recalibrated expectations for expressing and receiving love. AIRRP indicated sacrificing or finding new ways to satisfy certain needs. Betty shared these changes in her relationship and her process of redefining intimacy:

> We don't need to have the sex or the intimacy, you know what I mean? We can have it in intimacy through a letter or a card. I'm a card person. Send me a card, tell me you're thinking of me. That's what I need. But he does. He sends a lot of crap every other week or something. And I told him I'm not going anywhere. I'm here. I'll be here till he comes home. And that puts his mind at ease because there's a lot of people out there that will give up. Five years is a long time to wait for somebody. But, I tell him like this, five years might be a long time to wait for somebody, but after 35 years it's a long time to

have to start over again. So, I will wait the five years. I have him trained already [laughter], so to speak, so I don't need to start over. …I mean, I could throw in the towel. I could have said, "I can't deal with you being in there. I'm just gonna cut up all ties", but there's a lot of people who do that. They just can't deal with it. But, I took that vow "til death do us part."

All participants coped with layers of adversity, adaptively or otherwise, primarily on their own. For five years, Cheyenne dedicated hours and thousands of dollars on phone calls and traveling for visitation to foster and maintain her relationship; she only spoke of her experience with her mother. Explaining why she hid her relationship, Cheyenne shared:

It was the shame, I mean just what people say. I mean, people think that felons– and and there are, I mean, there's some very bad people out there. But you know, drug addicts. Homeless people are just looked down upon like leprosy. …But I think I think it was just, I was ashamed. I didn't want to hear what anybody said about it. I didn't want anybody to try to change my mind. You know, and it was, It was a great 5 years. I mean, you can't have sex, you know. We weren't planning on ever getting married while he was still locked up anyways. But even if you're married they don't have conjugal visits for [State name]. So it just gave us 5 years to like really like learn one another.

The hardships encountered in Act Two were exacerbated by contextual factors: Betty and Cheyenne were deeply impacted by low socioeconomic status, Betty by disability and health concerns, and all three participants by shifts in familial roles and responsibilities. They all shared stories of resilience and strength as they began to make meaning out of their shared sentences.

Act 3: Reconstruction

The intensity of being in survival mode decreased when participants were able to establish new routines. Though the incarceration still caused significant negative impacts on tasks of daily living and overall well-being, adjusting to their new realities restored some sense of stability. An increased sense of security allowed a reflective process to emerge, evidenced by participants shedding shame and feeling empowered to own their stories.

Accepting and Adapting to Their New Reality

Once participants were no longer gasping for air, they could reattune to their own needs. They began forming a new sense of stability, finding new ways to navigate their systemic realities. Anne shared the importance of adaptation and establishing consistency:

> …maybe three to four months in once we caught a rhythm of okay, expecting his phone calls at a certain time or having a schedule for when I'm going to see him. I felt like once we had some kind of like schedule or system in place, it became a little bit easier to navigate. And I feel like, I don't wanna say happiness, but I feel like there were moments like it was those moments where I feel like it was something to look forward to. And outside of that, I just stayed busy, hung out with friends a lot, my family. Just keeping myself busy as much as I could. But I definitely think having a system like knowing when he's gonna call and knowing I'm going to see him helped me, I would say, remain sane. Because it wasn't so many question marks or what-ifs.

Similar to Anne, Betty shared her process of adaptation in the way she shares memories with her incarcerated partner. Betty discussed bridging the physical and emotional disconnection through her artifact; a collage titled "Our Life Now" (**Figure 4**) and explained:

> I mean, that's how we…that's our memories put into pictures and cards and letters

because you can't… He doesn't have the same memories I have. So these are us having memories together as much as possible so that we can…because he's not out here. …Like, he didn't get that experience, but at least he had that picture. Which are totally different than the memories I have about those pictures because I'm the one living them. I'm getting to see the grandkids growing up and he's getting to see a picture of them growing up. So those are…this is just our connection, our connection to the world, to our family. Like I said, my memories are different than his, but I'm trying to keep him included in memories to let him know that he's still part of our family. That he's not forgotten about just because he's locked up.

On the other side of survival mode and holding down the fort, participants successfully worked toward building a new fort. In addition to rebuilding a life in their partner's absence, participants found ways of repairing their worldviews and finding new meaning in their lives.



Figure 4: "Our Life Now"

Reflection and Growth

Each participant was in drastically different phases of life given contexts of their experiences, yet each had substantial reflection and growth. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted that stories shift and reveal new meaning as we story and restory our lived experiences. The period of reconstruction includes shifts in perspective and meaning-making over time. During the interview, Betty had a moment of realization in real-time while reflecting on the ways she has sacrificed her needs and coped with her husband's incarceration by acknowledging a prison of her own making:

> [My kids] have their own stresses in life, you know. I don't want to be their burden. I don't want to be the burden grandma, or the burden mom, or the resentment, you know, I don't want them to feel that way about me. So I kinda like… you know…And it's weird, because, we're talking about prison, and I'm just looking around, and I stay mostly in my bedroom. So I'm still kind of locked in a prison. It's just a comfortable one because I just don't want to interfere with them, you know. And I have my days like I said where I have good days and bad days, and I just stay in my room, and I don't want to burden them. And I just… It's been hard, and we'll just put it at that. It's hard.

After her realization, Betty continued to process her experience and shared how her evolving awareness led her to reach toward growth, internalizing responsibility for her own navigation in the absence of support:

> There are no supports. There's really no support groups out there to help. I mean, you can go to AA classes, but if you're not in [recovery]… that wasn't me. You know, there's not a spousal incarcerated support group, you know, there isn't anything like that. …So I had to reset myself, you know? Like I had to reset my life. And you know it was hard. So

yeah, I make- you have to make life what it is. These are the cards we were dealt so… Make lemonade out of lemons, so to speak.

