

**Incarceration, Romantic Relationships, and the
Perspectives of African American Men**

Senior Thesis

Ogechi Nzewi
PPS 186
December 10, 2010

Introduction

Black men are the American demographic group that is both least likely to be married and the most likely to be incarcerated. As a result, the phenomena of unprecedentedly high incarceration rates and low marriage percentages intersect in these men's lives to provide potentially important insights about the ways in which a past criminal record affects future social arrangements and options. These insights are important because they enhance the research that has been done on this overlap in phenomena by providing the perspective of both genders. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the truth about the effect of incarceration on romantic relationships and household structure has strong relevance for policymakers that have already identified African American romantic relationships as an issue for policy.

The goal of this thesis is to determine whether male perspectives are adequately represented in current literature on the effect of a male's incarceration on African American heterosexual romantic relationships. Within this thesis, romantic relationships refer to non-platonic partnerships, including marriage and co-habitation, between African American men and women. cursory research revealed the widespread influence of the "Marriageability model" in current literature, where a past incarceration lowers a male's economic earning power and makes him less attractive as a future mate to his female potential partners, thus reducing the rate of marriage. This view of the effect of incarceration on marriage places women as the decision-makers, representing the demand for marriage, whereas men make up the passive supply of marriageable partners. This conception of the nexus between marriage and incarceration privileges the opinions, needs, and desires of female partners while ignoring the same considerations for men.

Without examining men as not only receivers, but also negotiators of the terms of romantic relationships, important facts about the realities of creating marriages and other romantic, monogamous arrangements are missed. In order to weigh the merits of current literature on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships, this thesis thoroughly surveys contemporary studies to establish whether a gender-bias exists, critically assesses current literature on the effect of incarceration on romantic relationships, and identifies potential sources of gendered-perspectives in research.

Methodology

To contribute to contemporary research both through critical analysis and new information, this thesis will comprise two parts: (1) a literature review that will serve as an evaluation of current literature to establish whether or not there is a gender bias in work on the effect of incarceration on romantic relationships, and (2) an empirical analysis of past research. The analysis will be conducted on literature that focuses (directly or indirectly) on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships. The goal of this analysis is to evaluate individual studies for gender bias and to gain information on why any gender-bias might exist.

1. Evaluation of Existing Literature

To support the premise of my hypothesis, that current literature privileges the perspectives of female African Americans over those of males, I will analyze current research on the impact of incarceration on African American marriage in three major disciplines: Economics, Social History, and Psychology. I will focus on demonstrating

whether or not a gendered-bias exists in contemporary literature that focuses on effect of incarceration on African American romantic relationships through positioning African American women as decision makers and African American men as decision takers.

2. Analysis of Secondary Research (Empirical Research)

Descriptive Analysis

After determining the nature of existing literature's gender-specific approach in addressing the impact of incarceration on African American relationships, I will complete an evaluation of studies that prioritize and marginalize the perspectives of men. I will describe each piece of literature according to the following five criteria in order to make the studies more readily comparable.

Literature Description Criteria

1. **Type:** Is the literature a study or the discussion/ compilation of several studies?
2. **Data:** Is the literature quantitative or qualitative?
3. **Question:** What question is the researcher trying to answer?
 - a. Are men asked to focus on romantic relationships or family relationships in general?
 - b. Are men asked about marriage specifically?
 - c. Is the focus of the research question on how men perceive the marriage/ relationship market or believe to be perceived within it?
4. **Conclusion:** What does the researcher conclude about the effect of incarceration on romantic relationships?
5. **Limitations:** What are the limitations or shortfalls of the researcher's approach?

Analysis Categories

Next, I will categorize each piece of literature according to its subject matter. I will use “mitigating factors” as gender-bias analysis categories. Each study will be analyzed for gender-bias within one of five “mitigating factor” categories. Each category represents a group of studies in which a researcher names a specific way in which incarceration affects romantic relationships. These intermediate actors between incarceration and romantic relationships range from skewed sex-ratios to lowered economic status. In the next section, current literature is evaluated, beginning with a brief overview of African American romantic relationships as topics of public policies.

Incarceration → (Mitigating Factor) → Romantic Relationship

1. Communities
2. Sex-Ratios
3. Economics
4. Family Relationships
5. None

Literature Review

Policy on African American Romantic Relationships

African American romantic relationships are an important area for research because these relationships have been a subject of American public policy since the Reconstruction Era. In antebellum times, marriage was regarded a “civilizing force” by abolitionists, and was used as a way to grant or withhold socioeconomic rights from African Americans after Emancipation (Franke, 1999). Throughout history, legislators have attempted to increase the marriages of African Americans (Franke, 1999). Today,

policymakers continue to identify African American romantic relationships as an important topic for policy.

In 1996, President Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWOA) ended America's 60 year long practice of providing largely unrestricted aid to poor women and their children on the basis of entitlement. Instead, the bill instituted Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a program that aimed to reduce the level of dependency on federal aid amongst poor populations and to encourage the increased prevalence of marriage amongst poor African Americans (DeParle, 2004). Although TANF was a block-grant program and thus provided individual states with great discretion in terms of their provision of welfare benefits and services, Clinton's bill instituted revolutionary national guidelines. Perhaps the most defining feature of TANF is the limits that it set on the amount of aid that an individual can receive in a lifetime. In an effort to force poor persons to change their working and interpersonal habits, a 60-month lifetime limit was set. Most states opted to further reduce this limit to three years or less (DeParle, 2004).

The relationship between policy and research is complex and difficult to quantify. In the case of African American romantic relationships and socio-economic policy in the late 1990s, research was used at least to justify these policies and at most was the driving force behind them. In 1994, author Charles Murray proposed in Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980, that increasing levels of single motherhood amongst African Americans were the direct consequence of increasing benefits to unmarried mothers. Murray proposed that lowering the benefits available to single mothers would force these women to either not to become pregnant or to become married, thus reducing

their social cost to society. This proposed link, despite its lack of quantifiable evidence (Wilson, 1987), contributed to the Clinton Administration's welfare reform policy of the 1990's (DeParle, 2004).

In terms of reducing the poor's federal financial dependency, PRWOA was successful. The policy change resulted in the decrease of caseloads by as much as 60% in some states (Wolf, 2006). Since about 75% of the households that receive welfare are headed by unmarried women (Wolf, 2006), many of the recipients that were dropped from the welfare rolls as a result of tightened restrictions and increased requirements were just the ones that the policy was designed to target. In this respect, the policy was successful. However, the marriage rates of both African American men and women continue to fall steadily (Pinderhughes, 2004), suggesting that the rhetoric behind the policy's reduction of economic assistance to poor African American women was flawed.

Despite the failure of PRWOA to increase marriage rates amongst poor African Americans, George Bush, Jr. maintained and instituted similar programs in hopes of increasing marriage rates in poor communities during his presidency. In 2001, President Bush echoed the concerns of the Clinton Administration when he asserted that "fatherlessness has emerged as one of our greatest social problems" (Lane, 2004). In a more explicit move than Clinton, Bush made it clear that his primary concern was with African American families, when he stated that "The intellectual roots of the fatherhood movement reach back to one exceptional public servant who spoke about the importance of fathers earlier, more often and more eloquently than any other public figure—former United States Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York" (Lane, 2004).

In linking his cause to the research of Senator Moynihan, Bush confirmed his particular interest in the state of the black family. Moynihan began speaking about “the importance of fathers” in 1965 in a controversial report entitled, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.” Moynihan’s report focused on the social and economic indicators of African American success and concluded that, collectively, African Americans were falling farther and farther behind other demographic groups. The problem, Moynihan claimed nearly half a century ago, was that “the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling” (Moynihan, 1965). Moynihan cited a “tangled web of pathology” as the root of the disintegration of black two-parent households, referencing a culture of poverty and dysfunction within African American family units (Moynihan, 1965).

Convinced, as Moynihan was, that the socio-economic success of African Americans lay in the reform of their family structures, Bush called for the devotion of \$315 million of the nation’s savings from Clinton’s implementation of TANF to promote increased marriage rates (Lane, 2004). The following year, The Welfare Renewal Bill—an extension of Clinton’s 1996 policy—passed in the House of Representatives. The policy called for \$300 million in additional spending to provide conflict resolution and marriage counseling services to “strengthen marriage” amongst poor Americans (Lane, 2004).

As is exemplified in the efforts of the Clinton and Bush Administrations in recent years, policymakers continue to prioritize marriage for African Americans, believing it to be an economically beneficial practice for poor people (Lichter, 2003). This belief is both supported and contradicted by available evidence. Although research certainly shows that

the economic situation of un-wed mothers is helped by marriage, it also indicates that women that marry and then divorce are, in the long run, more economically disadvantaged than never-married women (Lichter, 2003). This finding highlights a piece of the complicated calculus that African American men and women must make in determining the nature of their romantic relationships. Because this intimate area of the personal lives African Americans is important to policymakers, it is critical that research on black romantic relationships be well rounded and representative of all perspectives.

African American Romantic Relationships: Changing and Potentially Problematic

African American romantic relationships continue to be an important topic for policy research because they are changing quickly and markedly. According to current literature, African Americans have experienced decreasing rates of marriage and two parent households ever since the 1960's. In the place of these traditional relationships, there is an increased incidence of co-habitation and female-headed households. Although rates of marriage have decreased across the nation for all races, African Americans have experienced disproportionately higher rates of divorce, single parent homes headed by women, and the number of African American women who are never married.

Elaine Pinderhughes reported in "African American Marriage in the 20th Century" that in 2000 only 19% of African American men were married, as compared to 60% of white men. Similarly, only 37% of African American women were married, as compared to 57% of their white female counterparts. In addition, according to M. Belinda Tucker and Claudia Mitchell-Kerman (1995), African Americans divorce at a rate that is twice that of white couples.

According to White & Rogers (2000), the result of increasing divorce rates and lowered levels of African American marriage is the heightened prevalence of households headed by single mothers. These changes in household structure have widespread consequences for African American children. The Urban Institute reports that “over half of all black children (53.4 per- cent) lived with a single parent in 2002, compared with less than a third of Hispanic children (27.3 per- cent) and less than one-fifth of white children (18.2 percent)” (Wherry and Finegold, 2004).

The prevalence of single-parent households in the black community is potentially problematic because 60% of children in homes headed by women are below the poverty line. The reason for this, since the 1980’s, is that households with only one primary earner are more likely to be impoverished, especially when the breadwinner is a woman. Because of this disparity between the economic wellbeing of two-parent and single-parent households, policymakers and researchers have focused on the romantic relationships of African Americans.

In addition to its economic ramifications, researchers and policymakers have also identified household structure as a determinant of the wellbeing of African American children. In 1999, Black, Dubowitz, and Starr found that the presence of a father has a real impact on the development of children within a given household. In a study of the impact of the presence of a father on three-year-old children in low-income families, writers found that families with present fathers were more “child-centered” (Black, Dubowitz, Starr, 1999). Finally, when fathers contributed financially, the three year-olds demonstrated “better cognition, receptive language skills, and behavior” (Black, Dubowitz, Starr, 1999). This finding provides an incentive for the American educational

and the criminal justice system to increase paternal participation by creating policies that influence the household structure of African Americans. In order to understand these structures, incarceration must be taken into account.

