

Hard Time and Hard Love:  
Issues and Challenges of Visitation for Men of Incarcerated Women

by

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## ABSTRACT

The United States prison population is rapidly rising. Consequently, more families are losing loved ones to the system. While many researchers have focused on women of incarcerated men and children of incarcerated parents, none have looked at the partners of incarcerated women. This paper explores the issues and challenges of prison visitation for the significant others of women incarcerated at Perryville Prison in Goodyear AZ.

It is known that prison visitation is important for supporting and maintaining romantic relationships. It is also beneficial to the prison institution. Visitation assists in social control and high inmate morale; both of which lower the instances of violent acts. However, it has been reported that visitation is a daunting task for the visitors.

Many sources of information and data were used for this study; formal and informal interviews with family members and others with prison visitation experience, government websites that contain visitation policies, online forums for family and friends of inmates to discuss their concerns, existing research literature, direct observations, and discussions with scholar experts and prison activists. These resources act as a window to visitation at Perryville. With insights derived from symbolic interactionism and previous research guiding the project, it was found that visitation is a good experience for the significant others, incarcerated women, and Perryville. However, the troubles the significant others have with money, the institution and social support strongly suggest that these

men encounter hurdles that make the positive act of visitation at times nearly impossible.

## Dedication

To anyone with a loved one behind the wire:

Know that you are not alone.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The United States prison system presents many obstacles for those who have incarcerated loved ones. While the importance of outside relationships has been ignored by mainstream media, attention has been given to this topic by academics. The support of inmate romantic, familial, or platonic relationships has been shown to reduce recidivism and offer a smoother reentry into society. To date, the effects of maintaining relationships throughout a prison sentence has only been looked at in terms of the children of incarcerated persons, the families of incarcerated persons, and the women of incarcerated men. The partners of incarcerated women have yet to be accounted for.

The inclusion of the partners of incarcerated women is necessary because past research has uncovered a great deal of suffering when looking at the partners of incarcerated men. The difficulties of relationship maintenance are unknown for these men. Research on the women of incarcerated men identifies high levels of poverty, stress, and mistreatment from institution staff (Comfort, 2008; Condry, 2007; Christian, 2005; Comfort *et al.*, 2005; Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest, 2003; Comfort, 2003; Arditti, 2002; Girshick, 1996; Fuller, 1993; Fishman, 1990; Lowenstein, 1984). It is unclear if the men of incarcerated women experience these same issues, different issues, or are doing fine.

The female population in federal institutions along with state jail and prison facilities is rising, 93,234 in 2000 to 114,694 in 2009 (West, 2009, p. 7). This means that the number of families, traditional or not, left behind is also

rising. While the children of incarcerated parents have been well documented by researchers, the partners of these women have not. This is because the partners of incarcerated women are a hidden population. There are a many reasons for this. If the incarcerated women have children, the spouse or partner is unlikely to take on the role of caretaker (Glaze, 2008, p.5). Unlike women of incarcerated men, these partners usually do not seek out support groups or organizational help. They live through this mostly alone, while still supporting their incarcerated loved one. But the largest factor is that if the incarcerated woman is in a relationship prior to the incarceration, the partner is likely to leave.

This study seeks to find out more about the partners of incarcerated women in the context of prison visitation. With the use of qualitative methods, the question of how one maintains a relationship when the wife or girlfriend is incarcerated will be explored. While the partners employ a variety of methods, visitation was found to be the most important, in this and prior studies.

### **The United States Prison System**

The United States is the world leader in incarceration. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics there are about 1.6 million people incarcerated in state and federal prisons (West, 2009, p. 1). The actual number is hard to determine due to the constant fluctuation of jail and prison populations and the different ways of recording data. Females make up only 114,000 of the total inmate population. Males make up 1.5 million, which is 14 times the rate of females (West, 2009, p. 2). The state of Arizona has about 42,000 people incarcerated.

Around 38,000 males and 4,000 females make up the population (West, 2009, p. 2).

The racial make-up of the prison population is strikingly skewed. In the United States, African Americans and Hispanics together make up about 24% of the US population (McKinnon, 2001, p. 1; Guzman, 2001, p. 1). 77% of the US population is Caucasian (Grieco, 2001, p. 1). However, the ratio of African American to Caucasian inmates is 8:1 (US Sentencing Project). This ratio is the same for the state of Arizona, where the population of African Americans is about four percent, much lower than the national average (McKinnon, 2001, p. 4). This same ratio carries over for Hispanic inmates to white inmates. Hispanics make up 16.8% of the Arizona population, which is higher than the national average (Guzman, 2001, p. 3). One of the most cited reasons for the increased rate of incarceration for minorities is the war on drugs, which results in a large number of inner city residents to be sentenced for long periods of time.