Acceptance and adaptation to life circumstances altered participant's expectations and perspectives. Some participants developed a sense of gratitude for the totality of their life experiences, with new focus on the here and now. Cheyenne shared a period of personal reflection that led to reassessing her role in the reincarceration of her husband:

> Looking back, I had just as much to do with that whole situation as he did. But at the time there was no accountability on my point. I'm just the victim, and I'm miserable and- I don't know if we're gonna make this, you know. A lot of times we just don't look inward to hold ourselves accountable for our piece in it. Some people never do. Some people never look inward enough to realize that you are the problem. But at that time, yeah, I was very angry, which led to the drinking and all the you know, popping addies all day, and drinking and suboxone, and just all the things. But yeah, it looked very different the second go around. It wasn't pretty. …And now it's just living in the present moment, and knowing that we're gonna suffer. It's coming. It's not *if* it's *when.* And just be grateful for this moment right here, right now. It's all we got, girl. It's all we got [laughs].

Through their reflection, participants embraced humor and described shedding shame despite stigma associated with secondary prisonization. For Cheyenne, meaning-making and growth included telling her story and inspiring others to live in their truth. Cheyenne claimed full ownership of her story, good, bad, ugly, or indifferent:

> I don't do that anymore, like what you see is what you get. I am, and that's 1 of the things that– I am so free because I tell my whole story. There's nothing for me to hide. Yeah, nothing like there's… I mean, if people talk about me, they're going to tell the truth

> because it's been told. I'm going to tell them all, all the nastiness, all of it unashamed, unafraid. Debt paid, prison sentence served...and I want women to go boldly for themselves, because there's another woman that needs to hear it, from all the things that we've had to deal with.

For two participants, religion was a factor during reconstruction. Cheyenne reconnected with her Christian roots and brought her systemic knowledge into prison ministry. Betty tried multiple religious outlets offered to people impacted by incarceration but never found meaningful connection. All three participants referenced a need for more formal support to help them transition from full-time survival mode through reconstruction and toward growth. Anne reflected on her process and investment in her mental health and wellness:

> I would say having healthy relationships with my family and friends were very impactful because it helped me create normalcy outside of what was going on in me and his relationship. And I think that is important to not let the incarceration become your full existence, whether you're the person in jail, or the person outside supporting the person in in prison. So I think having friends and family who are active in my life was really a big deal. …I really got serious about therapy after that and really had to do some work the help break the thought patterns I had. To not let those unhealthy things that did occur in our relationship become my norm moving forward.

As part of their meaning making and growth, participants demonstrated a, “this is my life, take it or leave it” attitude. Two of three participants offered to use their real name as they had nothing to hide. Each participant was in a different place in their life with varying proximity to their partner’s initial incarceration. Though their timelines and outcomes were different, each participant began reconstructing their worldview within their new set of circumstances.

Discussion

Secondary prisonization was not originally conceptualized through the lens of mental health and well-being (Comfort, 2003). However, the holistic experiences of AIRRP participants closely aligned with the framework, especially in how incarceration transformed their daily activities, emotions, hopes, and worldview. These findings support Comfort's assertion that the penitentiary profoundly affects non-incarcerated individuals with incarcerated loved ones. Moreover, they suggest that secondary prisonization may extend beyond physical interaction with correctional institutions to encompass sustained exposure to the U.S. justice system.

Comfort (2008) argued that secondary prisonization disrupts the personal, domestic, and social worlds of those not formally sentenced, thereby extending the institution's transformative reach. AIRRP participants reported anxiety and instability as institutional regulations dictated their communication, forced them into multiple family roles, and required them to suppress their own emotions to prioritize their families. Although Comfort (2019) cautioned against applying secondary prisonization to loved ones without direct facility contact, she also acknowledged that findings on primary and secondary prisonization might necessitate expanding the framework. This study reinforces that argument, demonstrating the transformative effects of the institution even when individuals had limited in-person contact with their incarcerated partners.

Consistent with a large body of incarceration research (Comfort, 2008; Kotova, 2019), time had great significance in participant's stories. AIRRP shared their partners' sentences from outside the institution. Participants emphasized the strains of waiting and the sense of being in "limbo," delaying plans and altering visions of the future. Participants struggled with scheduling and rearranging daily routines to adapt to their incarcerated partners' access to phone calls or visitation and sharing or rotating visitation time with other loved ones.

Navigating the complications of Secondary Prisonization forced AIRRP to persevere through layers of adversity. Consistent with findings from previous research, participants assumed the responsibilities once belonging to their partners (Besemer & Dennison, 2018; Comfort et al., 2016). One participant emphasized the challenges of finding and obtaining various community resources to combat food insecurity congruent with findings from Testa and Jackson (2020), and attempts to bridge "the digital divide" (National Telecommunications And Information Administration, 1995) while parenting four children alone.

Compounding the significant financial burden of partner incarceration consistent with previous research (Comfort et al., 2016; deVuono-powell et al., 2015; Durante, et al., 2022; Arditti, 2002), barriers were substantially more difficult to overcome for AIRRP who were of lower socioeconomic status prior to incarceration. Two participants in this study went extended periods of time without seeing or hearing their partner because of financial barriers to access. Researchers should also consider ability status when they build upon and apply the secondary prisonization framework, as one participant shared that in addition to financial implications, her health prevented her from in-person visitation as it was unsafe for her to travel long distances. Despite some participants' lack of physical contact with the institution due to financial, health, or other barriers, all participants were deeply impacted by the institution.

The influence of the institution and the real or perceived experiences and impact to their partners led AIRRP participants in the current study to self-impose emotional restrictions in all communication, similar to those imposed by jail programming staff upon children and their incarcerated mothers during in person visitation observed by Aiello and McCorkel (2018). AIRRP assumed the burden of managing their partner's emotions, fears, hopes, and ability to cope with the conditions of incarceration by cherry-picking what and how to share their own

experiences and emotional responses, further exacerbating their sense of isolation and lack of practical and emotional support. Although adults may be more capable of understanding the nuances of the penitentiary to perform emotionally compared to children in the original study, the internal turmoil persisted. Additionally, it may be hard for anyone, regardless of age or developmental stage to comprehend and adapt to the totality of a system that many would argue lacks merit (see Angela Davis).