Understanding African American Romantic Relationships: Incarceration

Experts have differed markedly on the reasons behind low rates of African American two-parent households. Some have focused on the economic motivations of marriage or non-marriage while others have focused on social history. Still others have focused on the impact of attitudes on individual's decisions to enter into relationships. In this study, incarceration has been chosen as an appropriate lens with which to understand the decisions that African Americans make in their romantic relationships. Incarceration was chosen because of its recently increasing incidence in America, the magnitude of its impact in American families and romantic relationships, and its disproportional prevalence in the African American community.

Incarceration in America

In the past four decades the number of incarcerated Americans has grown by more than 600% from 350,000 in 1973 (Balthazar & King, 2001) to 2.3 million in 2005 (Hattery, 2007). As a result of this increase, the United States currently supports the highest percentage of incarcerated citizens in the developed world with more than 3% of its adult population currently behind bars (Balthazar & King, 2001; O'Connor, 2001). The cause of the American prison population increase is often attributed to the criminal justice policies characterized as the "War on Drugs" as initiated by the Reagan

administration in the 1970s. These policies introduced a myriad of new laws designed to increase penalties for drug users and distributors including mandatory minimum sentences, “three-strike” laws, and designating drug offenses as felonies (Hattery, 2007). Authors argue that the effect of these laws has been detrimental to the American family because of the separation that incarceration imposes by definition between offenders and their families and communities (Travis & Waul, 2003). Their claims are supported by further research on the impact of incarceration on the American family.

Incarceration and American Families

The adverse effects of incarceration on the stability and cohesiveness of family units are undeniable. Contrary to the pervading image of incarcerated persons as single, isolated persons, research suggests that, prior to their incarceration, law offenders create similar family units to the ones that non-offenders do. They are just as likely to have children as men that are not incarcerated (Western, 2004) and, as a result, more than half of all male prisoners are also dads (Tripp, 2001). These fathers are most likely legally employed as well as financial contributors to their offspring at the time of their arrest (Hairston, 1998).

Although the relationships between children and parents are outside of the scope of this work, an understanding of father-child relationships is intrinsic to an appreciation of the household structures and romantic relationships of formerly incarcerated fathers. Children play a large part in explaining the romantic and non-romantic obligations of African American men and women to one another. Thus, any discussion of romantic

relationships would be incomplete without the children that influence the construction, disintegration, and proliferation of romantic relationships.

In 2001, almost 1.5 million children in America had a parent in prison. As a result, two percent of the nation's minors are currently experiencing physical separation from one of their parents due to incarceration (O'Connor, 2001). Extensive research has been conducted on a parent's incarceration's effect on the wellbeing of his/her offspring. As Tripp (2001) writes, citing Gabel (1992), "The imprisonment of fathers is often associated with a variety of social and psychological problems in children, especially among young boys." The largest determinant of the wellbeing of children is the condition of the relationship that is maintained during the parent's absence. As Tripp (2001) reports, "Children who have little contact with their fathers during incarceration have higher levels of emotional problems than children who maintain frequent contact." In addition to its impact on father-child relationships, incarceration has a distinct effect on romantic relationships.

Incarceration and Marriage in America

Incarceration's impact on marital relationships in the general American population has been proven to be significant. Incarcerated men are only half as likely as their non- incarcerated peers to be married (Western, 2004). The reason for this disparity continues to be researched, and could reveal important truths about the motivations behind the decision to get married, and the effect of incarceration on the ability of those it affects to maintain intimate relationships.

In explaining the impact of incarceration on romance, some researchers have focused on the effect of incarceration on immediate and long-term earnings for ex-inmates and have proposed that a past incarceration makes formerly incarcerated persons less attractive as potential marriage partners (Grinstead et al, 2001). Others have theorized that incarceration breeds domestic violence, resulting in the dissolution of relationships after release (Braman, 2004). Finally, some researchers have proposed that relocation takes these men out of the marriage market physically, resulting in lower rates of marriage (Braman, 2004).

Incarceration and African American Men

Incarceration is often regarded as an event that disproportionately affects the African American community. However, it is more specifically an experience that is unfortunately familiar for African American men. As a result, the study of the effect of incarceration on marriage and other romantic relationships has especial relevance to both African American men and the community to which they belong.

African American men are much more likely to be imprisoned than their peers from other races. As Blthazar and King write (2001), “The incarceration rate, in 1997, for African American males in their late twenties was 8630 per 100,000 residents, compared to 2703 among Hispanic males, and 868 among white males.” According to Bonczar and Beck (1997), a black male is seven times more likely than a white male to be imprisoned.

Although this disparity is shocking, the uneven effects of increased incarceration become more clear when the African American community is viewed independently. Although, as King (1993) reports, African American men make up less

than 6% of the national population, they comprise 48% of the prison population. As Grinstead et al. write in “The Financial Cost of Maintaining Relationships with Incarcerated African American Men,” (2001), “One in every 14 African American men in the United States is now incarcerated, and one in four will be incarcerated at some point in his life.” Miller (1996) estimates that, when jails are included, nearly eight in ten African American males will be incarcerated during their lifetimes. The high prevalence of incarceration amongst black men makes their perspective increasingly relevant in discussion of African American romantic relationships.

Incarceration, African American Men, and Romantic Relationships:

Does Research Address Men?

The unusually high rates of incarceration and low rates of marriage for African American men would suggest that this particular demographic be targeted in research on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships. Since only 19% of African American men are married (Pinderhughes, 2004) while eight out of ten may be incarcerated in some capacity during their lives (Miller, 1996), there is likely great overlap between these two groups resulting in large numbers of African American men that have been incarcerated or jailed and have never married or are divorced.

The unique life events of African American men would point to a strong representation of the perspectives of these men in research on the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships. Particularly because of the potential relevance of an understanding of African American romantic relationships to public policy initiatives, it is important to ensure that these perspectives are properly prioritized in research.

Gender Parity in Research on African American Romance and Incarceration

Overview of Current Literature

Current literature is discussed below to determine the level of representation of African American male perspectives in research on the nexus between incarceration and romantic relationship in the lives of black Americans. Below a summary of gendered perspectives is presented on the three dominant disciplines in which researchers have focused on romantic relationships and African Americans: Economics, Social History, and Psychology.

The Role of Gender in Economic Research

The relationship between incarceration as it influences joblessness amongst African American men and marriage was first discussed in contemporary literature in Harvard Professor William Julius Wilson's 1987 book, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy. In this book, Wilson responded to arguments amongst legislators and researchers that increasing welfare benefits discouraged poor black women from creating stable families based on marriage. Finding little correlation between marriage rates and welfare benefits, Wilson proposed instead the Marriageable Male Pool Index.

The Marriageable Male Pool Index has become an influential model for understanding the way that incarceration affects the romantic relationships of African

Americans through economics. Wilson's Index separates men into two categories--those that are "marriageable" and those that aren't--based on whether or not the man is employed. In 1987, Wilson found a correlation between rates of female-headed household structures and low male "marriageability." This conclusion has led to the pervading rhetoric amongst researchers and academics that black women choose not to marry men that are not employed. Incarceration is included in this discussion because a former incarceration significantly lowers the likelihood of employment for African American men (Western, 2000).

Following Wilson's model, some scholars posit that economics have a strong impact on marriage rates across the board and do somewhat explain the difference between black and white marriage rates across the US (Lichter, 1991). In 1997, Cready, Fossett, et. Al argued that increased socioeconomic status amongst African American men increases marriage rates, while the same increase in socioeconomic status for females decreases marriage rates. Authors of this article also argue that the greatest indicator of marriage rates is mate availability, echoing the findings of Wilson a decade earlier.

In a 1991 study, D.T. Lichter concluded that welfare policies that increase or decrease economic independence for women have inverse relationship with whether or not women choose to partner themselves with men. However, spouse availability also plays a large role. Like Wilson, Lichter defined spouse availability by the "economic attractiveness" of males. Thus, Lichter, similarly to Wilson, found that economics largely affect marrying choices for particularly for women by producing or eliminating incentives to marry.

In 2000, White and Rogers found that increased earnings for men and women of all races correlate with increased marriage rate and decreased divorce rates. Their study looked particularly at the 1990's in America, when there was significant economic growth. The researchers' finding, however, could be interpreted as contradicting the Wilson model.

Even during a period of economic expansion that affected all classes and races, White and Rogers found a disparity between the increase in white marriage and the increase in black marriage. Such difference could indicate that marriage is mitigated by factors other than economic for African Americans. However, the study instead reinforced the link between economic status of males and the desire for marriage amongst African American women.

The Role of Gender in Historical and Social Research

Similar to the economically based arguments on the cause of low rates of African American marriage, analyses of the effect of historical and social events on African American rates of marriage also prioritize the attitudes and desires of African American women, treating African American as a passive input in the marriage equation.

In 2002, Elaine B. Pinderhughes "examined the state of African American marriages in [a] cultural context." Her article analyzed the "social, economic, racial, and historical factors" that shape African American marriage today. Pinderhughes concluded that African Americans largely have lived at the mercy of an environment that they could not control. In economic and social terms, this has made African Americans' relationships more vulnerable to outside forces (Pinderhughes, 2002). The context that

Pinderhughes provided served to attribute the differences between White and African American marriage rates to factors that are related to race in the context of its implications in America.

In a 2004 study, researchers reinforced the importance of the particular social, cultural, and economic environment of African Americans as a means of understand this demographic's lower likelihood of marriage. The study terms the household structure market of African Americans in terms of the supply of men and the demand of women, arguing that marriage is not simply personal preference for African American women but rather the result of complicated socioeconomic considerations (Lane, 2004). In other words, for African American women, obstacles to marriage reside in the supply of marriageable men, not the demand for them. The authors explained how policymakers that are geared towards increasing marriage amongst African Americans have created a "double bind" for black women as a result of a misunderstanding of this concept (Lane, 2004). While reducing the supply of marriageable men through the War on Drugs (which disproportionately represents an occupational choice for young, poor, black men), legislators have also created economic penalties for unmarried women through welfare policy. In doing so, black women are punished for a phenomenon that is without their control and marriage rates continue to drop. Similarly to the Wilson model, these researchers explained incarceration's impact on African American marriage through the decision-making of African American women. Their conclusions would imply that African American women decide when and where marriage happens, while African American men are passive participators and that regulate the marriage market through the level of supply, but in no ways otherwise.

The Role in Gender in Psychology Research

While most theorists simply imply the singular importance of the agency of African American women in determining the effect of incarceration on marriage, others directly endorse this conclusion by singling out African American women, and not men, in studies on their attitudes towards marriage. In 2000, author Kathryn Edin did a qualitative study of nearly 300 low-income mothers across 3 American cities. Echoing Wilson's 1987 study, the article argues the importance of economic stability to mothers as they choose or decide not to marry or enter into other romantic relationships. However, Edin also sought to quantify the importance of "non-monetary factors" such as affordability, respectability, control over household decisions, trust, and domestic violence. She finds that the non-monetary factors that matter the most to African American women are affordability, respectability, and control. White women prioritize trust and domestic violence as they decide to marry or not.

Similarly, a 1993 study on the race differences on marital wellbeing focused on African American women, continuing the legacy of Wilson's 1987 model. The study concluded that African Americans receive fewer psychological benefits from marriage than their white counterparts, emphasizing that white women are likely to be more content with their marriages than are black women (Broman, 1993). The study went on to report that although it appears that emotional support and financial wellbeing play a role in the disparity between the satisfaction of white and black women, neither factor fully accounts for the difference (Broman, 1993).