The stated goals of incarceration are deterrence, incapacitation, retribution, and rehabilitation (Clear & Cole, 2003, p. 64). These goals generally work together to punish and then to correct the issue. The idea of going to prison is supposed to deter one from committing a crime. However, if this fails incarceration is the punishment for the committed crime. Incapacitation is said to incapacitate inmates from committing additional crimes. In addition to protecting society, incarceration acts as retribution, which is historically defended as *eye for an eye*. In modern times, it is the idea of the punishment fitting the crime. During the incarceration, various rehabilitation activities should take place with

the goal of cure. Once rehabilitated, the offender should be ready to reenter society. Whether or not these goals are actually implemented varies by state budget status and the overall attitude towards incarceration.

Arizona implements warehouse-style incarceration as well as high rates of inmate labor programs. Lynch (2010) explains that money is always involved in making correctional decisions: “it should be cheap and mean” (p. 213). This means that “unnecessary” programs are cut and inmate labor is emphasized. Since programs are few and far between, prison officials rely on TVs that are purchased by the inmate and powered by a monthly electricity fee. Correction officers enjoy this because TVs act as “babysitters” for inmates. Visitation is another form of control for inmates, that has visible positive outcomes. If inmates are well behaved they can qualify for visitation.

Mauer (2007) of the Sentencing Project reminds us that the national recidivism rate is about 67% (p. 703). Since this rate is high, it would be in the best interest for prisons to support programs known to reduce recidivism rates. Visitation is such a program, due to keeping family ties strong (Glasser, 1964; Hairston, 1988; La Vinge et al., 2005; Bales and Mear, 2008; Berg and Hubner, 2010).

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The benefits of prison visitation have been researched for over 50 years. Visitation has been shown to be a positive activity for incarcerated persons. This is important because institutions would not facilitate this activity if there were not proven benefits. Even though this study focuses only on visits only between romantic partners, visitation between all family members, including children, offers additional insight about relationship maintenance with a prison barrier.

#### **The Importance of Visitation**

Early research by Fenlon (1972), Homer (1979), and Weintraub (1976) all touch on the importance of visitation (as cited in Schafer, 1991). Institutionally visitation is viewed as a control method, which gives inmates positive incentives (ADOC Dept. Order Manual, 2010, p 25). Visitation has been shown to improve inmate's perceptions of incarceration, which produces better behavior.

Wooldredge (1997) provides an illustration of this in his findings that inmates who have frequent visits report less prison crowding, even in institutions that are overcrowded. Visitation boosts morale, "mental well-being" and promotes positive attitudes towards the prison (Wooldredge, 1997, p. 37). Ellis, Grasmick, & Gilman (1974) found a correlation concerning violence ("transgressions") and visitation. Inmates are less likely to be violent when they have regular visitation sessions (p. 29).

There is a solid consensus that visitation promotes lower recidivism rates (Glasser, 1964; Hairston, 1988; La Vinge et al., 2005; Bales and Mear, 2008;

Berg and Huebner, 2010). This is due to better family relationships, which are maintained via visitation. Visitation is different from letters and phone calls because it allows the person to be tangible, which makes it easier to maintain a relationship. La Vinge *et al.* (2005) analyzed pre and post release intensive interviews with 233 male offenders in the Chicago area. They found that “visits from partners predicted higher post-release relationship quality and support for respondents who reported high levels of family relationship quality before prison and predicted lower levels of family relationship quality and support for those who reported low levels of family relationship quality before prison” (p. 328). However, it should be noted that this finding was different when children attended visitation. Poor father-child relationships were often mended with increased contact during the incarceration (La Vinga *et al.*, 2005, p. 331).

When it comes to children of incarcerated parents, it has been found that lack of connection with parents can be detrimental to the child’s well being (Hagan & Coleman, 2001; Radosh, 2002). Visitation prepares both the parents and child for the parent’s release (Casey-Acevedo & Brown, 2002, p. 69). Many institutions have recognized the need for this relationship; therefore they strive to help maintain them with special visitation programs. These include overnight visits and day programs. Researchers have deemed these programs to be positive for both the inmates and the children.

Carlson and Cervera (1991) observed inmates and family visitors who participated in a Family Reunion Program, which consisted of overnight visits in which the entire family participates. Both inmates and family members reported

“feeling closer” as compared to inmates and family members who did not participate in the program (p.325). This suggests better connections for post release.

Another program, Girl Scouts Beyond Bars, focuses exclusively on the daughters of incarcerated women. This program mirrors usual Girl Scout programs, however on two Saturdays a month the troop spends two hours behind bars with their mothers. Many researchers have reported that this program is highly successful due to it boosting self esteem levels for both mother and daughter, allowing mothers to feel more secure with their post release reunification with their daughters, the girls were able to make friends who are in similar situations, and all participants felt pride in their membership (Moses, 1995; Hanson Smart & Mann, 2003; Grant, 2006; Miller, 2006). As of 2006, over 20 states have adopted the program (Miller, 2006, p. 479). These special visitation programs along with regular visitation allow for children, parents and other family members alike, to confirm that everyone is “alive and in good health” (Casey-Acevedo & Brown, 2002, p. 69).