In contrast to existing literature, none of the participants referenced a period of shock or emphasized the impact of the period immediately following jail or prison intake (Chui, 2016; Fishman, 1981). This may not evidence a lack of a period of shock but rather indicate the point at which each interviewee was in their journey. All were within acts two or three at the time of the interview, but in various phases of life, differing circumstances, and a range of temporal proximity to their partner's incarceration, with only one participant's partner still serving time. Experience with disenfranchised grief was only briefly mentioned by one participant in reference to relatives encouraging her to leave her partner upon learning of his infidelity. Disenfranchised grief was not prominent in participant's stories as Bailey (2018) might have expected might have expected based on their work with spouses of sex offenders; however, stories were rich with direct and indirect experiences of grief, including references to death.

Findings from the current study converge with the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). The dual process model highlights the dynamic process of grieving and the oscillation between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented mental, emotional, and functional experiences. Though AIRRP experience the non-death loss of their partners rather than bereavement, participants connected their feelings of loneliness, depression, and yearning to grief. The AIRRP story arc as presented in this study alongside the dual process model illustrates

AIRRP experiences of both disorientation and reconstruction, and highlights that the processing of loss to incarceration, like bereavement, is non-linear.

Post traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995) or, "positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with traumatic or highly challenging life circumstances" (Tedeschi et al., 2018, p.3) was evident in each participant's story. All three participants persevered and renewed commitments to themselves and their partners despite challenges to physical, mental, and social wellbeing. While their strength and resilience were notable, emphasis on resilience alone normalizes the indignities inflicted by the unjust system of Mass Incarceration (see What is equitable resilience? Matin et al., 2018). When held alongside the unique grief, trauma, and injustice AIRRP may experience before and during reconstruction, the concept of posttraumatic growth may be applicable for both research and practice.

Limitations

The stories presented in this study reflect the experiences of the narrators and the perspectives of the researchers. Findings may have been influenced by the social desirability for participants to respond in a manner they think will be acceptable to the interviewer. Although influence does not undermine the integrity of the research, this study should be understood as co-constructed. As with any research, consumers should consider researcher and participant identities, biases, and contextual factors when integrating research and practice.

The sample size of three participants was lower than intended due to challenges with recruitment, which is well documented in incarceration research (Arditti, 2016; Browne, 2005). Recruitment delays also resulted in a shift in inclusion criteria from AIRRP actively experiencing partner incarceration or who were within one year of release to AIRRP who experienced partner incarceration at any point in the relationship. The timing of participant

experiences likely influenced how they responded to questions and framed their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). While their perspectives add depth and uniqueness to the study, participants in different phases of life, or at varying distances from their experiences, may have undergone distinct meaning-making processes. The single interview with artifact design may have limited participants' ability to explore additional aspects of their experience.

AIRRP were limited to adult incarceration in US jails or prisons to help with data collection and analysis, acknowledging the differences that may exist between various types of carceral experiences. Stories from other forms of incarceration such as immigration detention, juvenile detention, and probation were excluded from this study. Those voices and stories are important and should be explored in future research.

Implications for Practice

Two participants noted their own counseling as critical to reconstruction, and the third noted the lack of population-focused support. Several counseling approaches seem particularly fitting given the primary and subthemes identified in this study. Applying a trauma-informed lens at the start of counseling services will help build the therapeutic relationship and inform appropriate assessment, diagnoses, and treatment. The following is a non-exhaustive compilation of theories and techniques that may inform sustaining care for AIRRP.

Participants explained the difficulties of losing the support of a life partner and feeling that those without carceral experience do not understand the impact or the extent of the challenges, consistent with findings from Hinck et al. (2019). AIRRP may benefit from the therapeutic factors of group therapy such as universality, instillation of hope, group cohesiveness, catharsis, and altruism (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Counselors must also do personal work to understand complex systems and destigmatize work with this population to help mitigate

AIRRPs' felt sense of isolation and shame. Increased knowledge of the experiences of AIRRP can help counselors understand hesitance, resistance, or slow rapport building in treatment. Considerations for conceptualization include the extent of potential feelings of stagnation, disempowerment, helplessness, hopelessness, and disbelief in "the system" which can include social servants (Bailey, 2018) such as professional counselors.

Participants described the emotional labor of self-monitoring their expression in order to manage the emotions of their partners. Counselors should consider the potential cultural influences on emotion suppression and expression (Ramzan & Amjad, 2017) for implementing culturally sustaining care. Psychoeducation about the possible impacts of emotional suppression on their physical (Ramzan & Amjad, 2017), social, and emotional wellbeing (Butler et al., 2003; Gross & John, 2003) as well as the potential for emotional suppression to impact interpersonal relationships (Butler et al., 2003) may help AIRRP in navigating their communication with their partners and finding new, more healthy ways of sustaining emotional connection.

Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) (Elliott et al., 2004) and Relational Cultural Therapy (Miller, 1976; Jordan, 2018) appear to be particularly well-suited for helping AIRRP process emotions and facilitate movement from emotional suppression to emotional expression. Feminist techniques may also empower clients to acknowledge their strengths and support movement through survival mode and reconstruction. Application of Feminist Therapy (Brown, 2009) may help clients acknowledge the systems of power and oppression that influence their systemic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal experiences and help reconstruct their worldviews. The acknowledgement and reduction of the hierarchical nature of the therapeutic relationship and emphasis on reciprocity embedded within each of the preceding theories may also help with rapport building and empowerment of AIRRP. Narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) may

help AIRRP deconstruct and re-author their stories as part of reconstructing their worldviews and facilitating growth.