Conclusions from Literature Review

A study of the academic studies on and explanations for the low occurrence of marriage in the African American community since the release of Wilson's theory of "marriageability" in 1987 reveals that nearly all research, regardless of the causal explanation for low rates of African American marriage, prioritizes the decision making process of African American women. This emphasis has important implications for the study of the effect of incarceration on the romantic relationships and household structures of African Americans because incarceration has been and will continue to be understood within this biased framework. As a result, this thesis aims to determine both the nature and potential explanations of the visible gender bias in research on African American romantic relationships in the context of incarceration body. Only after the sources and motivations of gender bias in this body of work are understood can they be corrected.

Empirical Research

Introduction:

Analyzed Studies

The empirical section of this thesis is an in-depth analysis of literature that focuses on incarcerated African American males and their romantic relationships. The analysis draws on twenty-four pieces of literature from a body of work that boasts at least 100 articles. The majority of these studies focus on the different explanations of the impact of a male's incarceration on African American romantic relationships. It should be noted that studies that voice male perspectives or include male-only interviews are overrepresented even though they are underrepresented in the overall literature. Because

this thesis focuses on the importance of male-perspectives in discussions of the nexus between incarceration and romantic relationships in the lives of African Americans, it takes great care to include these pieces of literature. Thus, the number of such studies featured here should not be thought to be characteristic of this body of research.

Description Criteria

Each study in this section is described using five criteria as listed in the empirical section. The function of these criteria is to briefly illustrate the nature and content of each piece of literature before it is analyzed. In particular, Criteria 5, “Limitations” is used to evaluate the existence of any flaws, gaps, or shortfalls in the research method that were unacknowledged by the original author. In the majority of the studies analyzed, limitations included the ambiguity of research questions, causative claims based merely on correlation, and failure to include male perspectives.

Mitigating Factor Categories

Mitigating factors determine analysis categories because they reveal important insights about the perspective of individual researchers. In describing the relationship between a past incarceration and future romantic relationship possibilities, each researcher identifies—whether unwittingly or explicitly—the mitigating factor that he/she feels is most salient in explaining the impact of these two critical life events on one another. Thus, each section comprises researchers and resulting research with similar interests and emphases.

Analyzing similar studies together is helpful in two different ways. First, it allows for logical comparisons and contrasts between studies in each section. Secondly, categorizing research with similar ideology allows for comparisons and contrasts to be made between studies. For instance, researchers that focus on incarceration’s intermediate impact on communities may have the propensity to display different gender-biases from researchers that focus on economic status as a mitigating factor. Below, studies are analyzed according to these categories, beginning with studies that prioritize communities.

Incarceration’s Impact on Romantic Relationships through Communities (2)

Of the 24 studies, only two focused on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships through the scope of incarceration’s impact on communities. Because these researchers’ focus is nearly singularly focused on the larger realm of neighborhoods and communities, romantic relationships are discussed sparingly.

STUDY	TYPE	DATA	QUESTION	CONCLUSIONS	LIMITATIONS
1. “Death by a Thousand Little Cuts” from <u>Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse.</u>	A study on 100 people in Frenchtown and South City, Florida.	Discussion of ethnographic data	How does incarceration affect neighborhoods?	Relationship between men and women change after incarceration, a respondent says. Unknown how or why.	Unknown what questions researcher specifically asked respondents

2. "Bearing the Burden: How Incarceration Weakens Inner-City Communities"	Research Paper	A literature review of the ways in which incarceration destabilizes inner-city communities and families	Does incarceration weaken inner-city communities? How?	Incarceration affects African American romantic relationships through "marrigeability" model, sex ratios, attitudes of formerly incarcerated males	None
---	----------------	---	--	--	------

Gender Bias Analysis in Studies with Communities as Mitigating Factors

Researchers Rose, Clear, and Ryder authored "Death by a Thousand Little Cuts" from Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse, an ethnographic study of 100 people from the predominantly African-American areas of Frenchtown and South City, Florida. Authors chose this area because incarceration rates have become exceptionally high in recent years. Describing the results of the ethnographic survey, researchers mentioned that relationships between men and women "change" after incarceration, according to a participant. The relationship between incarceration and romantic relationships is barely discussed further and no further causal claims are given. This observation, without any qualifying information or an attempt to quantify it, is not particularly helpful in understanding the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships, however it does reveal that the authors feel that incarceration's impact on relationships is merely a consequence, or a secondary effect of its impact on communities.

In Joan Moore's article, "Bearing the Burden: How Incarceration Weakens Inner-City Communities," the researcher documents the correlation between increasing levels

of incarceration and a general weakening of communities. She goes a step further in asserting that incarceration's various impacts on romantic relationships are secondary effects of incarceration's impact on the wider community. The researcher states that incarceration affects African American romantic relationships in multiple, specific ways, through forces that are arguably attributable to its wider impact. First, incarceration reduces marriage rates through Wilson's Marriageability Model by lowering overall economic desirability of black men in the perspective of prospective black female mates. Secondly, incarceration reduces the raw ratio of black men to black women in a given community, which has a profound impact on marriage choices. Finally, the experience of incarceration also affects African American men in profound ways. It causes them to adopt an indifference towards marriage characterized by the 'cool pose', creating a community of men that are emotionally unavailable. These factors, which can be viewed on a grand scale through the scope of a community, impact the quality and quantity of African American romantic relationships.

Incarceration's Impact on Romantic Relationships through Sex-Ratios (4)

Overall, studies that focused on the skewing of sex-ratios as an intermediate effect of incarceration tended to place African American men in the primary decision-making role while making African American women secondary decision-makers. Sex-ratio skews occur when African American men are imprisoned and physically taken out of a given community. When men are taken out of a community, the ratio of African American men to women becomes unbalanced.

When there are an equal amount of men and women in a given community, the sex-

ratio of men to women is 100. For a number of factors including incarceration, health outcomes, and homicide rates, African American communities have consistently low sex-ratios. As researchers Fossett and Kiecolt report in “Mate Availability and Marriage Among African Americans,” “The mean sex ratio of noninstitutionalized Black men to women ages 16 and older in 270 U.S. metropolitan areas in 1980 is 90.7” When employment is taken into consideration, sex-ratios become increasingly low. Kiecolt and Fossett go on to write that, “The corresponding sex ratio for those areas, computed based on Black men in the labor force, is 65.4.” Citing the imbalance of males and females in many African American communities, researchers that focused on sex-ratios as the mitigating factor argue that it is one of the most important impacts of incarceration on African American romantic relationships.

STUDY	TYPE	DATA	QUESTION	CONCLUSIONS	LIMITATIONS
1. “Death by a Thousand Little Cuts” from <u>Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse.</u>	Research Paper	Presents research from quantitative studies	“What is the effect of incarceration on marriage?”	Incarceration produces “a large ratio of adult women to men.” This may empower men.	None
2. “ Sex and the Single Black Woman”	Discussion of research	A literature review of quantitative research	N/A	Incarceration empowers men because it skews the ratio of free men to women.	None
3. “The Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration”	Discussion of research	Review of quantitative and qualitative research	What are the neglected and hidden repercussions of heightened	Prison decreases likelihood of marriage for black men over 23 years old.	None

			incarceration rates?	Also lowers level of “marriageable” men	
4. “Mate Availability and Unmarried Parent Relationships”	Study	Quantitative analysis of U.S. Census Data and the Fragile Families study	Shortage of black men influences formation, quality, and trajectory of unmarried parent relationships?	The more mate options that men have, the lower the quality of romantic relationships. Findings uphold Wilson’s thesis.	None.

Gender Bias Analysis in Studies with Sex-Ratios as Mitigating Factor

In “Death by a Thousand Little Cuts”, Todd Clear used quantitative studies to answer the broad question, “What is the effect of incarceration on marriage?” Clear determines, citing past research, that incarceration’s most important impact on romantic relationships is that it produces “a large ratio of adult women to men” (Clear, pg. 97). After establishing this correlation, Clear goes a step further, explaining that incarceration lowers the number of available men in a given community because of the physical distance and limitations that it imposes on incarcerated men. Clear theorizes, briefly, that the effect of a skewed ratio between African American women and men may result in increased empowerment for men, who are able to navigate through multiple romantic relationships without committing to a monogamous marriage.

In “The Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration,” Clear echoes his past research and endeavors to support his specific claims about sex-ratios with additional quantitative research. The researcher cites evidence that going to prison “substantially” lowers the likelihood of marriage, particularly for black men over 23 years old. In addition, however, Clear takes the perspective of African American women in discussing

the ramifications of a skewed sex ratio. He gives voice to the sex-ratio theory as introduced by Wilson: that incarceration lowers the number of marriageable men and less black couples form as a result because women don't want to marry poorer men.

In Kristen Harknett's "Mate Availability and Unmarried Parent Relationships," the influence of Wilson's MMPI theory on the research questions and perspectives of consequent researchers is further displayed as Harknett demonstrates a focus on questions that relate strongly to Wilson's hypothesis. The researcher employed quantitative data analysis to determine whether or not a shortage of African American males, caused by incarceration, influences the "formation, quality, and trajectory of unmarried parent relationships". Harknett listed her findings, providing a non-gender specific explanation, writing, "in marriage markets that favor women [where the number of men is greater than the number of women] relationships seem to be of better quality". Her finding, and its implications give weight to the theories proposed by Wilson and reinforced by Clear while taking a gender-neutral stance.

The fourth piece of literature that focuses on sex-ratios as an impact of incarceration on romantic relationships relies Wilson's terminology while casting men as the decision makers in gender-relations similarly to Todd Clear's "Death by a Thousand Little Cuts." An article in the *Economist* entitled, "Sex and the Single Black Woman: How the mass incarceration of black men hurts black women" heavily cites a study by Dr. Charles Kerwin and Dr. Luoh Ming on the impact of incarceration on the marriage market of African American females. The article, like the underlying research, first focuses on economics and sex-ratios—much like Wilson's MMPI Theory. The authors state that incarceration reduces the number of "marriageable" (in strictly economic terms)

African American men to African American women. This unbalance in available partners, the author argues, leads to a lower quality of romantic relationships.

The discussion of the implications of this skewed-ratio, however, present a departure from the usual conception of black romantic relationships. *The Economist* writer illustrates a different picture of what happens with a simple scenario:

Imagine that the world consists of 20 men and 20 women, all of them heterosexual and in search of a mate. Since the numbers are even, everyone can find a partner. But what happens if you take away one man? With 20 women pursuing 19 men, one woman faces the prospect of spinsterhood. So she ups her game. Perhaps she dresses more seductively. Perhaps she makes an extra effort to be obliging. Somehow or other, she “steals” a man from one of her fellow women. That newly single woman then ups her game, too, to steal a man from someone else. A chain reaction ensues. Before long, every woman has to try harder, and every man can relax a little.

In this way, the writer echoes Clear’s first article while continuing to draw from the terminology and theories of William Wilson. The result is that the common perception of African American romantic relationships are re-imagined—men are finally given the opportunity to be decision makers while women, for once, take the backseat. This conception of gendered relationships, although not adequate alone, balances the perspectives voiced in literature about the nexus of incarceration and intimate relationships for black Americans.