Not every institution adopts these programs. Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005) found that men incarcerated in minimum security facilities, one in Utah and one in Oregon, felt that it was “hard to be a father” (p. 275). Some men were ashamed of their situation, while others were determined to be good fathers. These men had to rely on the children’s caretakers, who act as “gatekeepers,” to assist in keeping the father-child relationship alive (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005, p. 274). The reality of the situation is that being a long distance parent has

a set of challenges, which, as found by other researchers, seem to be eased when there is support from the institution. Hairston (1991) observes that “the maintenance of family ties during imprisonment is desirable, but difficult” (p. 87).

### **The Challenges of Visitation**

Visitation has many benefits but, institutions have not easily facilitated and accommodated visitors. While spending time with a loved one can be a great experience and opportunity, visitors encounter seemingly endless obstacles.

When looking at these issues, researchers have focused on the women of incarcerated men and families of incarcerated persons (Comfort, 2008; Condry, 2007; Christian, 2005; Comfort et al., 2005; Comfort, 2003; Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Fuller, 1993; Fishman, 1990; Lowenstein, 1984). Obstacles to visitation include financial constraints, transportation, problems with guards, inconsistencies of prison rules, poor visitation conditions, difficulties with children, and obstacles to expressions of intimacy.

Visitation is expensive. Girchick (1996) and Christian (2005) found that average visitation expenses, including food, gas, and lodging, can total \$80 up to \$200 per visitation session/trip (p. 61 & p. 37 respectively). Financial constraints are closely tied into traveling to the prison. If the loved one lives close to the prison, the cost of visitation is less due to the elimination of lodging and long-distance driving.

In some states there are organizations which offer transportation to the prison. Some of these trips are overnight, departing in the evening and arriving at the prison early the next morning. These tickets can be very expensive for people



with very limited means. Studies that included this option reported prices ranging from \$20 to \$40 per ticket (Christian, 2005; Girchick, 1996).

The cost of visitation is significantly high. Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest (2003) reported that of the 51 family members interviewed, the majority had a yearly income of less than \$14,999. Below \$16,000 is considered poverty level. This is just one study, but similar findings have been reported by Comfort (2008), Girshick (1996), and Fishman (1990).

Upon arrival to visitation, there is no guarantee that the visitor will be allowed into the institution. There are many rules one has to learn in order to visit. It has been well documented that rules are enforced differently depending on the officers working visitation intake (Comfort, 2008; Comfort et al., 2005; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). When rules change, visitors usually do not find out until they arrive at visitation and are rejected. Comfort (2008) reports an incident at San Quentin, CA State Prison, when a policy adjusted the time frame when the visitor is to call to request a non-contact visit. By the time visitors found out, it was too late to schedule the visit for the following week. Even if they were able to, the time they were instructed to call was when they were currently in line for visitation (Comfort, 2008, p. 47).

Many visitors report guards enforcing rules differently per visitor (Comfort, 2005; Comfort et al., 2005; Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). Comfort et al. (2005) and Girshick's (1996) studies of the women of incarcerated men reported that the unequal treatment of the prison wives was viewed as favoritism, especially when one women is allowed in wearing

suggestive attire, and another is not (p. 7 & 83 respectively). Arditti's (2002) families of incarcerated persons reported that only a select group of people were told or able to hear announcements regarding policy change. Some believed this was done intentionally (p. 126).

The erratic changes in policy are not the only actions that implies visitors are not worthy of being treated with respect. Visitors also report that institutional staff treats them with disrespect (Comfort, 2008; Comfort et al., 2005; Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). An interviewer in Arditti's (2003) study on families of incarcerated men observed that "the deputies were stereotypical of what I expected – they were unexpressive, hardly said a word, and acted like you were not even a person" (p. 127). Girshick (1996) and Fishman's (1990) participants, women of incarcerated men, had to deal with direct harassment from the guards. Officers made snide comments ranging from asking why she is married to a prisoner to commenting on their undergarments during strip searches (p. 74 & p. 146, respectively).

Once allowed in the visitation area, visitors are faced with adverse conditions (Comfort, 2008; Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 2006; Fishman, 1990). The physical conditions of the visiting area are often not conducive to a comfortable and relaxed time. The rooms may be dirty, crowded, loud, smoke-filled, and/or too hot or too cold (Comfort, 2008; Arditti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). In addition, rooms are not often equipped to handle young children. If children accompany a visitor, there is a risk of having the visitation terminated if their children are unruly (Fishman, 1990, p. 161).