The impact of secondary prisonization on worldview was monumental to AIRRP in this study, setting foundations for essential knowledge for counselors working with AIRRP. When counselors conceptualize Secondary Prisonization as Ambiguous Loss (Boss, 2007) or Disenfranchised Grief (Doka, 1989), they may appropriately apply grief theories and interventions. For example, counselors may use interventions consistent with Continuing Bonds theory (Klass et al., 1996) to help AIRRP feel a stronger sense of connection with their incarcerated partner. Psychoeducation using the Dual Process Model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) may help AIRRP develop insight into their experiences in Acts 1 and 2, increasing self-compassion, while Meaning Reconstruction theory (Neimeyer, 2001) may help rebuild worldview and facilitate meaning making and growth in Act 3.

Implications for Research

Acknowledging ongoing challenges to recruitment and a dearth of rich, qualitative data regarding this population, researchers may consider whether the findings from this study hold for a larger sample, or pursue a longitudinal approach to better understand experiences across time. Researchers may also consider validating an expanded framework of Secondary Prisonization to include attention to the impact of partner incarceration on those who cannot access in person visitation due to socioeconomic or ability status. More research about AIRRP will help counselors better conceptualize client experiences, understand coping mechanisms, identify extenuating circumstances, and create or adapt interventions aligned to the needs of the populations.

Future research may aim to capture stories of AIRRP while they are within specific acts. For example, it may be beneficial to explore experiences around the time of arrest, pre-, during, and post-trial to tailor counseling interventions. Researchers may inquire as to a period of time or particular experience that was especially difficult or a period of time when counseling would have been most helpful as previous research has noted that the transition immediately following prison in-take is high risk for familial dissolution and emotionally disorienting (Chui, 2016; Fishman, 1981). Inquiry into periods or methods of coping, growth, healing, or empowerment may be particularly helpful for counseling research and application.

Participants in this study shared impacts of stigma associated with primary and secondary incarceration that were underexplored due to the constraints and parameters of the study. Intentional investigation of stigma to explore impact on real or perceived support or the disenfranchisement of grief and trauma of AIRRP may help counselors understand intrapersonal barriers to access. Deeper exploration of stigma may also inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of AIRRP or Secondary Prisonization counseling groups, psychoeducational materials, and resource lists for partners at the time of incarceration.

Conclusion

A narrative inquiry of three AIRRP revealed commonalities of disrupted lives, grief, uncertainty, and emotional labor. Participants shared the weight of waiting, the pains of separation, and the instinct for survival that helped them navigate an unjust system. Despite their struggles, each participant adamantly accepted responsibility for their life circumstances with determination to move forward. In doing so, they took ownership of their stories and bravely shared them for this study.

Riessman (2008) wrote, “Stories function to alter the ways we view mundane everyday events. Stories can indeed accomplish change” (p. 94). Mundane, everyday events can become complicated to the point of near impossibility for AIRRP. The stories of AIRRP may illuminate the ripple effects of Mass Incarceration and influence desperately needed change in a broken system. By bringing together the sociological framework of Secondary Prisonization with mental health and counseling theories, counselors may improve experiences for AIRRP and assist in coping and healing wounds inflicted by carceral contact.

References

A. (1997). *Aristotle's poetics*: Translated and with a commentary by George Whalley. Ukraine: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Aiello, B. L., & McCorkel, J. A. (2018). 'It will crush you like a bug': Maternal incarceration, secondary prisonization, and children's visitation. *Punishment & Society*, *20*(3), 351–374. https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474517697295

Alexander, M. (2012). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness* (Revised edition.). New Press.

Andrews, H. (2018). 'Real people's lives rarely fall into a three-act structure': Writing biographical drama for British television. *Journal of Screenwriting*, *9*(1), 41–56. https://doi.org/10.1386/josc.9.1.41_1

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2016). Children of incarcerated parents, a shared sentence: The devastating toll of parental incarceration on kids, families and communities. Baltimore, MD: Author. www.aecf.org

Appleman, L. I. (2018). Deviancy, dependency, and disability: The forgotten history of eugenics and mass incarceration. *Duke Law Journal*, *68*(3), 417–478.

Arditti, J. (2002). Doing family research at the jail: Reflections of a prison widow. *The Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2002.1967

Arditti, J. A. (2003). Locked doors and glass walls: Family visiting at a local jail. *Journal of Loss & Trauma*, *8*(2), 115–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020305864

Arditti, J. A. (2016). A family stress-proximal process model for understanding the effects of parental incarceration on children and their families. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice, 5*(2), 65–88. https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000058

Bailey, D. J. S. (2018). A life of grief: An exploration of disenfranchised grief in sex offender significant others. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 43*(3), 641–667. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9416-4

Besemer, K. L., & Dennison, S. M. (2018). Family imprisonment, maternal parenting stress and its impact on mother-child relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, *27*(12), 3897–3908. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1237-7

Bocknek, E. L., Sanderson, J., & Britner, P. A. I. V. (2009). Ambiguous loss and posttraumatic stress in school-age children of prisoners. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 18*(3), 323-333. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10826-008-9233-y

Boss, P. (2007). Ambiguous loss theory: Challenges for scholars and practitioners. *Family Relations*, *56*(2), 105-110.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. http://doi.org/fswdcx

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. [Online] *11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2020). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide.* SAGE.

Brown, L .S. (2009). *Feminist therapy*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Browne, K. (2005). Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(1), 47-60.

Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, *18*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/448619

Bruns, A. (2019). The third shift: Multiple job holding and the incarceration of women's partners. *Social Science Research*, *80*, 202–215. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.12.024

Butler, E. A., Egloff, B., Wilhelm, F. H., Smith, N. C., Erickson, E. A., & Gross, J. J. (2003). The social consequences of expressive suppression. *Emotion*, *3*(1), 48.

Byrne, D. (2022.) A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, *56*(3), 1391–1412. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y

Cain, L. K., Williams, R. E., & Bradshaw, V. (2022). *Establishing data quality in qualitative research: Trustworthiness, validity, and a lack of consensus*. In Ivankova, N. (ed.) International Encyclopedia of Education (4th ed.). Elsevier.