Incarceration, Fatherhood and Family Relationships, & Romantic Relationships (7)

Of the twenty-four pieces of literature that were analyzed, nearly a third focused on incarcerated or formerly incarcerated African American males primarily as fathers, intending to overlook and sometimes minimize their roles as partners within marital, co-parenting, and other potentially romantic relationships. This approach is understandable

in light of the fact that a large amount of the social policy concerns that are raised concerning the soaring rates of incarceration of African American males have focused on the impact that the absence of a father makes in the lives of the children he leaves behind.

The studies analyzed in this section were principally concerned with once-incarcerated African American males because of their paternal roles within the family structure, or only directed questions towards the male that related to his perspectives as a parent. As a result, these studies look at the relationship between incarceration, fatherhood, and romantic relationships in two ways. Some depict romantic relationships as simply part of the family relationships that incarceration impacts. Other studies focus on a man’s romantic relationship as a mediating factor between his incarceration and his ability to parent.

STUDY	TYPE	DATA	QUESTION	CONCLUSIONS	LIMITATIONS
1. “Incarcerated men and Their Children: Study Report”	Study	Qualitative survey of attitudes of incarcerated men as parents.	Are incarcerated men interested in their children and families?	Marital status is mentioned as a confounding factor	Marital status is not studied further
2. “The Unintended Impacts of Sentencing Guidelines on Family Structure”	A study analyzing three data sets	Quantitative analysis	Do sentencing reforms impact family structures?	Incarceration rates don’t directly impact family structures; sex-ratios do	None
3. “From One Generation to the Next: How Criminal Sanctions Are Reshaping Family Life in Urban America”	Study on families from the District of Columbia	Discussion of ethnographic data	Researchers have a broad and unstated focus	Incarceration strains marital relationships. No theories presented.	Structure of inquiry process is unclear
4. <u>Doing time on the</u>	Study	Ethnographic	Both men	Unknown	Ambiguity of

Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in Urban America		data from families in D.C.	and women talk about romantic relationships		questions
5. “Criminal Incarceration Dividing the Ties that bind: Black Men and their Families”	Research Paper	A literature review of incarceration’s impact on kinship and familial bonds	How does incarceration strain the relationship between black men and families?	Incarceration causes emotional and financial strain	Perspectives of black men are never surveyed
6. “Incarcerated African American Fathers”	Study	Qualitative data analysis of 12 black incarcerated males	How does incarceration impact fatherhood role?	10/12 men volunteer information about partners	Men are not asked directly about romantic relationships
7. “Incarceration in Fragile Families”	Literature Review	Review of both qualitative and quantitative research	What is the effect of incarceration on fragile families?	Incarceration affects romantic partners mentally, socially, economically.	None.

Incarceration, Romantic Relationships, and Fatherhood

Studies that focus on incarceration’s impact on fatherhood relationships sometimes unwittingly shine light on the relationships between African American men and their female spouses, co-parents, or partners, particularly since the strength and quality of the relationship between an incarcerated male and his child’s mother is a key determinant of the ability of an incarcerated male to stay in contact with his children during his prison or jail sentence (Wildeman and Western, 2010) The relationship between an incarcerated male and his child’s mother is particularly important because

staying in touch with an inmate is a difficult endeavor in terms of time, cost, and convenience. In order for contact to be feasible, it must be facilitated by an adult.

This adult is most often the child's mother, although in some cases another family member takes on this role. Adult facilitation is necessary for the maintenance of inmate-child relationships because every mode of communication with an inmate is costly and inconvenient. Calls to prisons are collect only, representing a high cost of nearly \$1.00/minute to the families of the incarcerated (Wildeman and Western, 2010). Letters, when written must be mailed and the time between receipt and delivery is slowed by the security precautions of the correction center. Finally, inmates are housed at an average of 100 miles from their original homes (Wildeman and Western, 2010), additionally contributing to the difficulty and expense of face-to-face visits.

Gender Bias Analysis in Studies with Fatherhood as a Mitigating Factor

Because of the emotional and economic cost of keeping contact with an inmate, the role of a co-parent, the child's mother, cannot be understated. Thus, studies that seek to understand the relationship between inmates and their children are incomplete without an analysis of the relationship between the co-parents. Despite the study's singular focus on parent-child relationships, Gary Mendez partially addressed this concern in "Incarcerated men and Their Children: Study Report" by listing "Marital Status" as a confounding factor in explaining the impact of an incarceration on a man's ability to be a father. Mendez's acknowledgment is cursory at best, however, it at least points future researchers in the direction of untangling this important, and little-understood z-factor. Unfortunately, Mendez's own report is at best an incomplete picture without this key input.

In Browning, Miller, and Spruance's "Criminal Incarceration Dividing the Ties that bind: Black Men and their Families," a more explicit and researched link is provided between incarceration, romantic relationships, and fathering while imprisoned. In this article, the authors review a study of the wives and girlfriends of incarcerated black men as part of the discussion of incarceration's effect on family strength and structure. However, despite the good intentions of these researchers in researching this important link, they fail to give voice to the perspectives of African American men. Although the women's interviews do important work in establishing the link between romantic relationships and father-child relationships for incarcerated men, the perspectives of incarcerated African American men are not surveyed or voiced. Admittedly, one researcher cannot talk to everyone about everything, however, the failure of these researchers to note this omission as a potential weakness is misleading because it presents a partial perspective as a holistic view African American romantic relationships.

In a final examination of the intermediary impact of romantic relationships, Brad Tripp's "Incarcerated African American Fathers: Exploring changes in Family Relationships and the Father Identity" featured the ethnographic data from twelve incarcerated African American fathers. Tripp sought to answer the question, "How does incarceration change the family relationships and father identity of an incarcerated African American man?" Despite the broad nature of his question, Tripp focused primarily on incarceration's impact on father-child relationships. However, ten out of the twelve interviewees brought up their relationships with their wives/girlfriends in order to

describe the family conflict that has resulted from their incarcerations, unwittingly establishing the inextricable nature of romantic and strictly familial relationships.

Wives and girlfriends were discussed in terms of their roles in producing stress for the incarcerated men and as an area in which men felt disempowered particularly because of infidelity issues or the perception of these issues. In addition, ten of the twelve men that were interviewed voluntarily began to discuss their relationships with their wives and girlfriends as mediating factors in their relationships with their children. The men saw a positive, causal relationship between the quality of their romantic relationships with their children's mothers and their ability to remain in contact with their children, resulting in either good or bad relationships with their children. This pervading voluntary admission speaks to the impossibility of isolating discussions of fatherhood from discussions of romantic relationships.

Together, Mendez, Browning et al, and Tripp's studies highlight the importance of female and male perceptions of the role of romantic relationships in parent-child relationships. Drawing respectively from gender-neutral and female or male-specific perspectives, the three studies create a well-rounded perspective of a little-researched role of romantic relationships. The three studies in the context of one another showcase the importance of including all parties in a given discussion and the richer understanding that can result from balanced contributions.

Incarceration and Romantic Relationships in the Family

Of the seven studies that focused on family relationships, four described romantic relationships as merely a part of the greater family relationships that incarceration

impacts. Each of these four studies primarily focused on family relationships and only briefly discussed romantic relationships. Perhaps because of this focus, this area of research displays particular parity in gendered perspectives.

Analysis of Gender Bias in Studies with Families as Mitigating Factors

Many studies that focus on the broader range of familial relationships silence the voices of African American men in the realm of romantic relationships. These studies either fail to include formerly incarcerated African American men entirely or only report the perspectives of formerly incarcerated African American men when they relate to their children, while reporting the holistic perspectives of their African American female partners about both parenting and romantic relationships. In Braman and Wood's study, "From One Generation to the Next: How Criminal Sanctions Are Reshaping Family Life in Urban America," from Prisoners Once Removed, the researchers conduct interviews with families from the District of Columbia. Here, the researchers focus on the broad spectrum of familial relationships, which also encompass romantic relationships. The researchers conclude that incarceration strains marital relationships without explaining how or why. However, only the perspectives of women are presented regarding romantic relationships while quotes by male participants focus only on parent-child relationships. This unbalance contributes to a skewed perspective of the dynamics of relationships under the stress of an incarceration of the male partner.

For instance, one interviewee, Kenny, talks in depth about his relationship with his children and the difficulties of incarceration and even paints a detailed picture of his relationship with his mother. However, his views on his partnership or lack thereof with

the mother of his children remain unexplored. Other men are also interviewed with the same, peculiar omission. In noticeable contrast, however, African American women, like Olivia (Braman, 2004) speak in depth about their relationships with incarcerated black men in addition to giving their opinions. The result is that the interviewed men are only understood as fathers and sons, but not as romantic partners, leaving a critical gap in their identities.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that it is unclear whether or not this bias is the fault of the researchers. It is unclear whether men were simply not asked about romantic relationships or if they simply did not bring up these relationships. There also is a chance that they did speak about these relationships but their perspectives were not included in this particular piece of literature. Because this specific presentation of ethnographic data silences the researcher, leaving out any question prompts that were provided, while focusing only on the answers of the participants, it is difficult to tell if researchers or participants are the source of the visible gender bias.

Similarly, in Donald Braman's Doing time on the Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in Urban America, men give very little information about the nature of the hardships that romantic relationships endure during incarceration. In this study, the ethnographer reports extensive ethnographic data, again, from families from the District of Columbia. In the distinctive fashion of ethnography, no theories are given by researcher about the phenomena that is reported and the questions that the researchers asks are not revealed. Instead, although men and women are given the chance to talk about the impact that an incarceration has made on their personal romantic relationships, very little information is featured. Without exception, all respondents characterize the

impact as negative, and difficult. However, the other ways that men or women qualify the impact of incarceration on their romantic relationships are left out while their discussions of the impact on wider familial relationships are prioritized.

Literature that avoided gendered-bias often featured quantitative rather than qualitative studies. Researchers of this literature simply reported their findings and stopped short of explaining the phenomena that they reported. In “The Unintended Impacts of Sentencing Guidelines on Family Structure”, Myers, Wilkins, and Humphrey test the theory that sentencing reforms impact family structures. They analyze data from three data sets: 1) the National Longitudinal Survey on Youth for 1985 and 1994 merged with the Urban Institute 1980 and 1990 Underclass database and the 1984 and 1993 National Correctional Report Program, 2) merged data from the Current Population Survey for 1985 and 1995 state level data, and 3) data collected from inmates entering the Minnesota Prison system in 1997 and 1998 from the Minnesota Crime Survey and the 1990 Census. Using this data, the researchers find that the impact of incarceration on family structures is indirect—while incarceration does not have a statistically significant impact on family structure, it does have a significant impact on sex-ratios, which do impact the formation of family structures. The implication of these researcher’s findings, although unstated, is that Wilson was right statistical relationship between sex-ratios and marriage—an unsurprising finding in light of the fact that Wilson, too, did quantitative analysis and found trends that supported his thesis. Dissimilar to Wilson’s approach, however, these researchers do not discuss *why* and *how* sex ratios impact marriage. They stop after establishing correlation and avoided any potential for gender bias by not

offering explanations for their findings by rather focusing solely on the findings themselves.

Finally, in “Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Re-Entry,” Wildeman and Western represent literature reviews that also avoid gendered-bias while presenting important findings. Similar to the “The Unintended Impacts of Sentencing Guidelines on Family Structure,” this review was very fact-based at the expense of explaining the motivations behind the finding that were presented. Although each review enumerated the hardships encountered by the partners of incarcerated men, they did not similarly voice the relational hardships experienced by the incarcerated men themselves. Thus, even this quantitative analysis displays some gendered bias in favor of women.