While visiting, areas are observed by guards who are watching for inappropriate behaviors. These behaviors can be something as little as exchanging a hug or a kiss (Girshick, 1996, p. 71; Fishman, 1990, p. 175). The enforcement of these rules varies by the guard on duty. An example of an extreme enforcement of rules is reported by Comfort *et al.* (2005). A female visitor describes a guard correcting the action of eating a popsicle in a supposed wrong way (p. 8).

Wives and family members usually report feelings of shame when it comes to visitation (Comfort, 2008; Comfort et al., 2005; Adritti, 2003; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). Wives perceive this as being treated like a criminal (Comfort, 2008; Comfort et al. 2005; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). Adritti (2003) found that over half the visitors interviewed described visitation as going “very badly” (p. 122). Girshick (1996) states that, “the constant distrust erodes their self-esteem.” (p. 74). Even though time together could be spent productively many visitors are too stressed to enjoy their time with their loved one.

### **Meaning Making**

Due to institutional rules and regulations, couples with a partner who is incarcerated must make meaning of their relationship in non-conventional ways. While free couples have the option to go out for dinner and a movie, for example, incarcerated couples must find new ways to express meaning in their relationships. In order for this to be possible couples must navigate the strict institution rules and make best of the options they have.

Having a loved one incarcerated typically results in limited communication. This can be a difficult adjustment, because couples go from spending endless time together, to enforced separation. Visitation is a popular outlet but, letters and phone calls are the alternative.

Of the three options, letter writing is the most popular and inexpensive form of communication (Comfort, 2008; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). The free partner strives to make these letters special by sending cards or spraying the letters with perfume (Comfort, 2008, p. 73). The frequency of letter writing varies from daily to monthly. It is not uncommon for the incarcerated loved one to write longer and more frequent letters than the free partner (Comfort, 2008, p. 69). The only downside to letters is the prison policy that accompanies them, staff is to open and screen the letters sent in and out of the facilities. However, the degree of censorship needed varies per institution.

Some couples also utilize phone calls. This option, however, is very expensive. The majority of institutions only allow inmates to call out using collect style phone services. Women in Comfort's (2008) and Girshick's (1996) study report spending \$25 to \$300 extra a month on their phone bills (p. 89, p. 63). Hairston (2001) reported that "a 30-minute interstate, weekend call using an inmate phone system cost the receiving family \$15 or more" (p. 125). Even though this form of communication is expensive, some wives find this to be the best time to discuss intimate matters, as some institutions do not monitor calls (Comfort, 2008; Fishman, 1990). Fishman (1990) explains that it is easier to talk about "emotions and sex – that are difficult to put in writing" (p. 211).

Letters and phone calls serve as ways to keep the incarcerated man active in the free partner's life. Some incarcerated men want to continue to be part of the decision making at home and with their children (Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990). These positive reasons for communication can help with the adjustment of living in "two different worlds" (Girshick, 1996, p. 53).

Unfortunately, researchers have also found that unhealthy relationships are perpetuated or formed through these communication venues. Some incarcerated men attempt to control their wives from the outside with emotional abuse. This comes in the form of restricting what the free partner can and can not do (Fishman, 1990). Fishman (1990) offers an example of this: "I have had him yell at me for not being there when he called" and "He doesn't want me to go out because he feels that I would look at other men" (p. 213).

During visitation, communication continues as it does in letters and phone conversations. However, the shared time together allows for some physical contact. In Comfort's (2008) study, there were periodic food visits in addition to regular vending machine access. This is when visitors can bring food into the prison to share with their incarcerated loved one. It is the visitors' responsibility to bring money for the vending machine or to buy and prepare food for food visits. Comfort (2008) relates this to "the female gender role" (p. 106). The giving of food to her incarcerated partner, allows the women to feel like they are taking care of their men, and for the men to feel taken care of.

Some institutions allow for conjugal or family visits. These are overnight visits inside the prison where the couple can spend alone time together. While the

assumption is that these types of visits are all about sex, Comfort (2008) and Girshick (1996) both found that the women believe it is more than that. A participant in Girshick's (1996) study explained, "Sex is nice, but that's the basic part, just being able to talk with out having somebody sitting within five feet of you, without a guard walking around looking at you all time" (p. 77). These visits are a time to be an intact family or couple again.

If a couple is not married, some decide to make this step while the partner is incarcerated. The women attempt to make their prison weddings resemble weddings on the outside as much as they can. They wear white outfits, send out invitations, and sometimes have bridesmaids present. In Comfort's (2008) study, the prison reserved a time every other month during visitation for weddings. Brides-to-be must submit a marriage application many months in advance (Comfort, 2008, p. 110). Due to the prison setting, wedding guests are usually people who are regulars at visitation. The weddings occur on the yard and receive minimal special treatment.