Chui, W. H. (2010). "Pains of imprisonment": Narratives of the women partners and children of the incarcerated. *Child & Family Social Work*, *15*(2), 196–205. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00659.x

Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2013). Narrative inquiry. In Trainor, A. A., & Graue, E. (Eds.), *Reviewing Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences (1st ed.)* (pp. 166-179). Routledge. https://doi-org.utk.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780203813324

Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (pp. 35-76). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552

Clemmer, D. (1940). *The prison community.* Christopher Publishing House.

Comfort, M., McKay, T., Landwehr, J., Kennedy, E., Lindquist, C., & Bir, A. (2016). The costs of incarceration for families of prisoners. *International Review of the Red Cross, 98*(903), 783–798. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383117000704

Comfort, M. (2019). Developments and next steps in theorizing the secondary prisonization of families. In M. Hutton and D. Moran (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of prison and the family* (pp. 65–79). Palgrave MacMillan.

Comfort, M. (2008). *Doing time together love and family in the shadow of the prison*. University of Chicago Press.

Comfort, M. L. (2003). In the tube at San Quentin: The "Secondary Prisonization" of women visiting inmates. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *32*(1), 77–107. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241602238939

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, *19*(5), 2–14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2024). *2024 Standards*. https://www.cacrep.org/for-programs/2024-cacrep-standards/

Craigie, T. A. (2021). Men's incarceration and women's labor market outcomes. *Feminist Economics*, *27*(4), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1942510

Dallaire, D. H., Zeman, J. L., & Thrash, T. M. (2015). Children's experiences of maternal incarceration-specific risks: Predictions to psychological maladaptation. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 44*, 109 –122. https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2014.913248

Davis, A. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

Davis, B. R. (2021). Feeling politics: Carceral contact, well-being, and participation. *Policy Studies Journal*, *49*(2), 591–615. https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12408

DeShay, R. A., Vieraitis, L. M., Copes, H., Powell, Z. A., & Medrano, J. (2021). Managing courtesy stigma: Women and relationships with men in prison. *Criminal Justice Studies, 34*(3), 251–267. https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2021.1966628

deVuono-powell, S., Schweidler, C., Walters, A., & Zohrabi, A. (2015). Who pays? The true cost of incarceration on families. *Who Pays?* http://whopaysreport.org/who-pays-full-report/

Doka, K. J. (1989). *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow*. Lexington Books.

Durante, K. A., Phillips Meertins, J. R., & Tadros, E. (2022). Institutional relational maintenance barriers and perceptions of relationship quality among women with incarcerated partners. *Crime & Delinquency, 70*(3), 788-811. https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287221113304

Elderbroom, B., Bennett, L., Gong, S., Rose, F., & Towns, Z. (2018). *Every second: The impact of the incarceration crisis on America's families.* Every Second. https://everysecond.fwd.us

Elliott, R., Watson, J. C., Goldman, R. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (2004). Learning emotion-focused therapy: The process-experiential approach to change. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/10725-000

Fishman, S. H. (1981). Losing a loved one to incarceration: The effect of imprisonment on family members. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal, 59*(6), 372–375. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-4918.1981.tb00572.x

Foster, H., & Hagan, J. (2015). Maternal and paternal imprisonment and children's social exclusion in young adulthood. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, *105*(2), 387-430. https://link-gale-com.utk.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A463952969/AONE?u=tel_a_utl&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=76cc2b8a

Freytag, G. (1895). *Technique of the drama: An exposition of dramatic composition and art.* United States: S. C. Griggs.

Ghandnoosh, N., Trinka, L., & Barry, C. (2024, January 16). *One in five: How mass incarceration deepens inequality and harms public safety*. The Sentencing Project. https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/one-in-five-how-mass-incarceration-deepens-inequality-and-harms-public-safety/

Glass, M. R. (2015). Teaching critical reflexivity in short-term international field courses: practices and problems. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *39*(4), 554–567. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2015.1084610

Gramlich, J. (2020). Black imprisonment rate in the U.S. has fallen by a third since 2006. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/06/share-of-black-white-hispanic-americans-in-prison-2018-vs-2006/

Goodbye. (2001). Jagged Edge [Song]. On *Jagged little thrill*. So So Def; Columbia.

Hamad, R., Addo, F., & Montez, K. (2024). Reducing intergenerational poverty—An essential driver of health. *JAMA Pediatrics*. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.6510

Hinck, A. S., Hinck, S. S., Smith, J., & Withers, L. A. (2019). Connecting and coping with stigmatized others: Examining social support messages in Prison Talk Online.

Communication Studies, 70(5), 582–600. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2019.1658611

Hood, B. J., & Gaston, S. (2021). How families respond to the collateral consequences of incarceration and prisoner reentry. *Family Relations, 71*(3), 1175-1190. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12616

Jahn, J. L. (2020). A multilevel approach to understanding mass incarceration and health: Key directions for research and practice. *American Journal of Public Health*, *110*(S1), S50–S51. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305432

Jones, A. (2021, March). *Visualizing the unequal treatment of LGBTQ people in the criminal justice system.* Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/03/02/lgbtq/

Jones, M. D., McBeth, M. K., & Shanahan, E. A. (2022). "A brief introduction to the Narrative Policy Framework," in *Narratives and the policy process: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework*, Michael D. Jones, Mark K. McBeth, and Elizabeth A. Shanahan (eds.), Montana State University Library, 1-12. DOI: 10.15788/npf1[DJF2]

Jordan, J. V. (2018). *Relational–Cultural Therapy* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1chrsst

Klass, D., Silverman, P.R., & Nickman, S. (Eds.). (1996). *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief* (1st ed.). Taylor & Francis. https://doi-org.utk.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315800790

Kotova, A. (2019). 'Time … lost time': Exploring how partners of long-term prisoners experience the temporal pains of imprisonment. *Time & Society*, *28*(2), 478–498. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X18763688

Lee, H., McCormick, T., Hicken, M. T., & Wildeman, C. (2015). Racial inequalities in connectedness to imprisoned individuals in the United States. *Du Bois Review, 12*(2), 269–282. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X15000065

Lee, R. D., D'Angelo, D. V., Dieke, A., & Burley, K. (2022). Recent incarceration exposure among parents of live-born infants and maternal and child health. *Public Health Reports, 138*(2), 292-301. https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549221081808

Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 1*, 275-289.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.