Incarceration’s Impact on Romantic Relationships through Economic Status (4)

A sixth of the 24 studies that were reviewed for this thesis focused on incarceration’s impact on romantic relationships through economics. In general, researchers that subscribed to this model established a negative relationship between a male’s past incarceration and his future economic prospects. This lowered economic value, many argued, underpinned the reduction in marriage rates and perhaps also impacted other forms of romantic relationships for African Americans.

STUDY	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Criteria 5
1. “The Effect of Employment on Marriage Among Black males in	Study	Quantitative. Retrospective event-history data collected by National	How does employment affect marriage rates for black males	Employment levels and marriage rates have positive, causal relationship	Not all of the men in this sample had been incarcerated

Inner-City Chicago”		Opinion Research Center	in inner-city Chicago?		
<u>2. The Truly Disadvantaged</u>	Study and discussion of past research	Analysis of quantitative national data	Men nor women are asked about perspectives	Incarceration and resulting unemployment reduce marriage rates because males are less ‘marrigeable’. Creates the Male Marriageable Index Pool	Failure to consider male agency in marriage decisions
3. “Male Incarceration, the Marriage Market and Female Outcomes”	Study	Quantitative data analysis of national trends of education, incarceration for males and females	How does incarceration affect the marriage market for females?	Incarceration makes the marriageable pool of men smaller for women.	Causal claims based only on correlation. Potentially biased description of gendered interactions.
4. “Barriers to Marriage and Parenthood for African American Men & Women”	Research paper	Literature review of African American barriers to marriage	What are the true barriers to marriage for African Americans?	Incarceration impacts African American romantic relationships by lowering male ‘marrigeability’	Reliance on theories with potential gender bias (Wilson)

Analysis of Gender Bias in Studies with Economics as Mitigating Factor

It would be impossible to discuss the link between incarceration, economics, and marriage without first referring to William Julius Wilson. In The Truly Disadvantaged, Wilson conducts both a quantitative analysis of national African American incarceration

and marriage trends, but also goes a step further to introduce the Marriageable Male Index Pool (MMPI), a key theory that influenced, facilitated, and perhaps biased later research in the nexus between incarceration and family structure for African Americans. Wilson notes the decline in African American marriage rates and seeks to explain the decline in economic terms. The MMPI relates to the number of economically attractive African American male partners available to African American women. The lower this number of males, the fewer marriages that will ensue because women will not want to tie themselves to economic failures. Incarceration affects the economic viability of men because a past criminal record makes one less employable. In this way, Wilson explains the correlation between lowering marriage rates and heightening numbers of incarcerated African American males through the perspective of the preferences of African American women.

Taking Wilson's assertion of the negative relationship between heightening incarceration rates and declining economic status, Mark Testa and Marilyn Krogh test only the first link in Wilson's theory—the impact of employment on marriage. In “The Effect of Employment on Marriage Among Black males in Inner-City Chicago” from Decline in Marriage Amongst African Americans, the researchers quantified retrospective event-history data collected by National Opinion Research Center. In this way, researchers used ethnographic data to conduct quantitative analyses of the perspectives of African American men, resulting in the helpful consolidation and translation of past ethnographical data. They sought to uncover the ways in which employment, which is negatively influenced by incarceration, affects marriage rates for black males in inner-city Chicago.

The researchers found that, from the self-reports of the men interviewed, employment levels and marriage rates have a positive, causal relationship, which in turn would imply that incarceration and marriage rates will have a negative relationship. As a result, their findings provide partial, favorably evidence for Wilson’s hypothesis and follow a similar, gender-specific bias of perspectives.

Similarly, in “Male Incarceration, the Marriage Market, and Female Outcomes” Kerwin and Ming analyze the national trends of education and incarceration for males and females. Drawing directly from Wilson’s theory, the researchers seek to discover how incarceration affects the “marriage market” for females, borrowing Wilson’s now-famous terminology. Kerwin and Ming find that incarceration makes the “marriageable”—or economically successful—pool of African American men smaller for African American women. The result is that, not only do women marry less, but when they do, they marry less desirable socio-economic partners.

In a final testament to the pervading impact of the Wilson Hypothesis, particularly in the scholarly evaluation of the links between incarceration, economic status, and African romantic relationships, Vicky O’Connor focuses on the ‘Marrigeability’ of African American men in “Barriers to Marriage and Parenthood for African American Men & Women”. Her language, perspectives, and conclusions echo Wilson’s in The Truly Disadvantaged. Through a literature review of the barriers to marriage that African Americans face, she discounts common misconceptions that assume that African Americans simply don’t want to get married and instead employs economic arguments to explain the decreasing rate of African American marriages.

O'Connor finds that incarceration impacts African American romantic relationships by lowering the 'marriageability' of African American males. Men that have been incarcerated are less likely to be hired, and thus are a worse, less desirable option for African American women searching for a marriage partner.

Together, the four studies that focused on incarceration's economic impact on romantic relationships indicate that this particular 'mitigating factor' is typically discussed in a manner that prioritizes the expectations of African American women. As a result, the perspectives of African American men as they enter into or refuse to enter into marriages and other romantic relationships are not voiced. For instance, although it has been established that incarceration's economic impact is nearly always in the form of lowering the employment prospects of African American males, it is unclear that the only way that this decrease in economic status impacts marriage rates is through the perspective of African American women. For instance, males could become more reluctant to take on the role of a financial provider in light of their dimmed financial futures. Singularly viewing the relationship between incarceration, economics, and relationships through the traditional Wilson perspective precludes research on this alternative possibility.

Incarceration's Direct Impact on Romantic Relationships (7)

Seven of the twenty-four studies examined the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships without discussing any other mitigating factors or placing romantic relationships in the context of other phenomena. Together, these studies are markedly different from other analysis categories in that they display a perspective

bias that favors *men*. There are two potential reasons for this phenomenon. First, as has been admitted, there was a marked sampling bias in choosing studies for this analysis. Because this thesis recommends that increased research into male perspectives of the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships be conducted, there is a greater representation of these studies in this particular literature analysis than in the wider body of literature on this topic.

Secondly, it could be possible that this particular view of incarceration and romantic relationships—as being a direct relationship without mitigating factors—particularly lends itself to research that prioritizes the perspectives of African American males. Because of the preponderance of the selection bias, however, it is unclear why this particular section of research looks different than the others.

Of the seven studies that are analyzed in this section, only two can be described as ‘gender-neutral’ in that the perspectives of both men and women are either equally showcased or equally unspoken.

STUDY	TYPE	DATA	QUESTION	CONCLUSION	LIMITATIONS
1. “Incarceration and the Bonds Between Parents in Fragile Families”	Study	Analysis of ethnographic data from Families and Child Wellbeing Study	Both mothers and father are speak about romantic relationships	Unknown	Unknown what questions researcher specifically asked respondents

2. “Incarceration, Marriage and Family Life”	Study	Quantitative Analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY), and the Fragile Families Survey of Child Wellbeing	N/A	Relationship between Incarceration and Marriage is negative and causal in both directions	Unclear which gender is the decision-maker
3. “Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Re-Entry”	Literature Review	Review of qualitative and quantitative literature	Policy brief on the ‘hidden costs’ of sentencing policies.	Incarceration alters romantic relationships through physical, emotional, and mental distance.	None.
4. “Incarceration and the Formation and Stability of Marital Unions”	Study	Event history analysis of 2,041 unmarried men from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth	What is a male’s incarceration’s effect on his probability of getting married and staying married?	Incarceration’s aggregate, long-term effect is minimal	None
5. Incarceration and Partner Relationships	Study	Analysis of qualitative data from 20 fathers in Fathers and Families Resource and Research Center study	How do men’s perceptions of partner support shape their intimate relationships?	Incarceration presented a ‘critical change’ in existing romantic relationships.	None
6. “African American Males’ Attitudes toward Marriage: An Exploratory	Study	Qualitative study of the attitudes of African American	What are the nature of African American	Attitudes of black men are generally positive towards	None

Study”		males towards marriage	male attitudes towards marriage?	marriage, although “they do not believe that it is for everyone”	
7. “Imprisonment, Re-Entry, and Intimate Partner Violence”	Study	Selected reports from previous study on African American re-entry and intimate partner violence	How does a past incarceration contribute to intimate partner violence between formerly incarcerated men and their female partners?	Incarceration greatly increases the likelihood of violence because of pent-up emotions on the part of the males regarding sexual infidelity or their suspicions of it.	None

Analysis of Gender Bias in Studies without Mitigating Factor

In Weiman and Pattillo’s “Incarceration and the Bonds Between Parents in Fragile Families” from Imprisoning America, the researchers presented a balanced view of the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships in their analysis of ethnographic data from the Families and Child Wellbeing Study. In this research, both mothers and fathers were given a chance to comment on romantic relationships, presenting a holistic view of relationships in the context of the incarceration of a male partner. However, perhaps because of the inherent nature of ethnographies, the researchers draw no conclusions about the overall impact of incarceration on romantic relationships and do not seek to illuminate the nature of the interactions between incarcerated men and their significant others outside of presenting the ethnographic data. The result is that though

this presentation is balanced, very few conclusions can be readily drawn from its contents.

The second study devoid of gender bias accomplishes this end by while presenting important information. In “Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Re-Entry,” Travis, McBride, and Solomon present a literature reviews on the ‘hidden’ costs of American sentencing policies in the form of a policy brief and determine that these hidden costs are relational. Fortunately, unlike Weiman and Patillo, these researchers manage to present important findings while avoiding gendered assumptions.

In “Families Left Behind,” the three authors argue that intimate relationships undergo great obstacles as the result of an incarceration. They conclude that incarceration alters romantic relationships specifically through physical, emotional, and mental distance. In particular, they argue that lack of conjugal or extended visits exacerbates relational problems between incarcerated men and their partners. Finally, the authors suggest that the incarceration of a male partner makes female partners more self-sufficient and alters each partner’s perception of their role within the relationship, often resulting in the dissolution of the relationship. Despite the researcher’s ability to make concrete, founded conclusions, neither men nor women are placed solely in the role of a decision-maker. The authors highlight the fact that both men and women are decision-makers in their intimate relationships, and their research suggests that to cast either sex solely in the aggressive role is misleading.

The final gender-neutral study draws solely on quantitative data. Bruce Western’s, “Incarceration, Marriage, and Family Life” the prolific researcher conducts an analysis of

the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY), and the Fragile Families Survey of Child Wellbeing to determine the relationship between marriage and incarceration. Failing to comment on the correlations that he describes, Western simply determines that the relationship between incarceration and marriage is negative and causal in both directions. He finds that a prior marriage decreases the likelihood of a repeated incarceration and, conversely, incarceration decreases the likelihood of marriage.

Like Travis, McBride, and Solomon, Western succeeds in making important claims about the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships without taking a gender-specific viewpoint. Together, the three gender-neutral studies that address only the direct link between incarceration and marriage provide significant insight into the nature of the interaction between these two critical life-events.

Two studies reported ethnographic data from male-only participants. In “The Impact of Male Incarceration on Couple Relationships,” April McDowell reports the qualitative data of twenty fathers in the Fathers and Families Resource and Research Center study. McDowell endeavored to determine how men’s perceptions of support from their partners during incarceration and re-entry shaped their intimate relationships. In essence, she sought to make the link between perceptions of relationships and the outcome of them. She found that an incarceration presented a ‘critical change’ in existing romantic relationships for many of the male participants. Many of the men harbored intense distrust for their female partners. As a result of these feelings, many romantic relationships between co-parents dissolved following the incarceration and transitioned to ‘open’ or platonic partnerships.