In addition to these activities that take place in real time, couples plan for the future. In Fishman's (1990) study, these plans varied greatly. Some couples planned their future life together, while others focused on defining what deviant acts would be acceptable once out of prison (Fishman, 1990, p. 170). These types of plans gave the free partners different perceptions as how to life will be post release. Making plans for the future happen aggressively at the beginning of the sentence and then pick up again towards the end (Fishman, 1990, p. 169). These

plans allow for both parties to become excited for the reunification outside the prison.

Through communication and other acts that strengthen any relationship, couples with a partner that is incarcerated are able to make meaning of their relationship. For some couples, the separation is difficult. However, these actions help them strengthen and maintain their relationships.

While reviewing past research it has become strikingly clear that the partners of incarcerated women have been left out of the conversation of visitation and relationship maintenance. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring this issue.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study of the partners of incarcerated women is an exploratory study. It will discover the free partner's perceptions and interpretations of their relationships with an incarcerated woman by using a variety of qualitative methods.

#### **Symbolic Interaction**

Symbolic interaction guided the creation of the interview schedule, which reveals meanings and behaviors, also known as symbols (Sandstorm, Martin, & Fine, 2006; Hewitt, 1991; Adler & Adler, 1980). This allows the development of generalizations about the experiences of being in a romantic relationship with an incarcerated woman.

Symbolic interactionists believe that “human conduct depends upon the creation and maintenance of meaning” (Hewitt, 1991, p. 24). This is especially prevalent within this research because the maintenance of relationships is difficult when one party is incarcerated. In addition, these interviews were with men whose wife or partner had never been to prison before. This means that these relationships “through the wire” are a new situation. Hewitt (1991) explains, “human beings do encounter situations they have not faced before; they find their paths are blocked by one obstacle or another...people must find new meanings – new purposes and new methods – and they must reach into their stock of individual skills and socially acquired knowledge for general principles that can



help them deal with novel situations” (p. 27). Partners trying to navigate the prison system find it difficult, but over time the experience may become routine.

Another important concept in symbolic interaction is naming. This is the action of giving meaning to objects and situations (Sandstorm, Martin, & Fine, 2006, p.31). This allows humans to name their own reality, which is especially important for marginalized groups, inmate families included.

Symbols build off the notion of naming. Some objects have a shared meaning in society; however, the same object might have a unique meaning to a particular situation for certain participants. Symbols are defined as “something people create and use to stand for something else” (Sandstorm, Martin & Fine, 2006, p. 29). Since there are limited things loved ones can bring into visitation, seemingly simple acts can represent much more.

### **Procedure**

The exploratory nature of this study means that the results are generalizeable only to the partners of women incarcerated at Perryville Prison, in Goodyear, AZ. Eight interviews with family members of women incarcerated at Perryville were acquired by using opportunistic sampling. This is done by “taking advantage of the unexpected” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.28). Due to the hidden nature of this population it was imperative to take advantage of any interview opportunity.

The most basic recruitment method was driving out to the prison and approaching non-uniformed people in the parking lot. I explained the study and distributed a sheet of paper with my contact information on it. This process did

not lead to any formal interviews. Yet, these conversations helped inform me of issues unique to Perryville Prison.

One of these conversations led to the forum PrisonTalk.com. This website serves as a community for people who have family members or friends who are incarcerated, or who work/research the prison system. This website serves people from all over the world and has separate areas for individual prisons across the United States. I posted a call for participants on the Perryville page, and as a result obtained three formal interviews; only one was used for this analysis.

I also received help and support from community organizations. Two organizations, Middle Ground Prison Reform and GINA's Team, proved to be very helpful in participant recruitment. Both organizations are active in the corrections community. Middle Ground Prison Reform focuses on lobbying for policy change, while GINA's Team provides educational programs to inmates at Perryville. Four interviews were obtained due to these contacts, only three of which were used for analysis.

In order to participate in this study, participants had to have a loved one incarcerated at Perryville Prison. However, for the purpose of this report, only four interviews with men in a romantic relationship with a woman at Perryville were analyzed. A romantic relationship is defined as married, engaged, or dating. All relationships in this study are heterosexual. The remaining four interviews were used to provide additional context to the separation caused by incarceration and the visitation experience.

Once participants were identified, an interview was scheduled. I offered the option to have the interview in person or over the phone. As a result, four interviews were on the phone and four were in-person. The in-person interviews took place at chain fast-food restaurants across the greater Phoenix area. Three participants allowed me to provide them with a light meal. The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) of Arizona State University provided funding for this and travel costs for the researcher.

Of the four interviews analyzed, two were conducted on the phone and two were in person. During the interview, I asked open-ended questions about life prior to the incarceration and the participants' current situation. I inquired about finances, support and visitation. These deeper inquiries were motivated by themes presented in the literature on the families of incarcerated persons. Interviews took anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded, with the permission of the participant.