Link, N. W., Ward, J. T., & Stansfield, R. (2019). Consequences of mental and physical health for reentry and recidivism: Toward a health-based model of desistance. *Criminology*, *57*(3), 544-573. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12213

Matin, N., Forrester, J., & Ensor, J. (2018). What is equitable resilience? *World Development*, *109*, 197–205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.04.020

McKinney, R., & Storlie, C. A. (2021) A narrative understanding for counselors: An inquiry into gay Christian male identity. *Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling, 15*(4), 372-388, https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2021.1967250

McLaughlin, D. E., & Tierney, W. G. (1993). *Naming silenced lives: Personal narratives and processes of educational change*. Routledge.

Merlin-Knoblich, C., Moss, L., Cholewa, B., & Springer, S. I. (2020). A consensual qualitative research exploration of school counselor multicultural education behaviors. *Professional School Counseling*, *23*(1), https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X20940637.

Miller, J. B. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Beacon Press. http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/2150806.html

National Telecommunications & Information Administration. (1995). *Falling through the net: A survey of the "have nots" in rural and urban America*. US Department of Commerce

Neimeyer, R. A. (2001). *Meaning reconstruction & the experience of loss*. American Psychological Association.

Nellis, A. (2021). *The color of justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons*. The Sentencing Project. https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/

Nickels, B. M. (2020). Love locked up: An exploration of relationship maintenance and perceived barriers for women who have incarcerated partners. *Journal of Family Communication, 20*(1), 36–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2019.1674853

Patterson, E. J., Talbert, R. D., & Brown, T. N. (2021). Familial incarceration, social role combinations, and mental health among African American women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *83*(1), 86–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12699

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—one's own. *Educational Researcher*, *17*(7), 17-21.

Phillips, S. D., & Gates, T. (2011). A conceptual framework for understanding the stigmatization of children of incarcerated parents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 20*(3), 286–294. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-010-9391-6

Prison Policy Initiative (n.d.). *Disability.* prisonpolicy.org/research/disability/

Ramzan, N., & Amjad, N. (2017). Cross cultural variation in emotion regulation: A systematic review. *Annals of King Edward Medical University*, *23*(1). https://doi.org/10.21649/akemu.v23i1.1512

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences.* SAGE.

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, *21*(2), 95.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. SAGE.

Sawyer, W., & Wagner, P. (2024). *Mass incarceration: The whole pie 2024.* Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024.html#bigpicture

Schnittker, J., Uggen, C., Shannon, S. K. S., & Mcelrath, S. M. (2015). The institutional effects of incarceration: Spillovers from criminal justice to health care. *The Milbank Quarterly*, *93*(3), 516–560. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12136

Shlafer, R. J., Reedy, T., & Davis, L. (2017). School-based outcomes among youth with incarcerated parents: Differences by school setting. *Journal of School Health, 87*(9), 687-695. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12539

Siennick, S. E., Stewart, E. A., & Staff, J. (2014). Explaining the association between incarceration and divorce. *Criminology, 52*(3), 371–398. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12040

Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, *23*(3), 197–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/074811899201046

Sugie, N. F. (2015). Chilling effects: Diminished political participation among partners of formerly incarcerated men. *Social Problems*, *62*(4), 550–571. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spv017

Tadros, E., Durante, K. A., Morgan, A. A., & Hutcherson, R. (2022a). An actor-partner interdependence model analysis of family support and depression among coparenting couples with an incarcerated partner. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 61*(7), 390–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2022.2116521

Tadros, E., Presley, S., & Gomez, E. (2022b). "Not for the weak": The lived experience of women in romantic relationships with incarcerated individuals. *Crime & Delinquency, 68*(12), 2274–2297. https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287221077657

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1995). *Trauma & transformation: Growing in the aftermath of suffering*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483326931

Tedeschi, R. G., Shakespeare-Finch, J., & Taku, K. (2018). *Posttraumatic growth: Theory, research, and applications* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315527451

Testa, A., & Jackson, D. B. (2020). Incarceration exposure and maternal food insecurity during pregnancy: Findings from the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), 2004–2015. *Maternal and Child Health Journal, 24*(1), 54–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-019-02822-4

Thacker, N. E., Minton, C. A. B., & Riley, K. B. (2021). Marginalized counselor educators' experiences negotiating identity: A narrative inquiry. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *60*(2), 94–111. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12198

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "Big-Tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(10), 837-851. https://doi-org.utk.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

Trainor, A. A., & Graue, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Reviewing qualitative research in the social sciences* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi-org.utk.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780203813324

Turney, K. (2014). Stress proliferation across generations? Examining the relationship between parental incarceration and childhood health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 55*, (3). https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146514544173

Turney, K., & Schneider, D. (2016). Incarceration and household asset ownership. *Demography, 53*(6), 2075–2103. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-016-0519-1

Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2013). Redefining relationships: Explaining the countervailing consequences of paternal incarceration for parenting. *American Sociological Review, 78*(6), 949–979. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413505589

Wakefield, S., Lee, H., & Wildeman, C. (2016). Tough on crime, tough on families? Criminal justice and family life in America. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *665*(1), 8–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716216637048

Wakefield, S., & Wildeman, C. (2014). *Children of the prison boom: Mass incarceration and the future of American inequality.* Oxford University Press.

We Belong Together. (2005). Mariah Carey [Song]. On *The Emancipation of Mimi*. The Island Records; Def Jam Records; The Island Def Jam Music Group.

Western, B., & Sirois, C. (2019). Racialized re-entry: Labor market inequality after incarceration. *Social Forces*, *97*(4), 1517–1542. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy096

Western, B., & Wildeman, C. (2009). The Black family and mass incarceration. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 621*(1), 221–242. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208324850

White, M. & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends* (1st ed.). Norton.