Similarly, researchers Leonard Lopoo and Bruce Western conducted an event history analysis of 2,041 unmarried men from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Researchers used this data to determine incarceration's effect on the probability of an African American man getting married and staying married. The results were surprising: although incarceration has a large individual effect—it significantly reduces the likelihood of an individual getting married and substantially heightens the probability that he will divorce—its effects are not long-lived and have a small aggregate effect. A former incarceration increases rates of divorce and decreases rates of marriage for the individual for a limited period of time during and shortly after an incarceration. However, marriage rates normalize in the years after an incarceration. Thus, from a quantitative analysis of male-only data, it seems that the effect of incarceration on long-term marriage trends is negligible. This finding is contradictory to other studies analyzed. As a result, together, these analyses of past ethnographic data collections provide valuable insight about current phenomena.

The two remaining studies that featured male-only perspectives in the context of romantic relationships draw from analysis of qualitative studies. In Anthony King's "African American Males' Attitudes toward Marriage: An Exploratory Study," the researcher attempts to determine the nature of the attitudes of African American males towards marriage. Although the researcher does not focus specifically on incarceration as an impact on romantic relationships or African American male attitudes, he does note that incarceration skews the sex-ratio of men to women and may influence, as a result, attitudes towards monogamous relationships for African American males. In general, the researcher's focus on male-only participants allows him to uncover little researched facts

and overturn some myths. Contrary perhaps to popular belief, the researcher finds that the attitudes of black men are generally positive towards marriage, although ‘they do not believe that it is for everyone.’”

The final study in this analysis, “Imprisonment, Re-Entry, and Intimate Partner Violence” features selected reports from a study on African American re-entry and intimate partner violence. In this study, researchers William Oliver and Creasia Hairston seek to determine the impact of incarceration on intimate partner violence between formerly incarcerated men and their female partners. Despite the primary focus on violence within relationships, the researchers’ methodology presents a viable prototype for researchers that seek to determine the attitudes and perspectives of African American men towards romantic relationships as a whole. Not only are men asked to focus on their intimate relationships, but they are asked to recount their perspectives of their experiences—not merely the existence of certain events.

In the end, the researchers conclude that the experience of incarceration greatly increases the likelihood of violence because of pent-up emotions on the part of the males regarding sexual infidelity or their suspicions of it, echoing the findings of McDowell in “The Impact of Male Incarceration on Couple Relationships.” The importance of trust and anxiety over infidelity are critical factors in the romantic relationships of incarcerated men that are overlooked when models focus only on sex-ratios and economics or other explanations that favor the female perspective.

Overview of Empirical Results

Findings in the individual mitigating factor categories shine light on the nature and extent of gender-bias in literature on the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships. The individual findings become even more valuable when compared and contrasted with one another. In the conclusion of this thesis, new information is gained through such juxtaposition.

Conclusion

In determining whether or not current literature on the intersection between romantic relationships and incarceration adequately features the perspectives of African American men, I used literature evaluation and analysis to uncover new information. My research not only revealed important insights on the extent and nature of gender bias, but also pointed to possible explanations for the existence of this bias. In this section, I will compare the findings in each mitigating factor section to those in others, discuss the implications of my research through the assumptions of researchers, introduce the perspectives of independent professionals, and argue the importance of gender parity in research on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships in light of the impact of gender-bias in this area of research on past legislation.

Comparative Analysis of Mitigating Factors:

Placing the Findings in Context

In the following sections, findings of gender bias from each mitigating factor category in the empirical section are compared and contrasted. This comparative analysis uncovers valuable information about the nature of gender-bias within literature on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships. In general, each category of mitigating factors had a different quantity and quality of gender bias in favor of and sometimes even against female perspectives. Thus, the findings of each individual section become increasingly meaningful when the clusters are compared with one another.

Communities

Literature in this section was the most descriptive in its dealings with incarceration's effect on the romantic relationships of African Americans. In general, literature in this section relied entirely on describing the negative impacts of incarceration on romantic relationships but did not attempt to explain these impacts through theoretical models as did authors that emphasized Sex-ratios or Economics as mitigating factors. The result is that this section was analyzed to be without gender bias. Although the lack of gender bias may be influenced by the limited amount of information that authors in this section provided, a more probable explanation is that authors in this section took an aerial view of the African American relationship market that was not seen in other studies. Unlike authors that focused on Fatherhood and Family, researchers that prioritized Communities tried to step back from individual relationship decisions to try and

determine *what* happens—not why. Their approach resulted in a less biased, although also less informative, body of work.

Sex-Ratios

In terms of gender bias, literature in this section was balanced. This characterization is different from the lack of gender bias found in research on Communities as a mitigating factor in that gender bias *was* present in individual Sex-Ratio studies, however, in the overall literature both the perspectives of African American males and females were presented. Half the studies in this section focused on the perspective of women while the other half focused on the perspective of men. The result is that this body of work as a whole succeeds in presenting a holistic picture of the marriage and relationship market in the context of male incarceration for African Americans. Perhaps in the context of subject matter, gender balance in literature on Sex Ratios makes sense. Because of the nature of the Sex Ratio argument—that incarceration reduces the number of men in a given community and that there aren't enough remaining men to marry the available women—it may be more difficult to leave men out than in studies that focus on things like Economic status. Studies that focus on Economic Status must take *someone's* perspective (whether male or female) because economic status is a qualitative feature that must be perceived by someone else.

Women must perceive the difference between poor and rich men for this quality to have an impact on the marriage market. Either that, or rich and poor men must perceive their own status in order for this status to make a difference in their potential romantic relationships. Sex-ratios are more concrete—the men are either there, or they aren't, and their presence makes all the difference; the number of monogamous,

committed relationships is inherently moderated by the number of men (or women) in a given community. Thus, it is more difficult to leave male or females perspectives out when sex-ratios are being discussed.

Economics

Studies that focused on economics as a mitigating factor in incarceration's impact on African American romantic relationships exhibited more gender bias than any other study categories. Nearly without exception, these studies focused entirely on the perspectives of African American women to the exclusion of African American men. Following the theoretical framework of the Wilson hypothesis of the Marriageable Male Index Pool, researchers and writers nearly always claimed that economic status' effect on romantic relationships through incarceration was to make African American men less desirable as potential marriage partners.

The disproportionate amount of gender bias in studies that focused on Economic Status may be a direct effect of the preponderance of the influence of Wilson's Hypothesis. Because his 1987 writing on this area was the first well-researched attempt to inspect incarceration's effect on the marriage rates of the African American communities, its influence has been both broad and deep particularly in studies that focus specifically, as he did, on economic status as a mitigating factor. Thus, Wilson's writing may explain the disproportionate priority placed on female agency in theories under this literature category.

Family/Fatherhood

Literature that focused on Family and Fatherhood as an intermediary effect of incarceration on romantic relationships generally displayed gender-bias. However, the bias that was displayed was much different and perhaps less straightforward than in literature that focused on sex-ratios or economics. Often, gender-bias was exhibited in the questions that researchers asked of African American men versus women. Whereas men were usually only asked about their roles as fathers, brothers, and even sons, women were asked to answer questions about love, marriage, and romance as they are affected by incarceration. The result is that even though males were in the room and their perspectives were ultimately represented, researchers still displayed gender-bias.

Another interesting result of the nuanced gender-bias on the part of researchers particularly in this area are the results. Even though men are not asked about their perspectives in terms of romantic relationships, they manage to insert them. The result is that, even though there was less gender bias on the part of researchers than in an areas like Sex-Ratios or Communities, more in-depth findings of the nature of male perspectives are presented. Thus, the researchers' biased intentions do not necessarily retard the information collection process. This perhaps can be attributed at least in part to the methods that were commonly employed in Fatherhood studies—nearly all of the studies are ethnographic, which provides more space for a wide range of responses.

None

When there was no mitigating factor, the perspectives of African American men were not only presented, but prioritized. In general, studies in this section disproportionately focused on the perspectives of African American men, in some cases

excluding the perspectives of African American women. It is difficult to determine the source of this uncharacteristic bias. By over-representing the perspectives of African American males, this cluster of studies is markedly different from the body of work on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships in general.

The first apparent difference between these studies and all the rest is its defining characteristic—the lack of a mitigating factor. It is not very apparent why—beyond this obvious difference—these studies were more likely to talk to and about men. One potential explanation points back to the influence of the Wilson hypothesis on later theories on the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships. Although his influence was most apparent in studies that focused on economics, the continuing influence of Wilson is apparent in all literature on the impact of incarceration on black intimate relationships. Wilson shaped the conversation, and subsequent researchers have tended to work within the framework that he created: that incarceration affects an important input of romantic relationships (Communities, Sex-Ratios, Economic Status, Families) which in turn affects these romantic relationships. In not discussing a mitigating factor, researchers that talked about the direct impacts of incarceration through the changing of the emotions, perspectives, and existing relationships of incarcerated men differ from the others. By not focusing on middle impacts, they are forced to concentrate on the people involved. Perhaps, from this perspective, the voices of black men (the people that are actually incarcerated) are perceived to be more important than in other areas.

Overview of Conclusions from Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of findings from each of the five mitigating factor categories contextualized the findings from the empirical section. This secondary analysis

revealed that economic studies exhibited the greatest gender bias in favor of women whilst studies without a mitigating factor demonstrated the greatest gender bias in favor of men. In addition, studies that focused on the impact of skewed sex-ratios tended to be balanced in terms of male and female studies when taken as a whole, but individual studies displayed gender-bias that privileged either male or female perspectives. Unfortunately, very little information about the nature or extent of gender-bias was gained from studies that focused on communities. Perhaps the most important finding was the marked difference between studies without mitigating factors and studies with mitigating factor. A comparative analysis suggests that men are far more likely to be interviewed and respected when the researcher is not working within the confines of popular theoretical models. This finding may serve as a guideline for researchers interested in gaining the perspectives of men.

Researcher Assumptions

Potential Insights into the Sources of Gender Bias

In analyzing studies within mitigating factor categories, I found that literature that focused on women predominantly contained certain assumptions about male perspectives while literature that focused on males showcased different assumptions. The results provide important insight about the importance of a researcher's unstated assumptions in the results of the visible gender-bias in his or her work.

Assumptions in Literature that Focuses on Women

Authors of literature that focused predominantly on women tended to focus on the mitigating factors of Economics and Family relationships and made assumptions about

the nature and even existence of male perspectives of romantic relationships. In general, these authors made the assumption that African American men want to get married. Writers often took for granted that African American males desired marriage and were open to its possibility—in essence, all that stood in the way of these men was their economic status as perceived by unwilling African American women or the obstacle of the discord in these men’s wider family relationships.

In particular, authors that focused on Family and Fatherhood Relationships tended to assume that African American women could give them better information on their romantic relationships than men could. Repeatedly, researchers chose to feature the answers of women regarding their romantic relationships while only featuring the responses of men regarding their platonic familial relationships. The implication is the researchers preferred the perspectives of women regarding these relationships.

In studies that focused on Economic Status as a mitigating factor, researchers tended to assume that a male’s economic status is an important indicator of whether or not he is seen as marriageable to African American women. However, researchers also assumed that this status does not affect the male’s own desire to take on the potential financial responsibility of a wife. This assumption is particularly odd because it would seem that African American men, too, would factor their finances into their decision to marry. This potential impact on male desire for marriage, however, is left out.