The interview schedule was in the style of a narrative with open-ended questions. A narrative interview consists of "approximately six questions that take your research participants through the history of their experience" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p.21). Interview questions were influenced by Girshick's (1996) report "Soledad Women." This study investigated the women of men incarcerated at a prison in Soledad, California. Girshick's (1996) interview schedule covered everything I was interested in, including demographics for both partners, "economic impact" of imprisonment, "children," "support network," "relationship issues," and "dealing with the prison system" (Girshick, 1996, p.

123 – 124). My schedule was worded differently and modified to fit male partners of incarcerated women.

The interview process proved to be difficult. Sample recruitment took a total of 11 months. Once interviews were obtained, I was faced with the obstacle of my presence. Being a student and a young woman led some of my interviewees to talk down to me or to comment on my naivety in thinking my research would make a difference. Because of these ideas and actions some participants were difficult to interview. For example, my first interview was with a 58 year old man, who had just retired from the military. His background in the military suggests his hesitance to speak freely about his emotions. Therefore, this interview was not considered for analysis. While phone interviews seemed to buffer this, due to my appearance being a mystery, these interviews were mostly a challenge to obtain and conduct.

For the participants' time, I was able to provide a \$20 gift card to Wal-Mart. Funding for this was provided by GPSA. Each participant protested against the gift card, saying that it was not necessary. Upon learning that GPSA was providing funding for this study, however, participants felt more comfortable accepting the gift card. This shows that participants were not drawn to participate because of the gift card.

Participation was strictly voluntary and subjects were allowed to terminate the interview at any time. Although each interview was completed, I informed participants that they would still receive the \$20 gift card even if they chose to

terminate the interview. The confidentiality of each subject was guaranteed and all names of all participants were changed for this report.

All interviews were transcribed and then coded. When coding, I followed recommendations from Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003). Codes were identified by themes of repeating ideas and theoretical constructs. The codes were identified with the assistance from Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) general code categories: "setting/context," "definition of the situation," "perspectives," "ways of thinking about people and objects," "process," "activities," "events," "strategies," and "relationships and social structure" (as cited by Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.61). All these categories are compatible with the symbolic interactionist approach because they allow the naming of one's own reality and the creation of symbols.

For data analysis, I used a combination of individual case synopses and illustrated narrative design. Through individual case synopses, I was able to formulate each relationship into its own narrative, as to highlight the unique situation of the individual relationship. When codes are revealed, leaving the names and symbols in their original context allows for the information to still "tell us why and how" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.87). Once the uniqueness of each situation is known, data analysis was taken a step further and identified in a form similar to an illustrated narrative, which reveal the codes common to the narratives as a whole.

Finally, trustworthiness of this study is insured by the common relationships held between the researcher and the participants. Even though I did

not know any of the participants prior to the interview, the relationship we all hold with the various community organizations offers some security. The organizations that introduced us were able to vouch for our integrity, for me as a researcher, and the participants in their experience.

It is important to note that this trust relationship traditionally takes years to develop. However, this idea of trust has been disputed. Johnson (1978) explains that these relationships of trust may remain uncertain and problematic, even when the researcher devotes great lengths of time to the community being studied. Therefore, triangulation is employed to verify the data gathered with other sources. Triangulation is a technique that uses “two or more different measures of the same variable” (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, p. 17). The data in this study was triangulated with existing literature, experts in the field, community organizations that work closely with the Arizona Department of Corrections (henceforth ADOC), and the ADOC visitation handbook.

### **Participant Profiles**

Alan and Amanda: Alan is a 48-year-old Native American: Black Feet of Montana who at the time of the first interview worked as a janitor at a restaurant. About a month later, during a follow-up interview he revealed that he lost his job and was currently unemployed. His girlfriend, Amanda, is serving a three and a half year sentence for a dangerous drug violation concerning Methamphetamine. Amanda is 41 and Caucasian. Even though Alan and Amanda are not legally married, he refers to her as his wife, as they had plans to be married by the time of the interview. However, her incarceration hindered the union. They have no

children together, but Alan has one daughter studying at an out of state university and Amanda has three children who all live in another state. Both Alan and Amanda have accepted each others children as their own.

Mike and Susana: Mike is a 53-year-old, Caucasian, a self proclaimed retired biker, and has been in jail 40 times. He is currently unemployed and pursuing an associates degree in psychology. Mike's wife, Susana, is 45, Caucasian, and is serving an eight year sentence for fraudulent schemes. At the time of the interview Susana was actively working on her appeal. Mike and Susana met three years into her incarceration. Their relationship grew so strong that they were married during her incarceration. Mike has two children and Susana has three.