Widra, E., & Herring, T., (2021, September). *States of incarceration: The global context 2021.* Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html

Wildeman, C., & Wang, E. A. (2017). Mass incarceration, public health, and widening inequality in the USA. *The Lancet*, *389*(10077), 1464–1474. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30259-3

*Williams, J. C., Barrio Minton, C., Ault, H. R. (2025). The impacts of mass incarceration on partners of the incarcerated: A PRISMA review. (in submission).

Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2020). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (6th edition.). Basic Books.

Appendix

Appendix A

Search Strategy

Date conducted: January 31, 2023

Platform: EBSCOhost

Databases: Academic Search Complete, Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text, ERIC, Humanities International Complete, Women's Studies International, Child Development & Adolescent Studies

Search Terms: (incarceration or imprisonment or carceral or prison or jail or correctional facilities or detention) AND (spouse or romantic partner or wife or husband or intimate partner or co-parent)

Limiters: Full text, 2013-2022, Peer Reviewed

Inclusion Criteria: United States justice system/incarceration, experiences leading up to (i.e., arrest) or during incarceration, adult family members or fictive kin, romantic partners

Exclusion Criteria: International justice system, post-release/reentry, immigration detention, children of incarcerated adults, juvenile justice system, experiences of incarcerated persons

*Articles that included both inclusion and exclusion criteria were discussed with the dissertation chair for final decision and justification.

Appendix B

Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Julianna (Julie) Williams. I am a PhD candidate in Counselor Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am conducting a research study to understand the experiences of people experiencing incarceration of a romantic or relational partner. I invite you to share your stories and experiences if you meet the following criteria for this research:

1. You identify as a romantic or relational partner of someone who is currently or has been incarcerated recently
2. You and your partner are at least 18 years old

Participants will be asked to complete a 60–90-minute interview. To prepare for the interview, I will ask you to share a personal item, drawing, downloaded picture, or song that represents your experience, whether it be one item or a few items that correspond to specific experiences or timeframes, and share the story of the item(s) during the interview. During the interview, I will ask you to share stories about your experiences with partner incarceration and how you have responded and coped with your experiences.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you want to learn more about this research, please go to the following link: [INSERT LINK TO QUALTRICS HERE] and complete the interest screening. If you are eligible to participate, you can read more about the study so you can decide whether to participate. If you agree to participate, you will respond to a brief survey and let me know how you prefer for me to contact you. Participants can earn up to $50 for completing the study.

If you have any questions, please contact me at jwill442@vols.utk.edu. Also, please share this study information with friends or others who might be interested.

This study has been approved by the UT Institutional Review Board (#) under the advisement of Dr. Casey Barrio Minton. A copy of the study's informed consent can be found at: [INSERT INFORMED CONSENT LINK].

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Julianna Williams, MA. Ed

Appendix C

Consent for Research Participation

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-24-08226-XP

IRB APPROVAL DATE: 07/16/2024

IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 05/29/2025

Research Study Title: Navigating Secondary Prisonization: Narratives of Adults with Incarcerated Romantic or Relational Partners

Researcher(s): Julianna Williams, MA.Ed, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Casey Barrio Minton, PhD, NCC, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jenny McMullen, MS, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you have a romantic or relational partner who is incarcerated or was incarcerated at some point during your relationship. You must be age 18 or older to participate in the study. The information in this consent form is to help you decide if you want to be in this research study. Please take your time reading this form and contact the researcher(s) to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

Why is the research being done??

The purpose of the research study is to understand how having a partner who is incarcerated impacts romantic or relational partners such as spouses, girlfriends, or domestic partners. We hope to add to the current literature by learning about your challenging or positive experiences, how you navigate the experience, and your mental and emotional wellbeing.

What will I do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to:

- Complete a brief online survey to tell us about yourself

- Share a personal item, drawing, or downloaded picture with a short paragraph describing its meaning via email.
- Participate in one 60-90 minute audio-recorded interview. You can decide whether you would like to participate via Zoom, in person at an agreed upon location within 30 miles of Knoxville, or on UT's campus.
- Participate in voluntary member checking, through email, which will offer you an opportunity to clarify our understanding about your experiences .

You can skip any questions that you do not want to answer.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last 90-120 minutes over a one-month period. This will include a short online survey, an email, a 60-90 minute interview, and two optional emails following the interview.

Can I say "No"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, your interview, demographic data, and personal item/drawing/picture will be deleted. If you would like to withdraw from the study, please email Julianna (Julie) Williams at jwill442@vols.utk.edu or Dr. Casey Barrio Minton at cbarrio@utk.edu

However, following the voluntary member checking, all items will be de-identified, and the ability to withdraw data from the study will no longer be available.

Are there any risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

It is also possible that you may experience discomfort, sadness, or other emotions during the interview and reflection process. You may choose to stop the interview at any time, and you may decline to answer

any interview questions. If you need mental health or wellness resources, we will provide you a list upon your request.

Are there any benefits to me?

There is a possibility that you may benefit from being in the study, but there is no guarantee that will happen. Possible benefits include emotional processing, identifying strengths, or other positive emotions during your interview and reflection process. Your participation may also benefit your personal understanding of your experiences and well-being. Even if you don't benefit from being in the study, your participation may help us to learn more about the experiences and well-being of adults with incarcerated romantic or relational partners. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

What will happen with the information collected for this study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by asking you to create a pseudonym and separating all identifying information from collected data. All files connected to the study will be stored on a password-protected computer in a secure drive. Informed consent and documents with your name will be stored separately from the data files with no connection between this agreement and your pseudonym after transcription. Interview recordings will be transcribed in HIPAA-compliant Zoom. Audio recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the study. Only the primary investigator and faculty advisor will have access to the audio files until they are destroyed.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

We may share your research data with other researchers without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

You may earn up to $50 in the form of an Amazon or Wal-Mart gift card for participating in this study. You will receive $40 for completing the study interview. You will receive an additional $10 by emailing the personal item/drawing/picture with a one-paragraph description of how the item represents your experience before the interview. The gift card will be sent to you within 5 business days of completing the interview. You can decide whether to receive the gift card by email or mail.