Assumptions Literature that Focuses on Men

Literature that focused on African American men tended to make different assumptions about male perspectives and generally either focused on Sex-Ratios as a

mitigating factor or did not employ a mitigating factor at all. In general, authors that included male perspectives tended to make two common assumptions. First, researchers they assumed that the male perspective was qualitatively different from the female perspective. By simply making the choice to study men, researchers unconsciously asserted that they could gain different knowledge than had already been presented in the majority of studies on incarceration and African American romantic relationships, which tend to focus on female views.

Secondly, authors that focused on men implicitly did not take the male perspective for granted, as was often the case in literature that privileged female perspectives. In studies that either interviewed men or took their perspective, the researcher always treated male perspectives as a subject that should and could be defined. No assumptions were made about whether men want to engage in romantic relationships after being incarcerated. This assumption, although seemingly obvious, is significantly different from the assumptions found in work that focused on women.

Besides their common assumptions, authors that focused on either Sex-Ratios as a mitigating factor or the direct relationship between incarceration and African American romantic relationships tended to make differing implicit claims. Writers that prioritized Sex-Ratios as an important indicator of the relationship between incarceration and romance nearly always assumed that *both* men and women were decision-makers in romantic relationships. In addition, Sex-Ratio researchers did *not* assume that African American men want to get married. This is an important difference between these authors and researchers that focused on Economic Status.

In addition, authors that did not focus on a mitigating factor made assumptions about male perspectives. They tended to assume that romantic relationships are very important to men, that men are emotionally dependent on their significant others (especially while imprisoned), and that an incarceration changes male attitudes towards marriage and women in general. These assumptions vary markedly from the types of assumptions that authors that focused on women made. While authors that focused on women tended to assume that male opinions were either positive or barely existent, authors that focused men took for granted that males had strong preferences either for or against romantic relationships.

The utility of the second approach and its accompanying assumptions is exemplified in the unique, valuable findings of authors that focused on males. While throughout most of the literature on incarceration and African American romantic relationships very little information was gained specifically about men, in literature that focused on men we find that men are intensely and even obsessively worried about their romantic relationships while they are imprisoned. In particular, men are concerned about infidelity issues. Their powerlessness to ensure their partner's faithfulness results in attitudes that vary from feigned indifference to violent rage (McDowell, 2007). These findings change the perception of African American men from indifferent, happy-go-lucky participants to conflicted decision-makers and even victims in romantic relationships that have been impacted by an incarceration.

Practical Obstacles to Gender-Parity in Research: Expert Opinions

In order to include the perspectives of researchers of African American incarceration, romantic relationships, or both, three researchers were consulted during the

course of the writing of this thesis: Dr. Earl Smith from Wake Forest, Dr. Kim Blankenship of Duke University, and Dr. William Darity, also from Duke University. Each researcher was asked to shine light on any potential practical or logistical factors that could contribute to the unbalanced representation of female and male perspectives in literature that focuses on the impact on an incarceration on African American romantic relationships. In terms of their opinions on practical explanations for the lack of male perspective in current literature, the researchers showed surprising consensus around two areas.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Without exception, the researchers mentioned the hardship of gaining IRB approval as an obstacle to conducting research with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated African American men. According to the IRB, these men are considered vulnerable populations because they suffer the stigma of being ex-convicts. The researchers reasoned that the time consuming nature of writing IRB protocols and waiting for an approval or (likely) rejection could discourage and even prevent potential research that targets these groups of men. The difficulty of being approved to target incarcerated or formerly incarcerated men for research is compounded by an interview's subject matter: romantic relationships. Questioning these already vulnerable men about intensely personal parts of their lives introduces the risk of emotional distress or the critical loss of privacy if the researcher's data is compromised. These additional factors are ones that researchers must take into consideration before proposing to do research and may be obstacles if they decide to go ahead with this type of work.

Demand for Female Perspectives in Research

The researchers' claims about IRB approval as an obstacle explain the low levels of studies in which incarcerated or formerly incarcerated male participants are questioned. However, the obstacle of IRB approval does not shine light on why writers choose to focus on women theoretically, particularly in literature that focuses on Economic Status or Sex-Ratios as determinants of the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships.

Luckily, the researchers had an answer to this conundrum. Most asserted that research is motivated by demand. In the case of the impact of incarceration on romantic relationships, the demand is mostly female. African American women, not men, have been most vocal about the changing relationship market and marriage probabilities. This disparity in demand, they commonly remarked, may have something to do with sex-ratios. Partially because of high male incarceration rates, there are nearly always more women in a given African American community than men. The result of this imbalance may be that men have more leverage—they have little incentive to engage in monogamous relationship and if one relationship fails, another woman is usually available. Thus, some researchers theorized, men aren't complaining because the relationship market favors them. They have little to say.

Researchers also commonly noted that because of this disparate demand, research, as it is reported in op-ed and short articles, is usually published in popular African American magazines such as *Ebony* and *Jet* that women, not men, read. Thus, researchers have an incentive to target audiences that exist when designing and carrying out their

studies. And as one researcher remarked, catering to willing audiences may not be a bad thing. Researchers are responding to the group that is asking questions and are providing answers. That is arguably exactly what research is supposed to do. However, the downside of this relationship between the researcher and his audience is that sometimes answers targeted to only one perspective risk silencing other valuable explanations of the world.

Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the practical barriers to conducting research that includes the perspectives of African American men, the importance of gender parity in the body of knowledge on incarceration and black romantic relationships begs that this work be done. The findings of this thesis suggest that mitigating factors may have a significant role in determining the representation of the male perspective in a given study. Since some mitigating factors, like economics and fatherhood, seem to lend themselves more to gender-bias, researchers may be able to focus better on men by prioritizing research in other areas such as the direct relationship between incarceration and African American romantic relationships or the importance of Sex-Ratios in explaining the impact of incarceration on romance.

Besides changing the focus of their literature, authors can also include the male perspective simply by ensuring that African American men are asked about their romantic relationships. Researchers of family relationships should make a conscious effort to interview African American men about their relationships with their spouses, co-parents, and significant others. Of course, these recommendations are easier said than done, as they would require researchers to jump through the multiple hoops of IRB

protocol approval and endure the costly delay of intended research. However, the importance of this research is well worth these inconveniences.

Policy Implications of Gender Parity in Research

Despite the difficulties of ensuring that male perspectives are equally privileged in research on the impact of incarceration on African American romantic relationships, flaws in current policy point to the necessity of this initiative. The importance of gender-parity in research on African American romantic relationships hinges on the relationship between policy and research.

When asked why he felt that the representation of male perspectives in research was important, Dr. Earl Smith of Wake Forest University cited the punitive economic policies that follow African American men after they are released from corrections facilities. He asserted that if only female perspectives are being voiced in an area that has been identified for policy, the policies that are produced or justified by research will only reflect the needs and concerns of African American women.

Dr. Smith's concerns were echoed in an interview with Mr. Dennis Gaddy, the executive director of the Community Success Initiative in Raleigh, North Carolina. The Community Success Initiative is a recidivism agency that provides training and resources to predominantly black, recently released offenders in the Triangle Area of North Carolina. Mr. Gaddy argued that the lack of black male voices in research results in excessively punitive economic policies for ex-offenders that discourage the participation of formerly-incarcerated African American men in the lives of their partners and children.

Punitive Economic Policies for Ex-Offenders

The punitive economic policies that Dr. Smith and Mr. Gaddy referred to are composed of federal laws that deny civil and economic benefits to offenders and state policies that make incarcerated men liable for child support payments during their incarceration. Although these economic policies affect all formerly incarcerated persons, these restrictions have particular impact in the lives of African American men because these men are most likely to be incarcerated. In addition, punitive economic policies have greater impact in the lives of Black men because their rate of employment is markedly lower than Hispanics and Whites (Holzer, Offner, Sorensen, 2005), resulting in greater financial vulnerability.

Restrictive Economic Policies

National laws restrict formerly incarcerated persons from gaining assistance for everything from housing to education. In “Collateral Consequences of Punishment: Civil Penalties Accompanying Formal Punishment,” Hugh LaFollette highlights some of the 140 social and economic restrictions that formerly incarcerated persons face in receiving federal assistance after being released from prison:

- In six states a felon can never hold public employment.
- Federal law forbids felons from holding many government jobs or receiving federal contracts.
- People convicted of a drug felony can be denied all forms of federal assistance, including food stamps. Although states can opt out or narrow the focus of these penalties, only twelve states have entirely rejected them.
- Everyone convicted of a drug-related felony, and indeed, many former felons, can be denied access to federal housing.
- The Higher Education Act of 1998 suspends their eligibility for student loans for at least a year, even for simple possession; longer, for second offences and for selling drugs. This

loss of benefits may be reinstated if the person goes through an “approved” drug treatment program. (Lafollette, 2005)

Lafollette’s list demonstrates the depth and breadth of restrictive economic policies in the lives of the formerly incarcerated. These restrictions have especial significance for poor African American men that are unlikely to find employment, especially after an incarceration (Holzer, Offner, Sorensen, 2005).

In my interview with Dennis Gaddy, the Campbell University Law School graduate theorized that these restrictive economic policies nearly ensure that poor, formerly incarcerated black men cannot be productive citizens. In fact, he argued, these policies encourage former offenders to commit economic crimes in order to survive.

Child Support Policies

In addition to the restriction of benefits, Mr. Gaddy pointed out that stringent child support legislation presents heightened disincentives for formerly incarcerated African American men. In an article published in a 2004 issue of the American Bar Association’s *Judge’s Journal*, Jessica Pearson provides support for Mr. Gaddy’s assertions, highlighting state policies that collect child support in arrears for periods during which parents are incarcerated. According to Pearson, in the US, twenty-one states always collect child support payments during periods of parental incarceration and an additional eleven states leave the decision to collect or exempt to the discretion of a judge. The result of these policies are enormous levels of debt for formerly incarcerated persons, who typically earn \$50 per month while incarcerated, but are liable, on average, for about \$200 in child support payments each month during their incarceration (Pearson, 2004).

Current child support payment policies not only demand the immediate payment of large amounts of debt once a prisoner is released, but use punitive tactics to enforce regular payments. In Colorado, Pearson found that inmates owed an average of \$16,651 by the time they were released from prison. As soon as they are released, formerly incarcerated parents are inundated by aggressive collection tactics as instituted as part of Clinton's 1996 welfare reform and marriage promotion policies.

As a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, parents who fail to pay child support face a host of new, aggressive enforcement actions... Parents ...may have up to 65 percent of their take-home pay automatically garnisheed. They may also have their driver's license and/or state-issued professional license suspended and be reported as delinquent on their credit reports. Those with child support delinquencies may experience automatic seizures of their bank accounts and any other asset or income they possess, including savings accounts accrued for reentry. In some states, payment of child support is a condition of parole, with nonpayment theoretically leading to the noncustodial parent's return to prison for parole violation. Some prisoner advocates and reentry program personnel fear that these policies may drive paroled and released parents away from their families and legitimate employment. (Pearson, 2004).