Chuck and Kelly: Chuck is 37, Caucasian, and had a good job as a sales and marketing director. His wife Kelly, a 40-year-old Caucasian, is serving a four and a half year sentence for aggravated assault. Due to Chuck's gainful employment, he is able to financially support Kelly so her prison stay is as comfortable as it can be. In addition to this, Chuck is able to visit Kelly every weekend and they talk on the phone three times a day. They have no children together.

George and Sara: George is a 42-year-old Hispanic, who works part time as a DJ. His girlfriend, Sara, is 23, Hispanic, and serving a year sentence for a probation violation. At the time of the interview, Sara would be released in 21 days. George and Sara met one week prior to her incarceration; therefore their relationship has developed over the course of her sentence. George has served

time in jail and in prison. He has five children from previous relationships, and they have no children together.



## Chapter 4

### VISITATION AT PERRYVILLE

The process of visitation at Perryville prison has been defined in two ways. The initial definition is provided by the ADOC. This description is a summary of the visitation rulebook provided by the ADOC. It is a sterile description of how visitation should be, and the rules that must be followed.

#### **The Hug and Kiss Combo**

Not everyone is eligible to participate in visitation at Perryville. To begin the process, the incarcerated person must submit a list of up to 20 people; detailing the name, birth date, address, phone number, and relationship to the potential visitor. The visitor also has to submit an application that according to the ADOC may take 60 days to review.

The ADOC may deny people for many reasons, including if the potential visitor poses a threat to safety or order, felony, is on another inmate's visitation list, or has falsified identity or any information on the application. However, even if a person has been accepted to visit, they can still be denied upon arrival at the gate. This occurs when someone wears the wrong clothes or arrives late. The colors orange, brown, and khaki may not be worn by visitors. Shorts must be worn to the knee and shirts must have sleeves. Women may not show their collarbone. Mesh or see through clothing is not allowed, even if layered over a solid piece of clothing. If one is rejected due to clothing, the officers may allow the visitor to change and return. This can only happen one time. There is a swap

meet located one-half mile south of the prison. Some rejected visitors purchase clothing there in hope of being allowed in for visitation.

The rules for visitation can be found on the ADOC website in the 37 page Arizona Department of Corrections Department Order Manual (2010). Visitors may also learn from each other while waiting to go through the security check or on websites such as PrisonTalk.com. The informal ways of learning the rules bring life to the actual situation and seem to be more appreciated than the official rule book. People who have never been rejected from visitation state that it is only because they were well educated in advance.

There are two types of visitation: contact and non-contact. Contact visits occur in a large room with tables and chairs. There is also an outdoor area, which also has tables, chairs, and lighters for cigarettes. People seem to enjoy sitting outside because it is quieter. Non-contact visits are when the inmate and visitors are separated by glass and have to talk to each other through a phone-like device.

Visitation time is determined by which phase the inmate has earned. When the inmate is first incarcerated, she is in Phase 1. This allows for visitation four hours a day on either Saturday or Sunday. The time blocks are 8am -12pm and 12pm – 4pm. Overtime inmates earn more visitation time, and advance to Phase 2 and Phase 3. Phase 2 and 3 vary depending on custody level but, generally speaking, Phase 2 allows for an eight hour and four hour visit on both Saturday and Sunday. In addition, it also allows for holiday visitation on Mothers and Labor Day. Phase 3 allows for two eight hour visits on Saturday and Sunday. It also adds Valentine's Day and Veterans Day to holiday visitation.

The most anticipated visitation sessions are “food visits,” which are only for contact visits. This is when visitors are able to bring in a cooler full of homemade or store bought food. Everything must fit into a 25-quart or smaller cooler. All food has to be sliced, de-boned, peeled and in single serving portions before entering the prison. In addition, it must be stored in clear containers. In order to comply with this rule, all items, like chips and other packaged snacks must be opened and stored in a clear container. Only paper plates and cups, and plastic “light weight” forks and spoons are allowed (ADOC Order Manual, 2010, p. 26). Any uneaten food must be taken out by the visitor; the inmate can not save it to eat later. Even though a lot of effort goes into preparation for these visits, the loved ones enjoy the opportunity to do this because it symbolizes being able to care for their incarcerated loved one.

On a non-food visit, visitors are only allowed to bring in a few items. These items are: personal identification, prescription medicine in original bottle needed for the time in visitation, unopened pack of cigarettes, \$20 in quarters, one wedding/engagement ring, one religious medallion, one watch, one pair of earrings or two observable body piercings and vehicle keys. The only exception to this list is if the visitor has an infant with him/her. The visitor is then allowed to also bring in a clear plastic diaper bag containing three clear pre-filled and commercially-sealed bottles or commercially-sealed juice drinks, four small plastic containers of soft food, one diaper per hour of visitation, one unopened container of baby-wipes, one blanket no bigger than 4’x4’, one small plastic

feeding spoon, one pacifier, one change of baby clothing, one bib, one small tube of diaper rash medicine.