What else do I need to know?

About 4-8 people will take part in this study. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you. We will protect your privacy by making sure we do not include the name of your town or any other information that could be specifically linked to you will not be reported within this study.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Julianna (Julie) Williams, **jwill442@vols.utk.edu**, 312-437-1202 or Casey Barrio Minton, **cbarrio@utk.edu**, 865-974-8382.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form, been given the chance to ask questions and have my questions answered. If I have more questions, I have been told whom to contact. By clicking the "I Agree" button below, I am

agreeing to be in this study. I can print or save a copy of this consent information for future reference. If I do not want to be in this study, I can close my internet browser.

Consent for use of images

I agree that video recordings of me from this research may be analyzed for research purposes.

[check box] I agree to participate in this study.

Appendix D

Qualtrics Eligibility Screening Survey

1. I am 18 years or older (yes or no) – if no, end survey
2. I have a romantic or relational partner (spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, intimate partner) who is currently incarcerated (yes or no) - if yes, skip to question 4.
3. I have a romantic or relational partner (spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, intimate partner) who was incarcerated at some point within the last 6 months (yes or no) - if no to both 2 and 3, end survey
4. My partner is 18 years or older (yes or no) - if no, end survey
5. My partner was incarcerated in:
    a. Jail
    b. Prison
    c. Immigration Detention (if yes, end survey)
    d. Juvenile detention (if yes, end survey)
    e. Supervised community incarceration only (e.g., parole or probation. Choose this option only if your partner was only sentenced to community incarceration and never spent time in jail or prison) (if yes, end survey)
6. If qualified: "You are eligible to participate in this study. Please continue to the next page to learn more about the study and decide whether you would like to participate."
7. If not qualified: “Thank you for considering participating in this study. Unfortunately, you are not eligible to participate at this time. Thank you for your time.”
8. Then, the informed consent form is presented and clicked. If the respondent agrees to participate, the survey will proceed to demographics.

Demographics Survey (Post Consent)

9. Please tell us a bit about yourself. If you would rather not share a response to the question, you can click “prefer not to answer.”
    a. What is your racial and/or ethnic identity? - fill in or click “prefer not to answer”, but it must have a response.
    b. What is your sexual/relational identity (e.g., straight, gay, pan, biromantic, etc…)? - fill in or click “prefer not to answer,” but it must have a response.
    c. What is your age? - fill in or click “prefer not to answer,” but it must have a response.
    d. What is your gender identity (e.g., man, woman, non-binary)? -fill in or click “prefer not to answer,” but it must have a response.
    e. What is your relationship status (e.g., married, partnered, co-parent only, long-term relationship, etc.) - fill in or click “prefer not to answer”, but it must have a response.
    f. What is your parental status (e.g., parent, mother, guardian, no children, etc.)? - fill in or click “prefer not to answer,” but it must have a response.
    g. Who lives in your household? (e.g., your children, your mother, your father, your partner, roommates, etc.) -- fill in or click “prefer not to answer,” but it must have a response.

Contact Preference

10. Please provide your first name
11. How would you like me to contact you to schedule the interview and discuss next steps? phone, email, text message.
    a. Please provide your phone number - fill in response
    b. Please provide your email address - fill in response

Appendix E

Social Media Post

Hello!

As you may know, I am a PhD candidate in Counselor Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am conducting a research study to understand the experiences and well-being of adults with incarcerated romantic or relational partners through the gathering and sharing of stories. To qualify for the study, participants must be at least 18 years old and either identify as an adult with an incarcerated romantic or relational partner OR have a romantic or relational partner who was released from incarceration within the past 6 months.

If you have friends or acquaintances that might be interested in participating in this study, Please share this research flier with them! If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you!

Appendix F

Recruitment Fliers



RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

I am interested in speaking with adults who have experienced the incarceration of a romantic or relational partner. Participants will be asked to complete a 60-90 minute interview and share a personal item, photograph, artwork, song, or album that represents their experience with partner incarceration.

Participants will receive a $40 gift card for completing the interview, $10 for submitting a photo or copy of their personal item.

Interested?

https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eyx1H7d3KyzPway

QUESTIONS?

Please contact Julie Williams
jwill442@vols.utk.edu
312-437-1202
Casey Barrio Minton
cbarrio@utk.edu
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
UTK IRB-24-08226-XP

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

STUDY OVERVIEW

I am interested in speaking with adults who have experienced the incarceration of a romantic or relational partner. Participants will be asked to complete a 60-90 minute interview and share a personal item, photograph, artwork, song, or album that represents their experience with partner incarceration.

Participants will receive a $40 gift card for completing the interview, $10 for submitting a photo or copy of their personal item.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact
Julie Williams
jwill442@vols.utk.edu
312-437-1202
Casey Barrio Minton
cbarrio@utk.edu
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

UTK IRB-24-08226-XP

https://utk.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eyx1H7d3KyzPway

Vita

Julie Williams grew up primarily in Marlton, New Jersey. After high school, she started college in Chicago. Due to financial constraints, she took a hiatus from school and continued living and working in Chicago for nine years. Julie and her partner moved to Virginia, where she finished her bachelor's degree with a double major in Psychology and Political Science at Radford University. She then attended Virginia Tech, earning a master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She went on to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education with a cognate in Social Justice and Legislative Advocacy. Her research interests include investigating the holistic impacts of incarceration, sexual health and wellness issues in counseling, and mental health parity. Julie is currently a staff counselor at the UTK Student Counseling Center and will soon attain licensure as a Professional Counselor-Mental Health Service Professional in the state of Tennessee. She is grateful to all who helped her learn and grow, including professors, classmates, and students. She would like to share her deepest appreciation for her family, friends, and partner for their love and support.