Thus, at the same time that economic benefits to single, African American mothers were decreased as a result of Clinton's welfare policy, statewide child support policies and aggressive national collection tactics were positioned to economically penalize formerly incarcerated African American men. Each of these policies shared the common goal of increasing the levels of two-parent households within poor, African American communities. Assuming that black women were the decision makers in the African American marriage market, policymakers hoped that the reduction of benefits to poor unwed black mothers would make them more dependent on African American men and result in an increased level of marriage (DeParle, 2004).

In the same way, the dominance of the female perspective is evident in stringent child support policies that aggressively collect back payments from formerly incarcerated men, regardless of their earnings. The result both these policies were negative economic

consequences for African American men and women. However, as evidenced by the uninterrupted decrease in African American marriage rates, the policies were ineffective in changing the make up of African American households.

Gender-Biased Policy: Bad for Everyone

An incomplete understanding of the factors that determine the relationship decisions of both African American men and women has resulted in poorly designed social and economic policies. It should be noted that just because research is biased in favor of female perspectives, does not necessitate that the policies that result from such bias are more helpful to African American women. In the case of African American romantic relationships, an imbalance in research perspectives hurt both sexes involved. Because of the influence of economic-based research that assumed that African American women make the choice not to marry, policymakers perceived a strong link between the growing number of households headed by single mothers and increased welfare dependency. In reaction to this limited understanding, legislators sought to limit the welfare benefits of poor mothers and increase child support obligations of poor fathers in order to encourage the increased construction of two-parent households.

The failure of Clinton's socio-economic policy to influence African American romantic relationships may be attributed to a misunderstanding of a complicated marriage market. Relying on the types of theoretical models that Wilson's 1987 work presented and influenced, policymakers understood that African American women were the only decision makers that were swayed by economic motives in their romantic choices. By not considering the preferences of African American men, policymakers failed to consider

that poor, formerly incarcerated African American men may not want to take on the financial responsibility of a wife. Had they considered this idea, perhaps the Clinton and Bush Administration's welfare reform programs may also have included a work-training initiative for recently-released men or relaxed punitive economic and social policies that make it difficult for African American men to survive legally outside of prison.

Gender Parity in Research: A Moral Imperative

The failure of past policies to impact the romantic relationships of African Americans suggests that notions about the nature of these relationships are flawed. Unfortunately, these misconceptions have resulted in punitive and reductionist economic policies that may have further destabilized the African American community. In light of the consequences of imbalanced perspectives, gender-parity in research on African American romantic relationships must be prioritized to ensure that future legislation does not continue to economically penalize African Americans unnecessarily for "choices" in relationships and household structures that are not yet understood.

Bibliography

1. Banks, R. and S. Gatlin (2005). "African American intimacy: The racial gap in marriage." Mich. J. Race & L. 11: 115.
2. Barak, G., P. Leighton, et al. (2006). Class, race, gender, and crime: the social realities of justice in America, Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc.
3. Braman, D. (2004). Doing time on the outside: Incarceration and family life in urban America, Univ of Michigan Press.
4. Braman, D and Wood, Jennifer. From One Generation to the Next: How Criminal Sanctions are Reshaping Family Life in Urban America (From Prisoners Once Removed: The Impact of Incarceration and Reentry on Children, Families, and Communities, P 157-188, 2003, Jeremy Travis and Michelle Waul, eds
5. Broman, C. (1993). "Race differences in marital well-being." Journal of Marriage and the Family: 724-732.
6. Browning, S, Miller, R, & Spruance, L. (2001). Criminal incarceration dividing the ties that bind: black men and their families. Journal of African American men, 6(1), 87-102.
7. Charles, C.K., & Luoh, M.C. (2004). Male incarceration, the marriage market and female outcomes. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Economics, McGill University, Quebec, Canada. Retrieved from http://www.mcgill.ca/files/economics/jail_marriage_talk.pdf
8. Clear, Todd. (2009). The collateral consequences of mass incarceration. Informally published manuscript, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University, Glendale, Arizona. Retrieved from <http://ccj.asu.edu/events/conferences/downloads/asu-paper-3-todd-clear>
9. Clear, Todd. Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse. New York City, NY: Oxford Univ Pr, 2009. Print.
10. Clear, Rose, and Ryder, "Death by a Thousand Little Cuts" (from Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse.) New York City, NY: Oxford Univ Pr, 2009. Print.

11. Cready, C., M. Fossett, et al. (1997). "Mate availability and African American family structure in the US nonmetropolitan south, 1960-1990." Journal of Marriage and the Family 59(1): 192-203.
12. DeParle, J. (2004). *American dream: three women, ten kids, and a nation's drive to end welfare*. New York City, NY: Viking Press Publishers.
13. Franke, Katherine M., Becoming a Citizen: Reconstruction Era Regulation of African American Marriages, 11 *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 251-309, 251-258, 307-309 (Summer 1999)
14. Froomkin, Dan. "Welfare's Changing Face." *Washington Post* (1998): n. pag. Web. 10 Dec 2010.
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/politics/special/welfare/welfare.htm#whe>>.
15. Harknett, K. (2008). Mate availability and unmarried parent relationships. Informally published manuscript, Population Aging Research Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Retrieved from http://www.pop.upenn.edu/rc/parc/aging_center/2008/PARCwps08-03.pdf
16. Hattery, A. and E. Smith (2007). African American Families, Sage Publications, Inc.
17. Holzer, H, Offner, P, & Sorensen, E. (2004, April). Declining employment among young black less-educated men: the role of incarceration and child support. *Urban Institute*, Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411035_declining_
18. Kiecolt, K. Jill, and Mark A. Fossett. "Publications." University of Michigan. University of Michigan, 1997. Web. 13 Nov 2010.
<http://rcgd.isr.umich.edu/prba/perspectives/spring1997/kj_kiecolt.pdf>.
19. King, A. (1999). "African American males' attitudes toward marriage: An exploratory study." Journal of African American Studies 4(1): 71-89.
20. Koball, H. (1998). "Have African American men become less committed to marriage? Explaining the twentieth century racial cross-over in men's marriage timing." Demography 35(2): 251-258.

21. LaFollette, Hugh. "Collateral Consequences of Punishment: Civil Penalties Accompanying Formal Punishment." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 22.3 (2005): 241-61. Web. 13 Nov 2010.
<<http://www.hughlafollette.com/papers/Collateral%20Consequences%20of%20Punishment.pdf>>.\
22. Lane, S., R. Keefe, et al. (2004). "Marriage promotion and missing men: African American women in a demographic double bind." *Medical Anthropology*
23. Lexington (2010). Sex and the single black woman. *The Economist*.
24. Lichter, D., F. LeClere, et al. (1991). "Local marriage markets and the marital behavior of black and white women." *American Journal of Sociology* 96(4): 843-867.
25. Lichter, D., D. Graefe, et al. (2003). "Is marriage a panacea? Union formation among economically disadvantaged unwed mothers." *Social Problems* 50(1): 60-86.
26. Lichter, D., D. McLaughlin, et al. (1992). "Race and the retreat from marriage: A shortage of marriageable men?" *American Sociological Review* 57(6): 781-799.
27. Lichter, D. T. (2001). "Marriage as Public Policy." *Progressive Policy Institute*
28. Lopoo, L, & Western, B. (2005). Incarceration and the formation and stability of marital unions. Unpublished manuscript, Center for Policy Research, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Retrieved from <http://www.cpr.maxwell.syr.edu/faculty/lopoo/selectedpapers/paper2.pdf>
29. McDowell, April. "Publications." University of Maryland Library. University of Maryland, 2007. Web. 13 Nov 2010.
<<http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/1903/6975/1/umi-umd-4483.pdf>>.
30. Mendez, G. U.S. Department of Justice, (2001). Incarcerated men and their children: study report (97-IJ-CX-0036). Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/189789.pdf>
31. Moore, J. Department of Corrections Oklahoma, (1996). Bearing the burden: how incarceration weakens inner-city communities Oklahoma: Retrieved from

<http://www.doc.state.ok.us/offenders/ocjrc/96/Bearing%20the%20Burden.pdf>

32. Moynihan, Patrick. United States. Negro Family: The Case for National Action. , 1965. Web. 5 Dec 2010. <<http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm>>.
33. Myers, S.L., & Wilkins, R. (2002). Unintended impacts of sentencing guidelines on family structure. Unpublished manuscript, Human Relations and Social Justice, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/194339.pdf>
34. O'Connor, Vikki. (2006). Barriers to marriage and parenthood for african american men and women. Informally published manuscript, Department of Child and Family Studies, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Retrieved from <http://www.thrivingcouplesthivingkids.syr.edu/Pdfs/0VOConnerresearchpr0jspring05.pdf>
35. Oliver, W, & Hairston, C. (2008). Intimate partner violence during the transition from prison to the community: perspectives of incarcerated african american men. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Traum*, 16(3), 258-76.
36. Pager, D. (2007). Marked: Race, crime, and finding work in an era of mass incarceration, University of Chicago Press.
37. Pattillo, M., D. Weiman, et al. (2005). "Imprisoning America: The social effects of mass incarceration." The Review of Black Political Economy 33(1): 41-45.
38. Raley, R. (2000). "Recent trends and differentials in marriage and cohabitation: The United States." The ties that bind: Perspectives on marriage and cohabitation: 19-39.
39. Spain, D. and S. Bianchi (1996). Balancing act: Motherhood, marriage, and employment among American women, Russell Sage Foundation Publications.
40. Testa, Mark and Krogh, Marilyn. "The Effect of Employment on Marriage Among Black males in Inner-City Chicago" from The decline in marriage among african americans: causes, consequences,

and policy implications. Russell Sage Foundation Publications.

41. Travis, J. and M. Waul (2003). "Prisoners once removed." Prisoners once removed: the impact of incarceration and reentry on children, families, and communities: 1.
42. Travis, Jeremy, McBride, Elizabeth Cincotta, Solomon, Amy L., Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Re-entry, Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, June 2005
43. Tripp, Brad. (2001). Incarcerated african american fathers: exploring changes in family relationships and the father identity. *Journal of African American men*, 6(1), 13-30.
44. Tucker, M. and C. Mitchell-Kernan (1995). The decline in marriage among African Americans: Causes, consequences, and policy implications, Russell Sage Foundation Publications.
45. Western, B. and B. Pettit (2000). "Incarceration and racial inequality in men's employment." Industrial and Labor Relations Review 54(1): 3-16.
46. Western, B. (2002). "The impact of incarceration on wage mobility and inequality." American Sociological Review: 526-546.
47. Western, B. (2006). Incarceration, marriage, and family life. Manuscript submitted for publication, Department of Social Sciences, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Retrieved from http://www.socialsciences.cornell.edu/0407/Western_incarceration_chapter.pdf
48. Wildeman, Christopher, and Bruce Western. "Publications." *Future of Children*. Future of the Children, 2010. Web. 13 Nov 2010. <http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/20_02_08.pdf>.
49. Wilson, W. Julius. (1990). *The truly disadvantaged: the inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
50. White, L. and S. Rogers (2000). "Economic circumstances and family outcomes: A review of the 1990s." Journal of Marriage and the Family 62(4): 1035-1051.
51. Wherry, Laura, and Kenneth Finegold. "Marriage Promotion and the Arrangements of Black, Hispanic, and

White Children." Urban Institute B.B-61 (2004): 1-8. Web.
5 Dec 2010.
<http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/311064_B-61.pdf>.

52. Williams, D. and J. Jackson (2000). "Race/ethnicity and the 2000 census: recommendations for African American and other black populations in the United States." American Journal of Public Health 90(11): 1728.