Once at the prison for visitation, the visitor must show ID and fill out paperwork. Then the visitor is subject to a thorough search before being let into the actual visitation area. This starts with removing shoes and passing through the metal detector. After this, the visitor walks next to a drug dog, so it can sniff for any potential drugs attempting to be smuggled in. Then some visitors must be scanned with an ion scanner, to further check for drug contraband. It should be noted that strip searches are not utilized with visitors at Perryville, unlike other US institutions.

In the main complex, once the visitor is cleared he/she exits the room through two sally ports. At this point, he/she waits outside for a van to take him/her to the yard their loved one resides. These vans are driven by inmates who are not allowed to talk to the visitors. Across the street yards are contained as individual complexes. They each have an individual intake so, the visitor walks to the visitation area directly after intake.

When the visitor arrives at the appropriate yard, he/she turns in the paperwork and enters the visitation area. The inmate is then summoned for visitation. During this time for contact visitation, many visitors rush towards the vending machines in order to get the best food items for their loved ones. The food selection is similar to a usual vending machine, with chips and candy bars. However, there are also items like burritos and chicken wings which can be heated in a microwave. Inmates are not allowed near the vending machines.

There is a red box painted on the floor surrounding the machine which indicates that inmates can not cross it. Inmates are also not allowed to touch or handle the coins visitors bring in.

When the inmates arrive to the visitation area they are allowed to share only one brief hug and kiss with their romantic partner. However, this is only allowed between lovers of the opposite sex, therefore lesbian partners are not allowed to participate. After the hug and kiss, the inmate and visitor can hold hands and sit next to each other, but all contact is monitored by officers who oversee visitation. The hand holding can not exceed one hand or turn into “arms around waist or shoulders” (ADOC Order Manual, 2010, p. 31). Inmates are also not allowed to engage in cuddling activities which are defined as “laying heads on the shoulders of each other, massaging one another, etc.” (p. 31).

Food and cigarettes are the only things that the visitor can “give” or share with the inmate. The inmate can bring in her own cigarettes to visitation; however she cannot take any back to her cell. According to the manual, Inmates can only bring in their room key, glasses, medication needed for the time of visit and a wedding ring to visitation. Because these are practical items, the inmate essentially cannot share anything with her significant other, as the visitor can bring food or purchase food for her. In order to make up for this, inmates maintain their “visitation orange.” Upon entering Perryville, the women are issued two uniforms that consist of two pairs of orange pants and two orange tee-shirts. The women typically keep one uniform especially for visitation and use the other for everyday and work activities. This ensures that the orange stays

bright and looks good, as opposed to fading and dingy from being washed often. This practice is comparable to “dress whites” and “dress blues” in the Navy or getting dressed up to go out on a date in the non-incarcerated world.

The visitation areas have indoor and outdoor seating. The indoor area has been described as noisy so many couples enjoy being outside. All visitors and inmates, romantic partners or not, can walk around the area, go in and/or outside, eat, smoke cigarettes, talk and play board games or cards, which are provided by the prison. Some people do not stay for the whole time due to visitation being “boring.” Others stay until the very last moment, because they savor the time physically spent with each other. Upon leaving the visitor and inmate are allowed one more brief hug and kiss, and then they go their separate ways. The visitor returns to the free world, and the inmate returns to her cell after being stripped searched.

Non-contact visitation is different from contact visitation. This form of visitation is used as a form of punishment, if the inmate has too many violations. It is also used for the “well being of visitors, staff, and inmates” (ADOC Order Manual, 2010, p. 19). The only difference between the two forms of visitation is that non-contact visitation takes place between a glass wall. But, as one could imagine, the quality of contact is undesirable. Because of the glass, the hug and kiss combo is not allotted to romantic partners participating in non-contact visitation. The prison attempts to make the visitors comfortable in this situation by providing vending machines; however visitors can not purchase food for their loved one.

Due to opportunistic sampling, contact was only made with visitors who participate in contact visitation. The narratives that follow will bring this description alive, as this is the only way to share space, or maintain physical contact, with their incarcerated loved one.

## Chapter 5

### NARRATIVES

The narratives that follow add life to visitation, which further helps define and create an understanding of visitation. The men's perceptions of the rules and experiences with the enforcement are on the front line. This is the real experience of the men of women incarcerated at Perryville.

#### **Alan and Amanda: 99 Days of Torture**

Alan and I met on Prisontalk.com. We set up three interview times, and after three weeks of phone tag we were able to do an interview. Alan called me, unexpectedly, at 11pm. This happened to be the perfect time to conduct an interview, being late at night there were few distractions for both of us. During other phone interviews, participants periodically received other calls or were interrupted by people near by.

At the time of the interview Alan, a 48-year-old Native American, had not heard from his wife, Amanda, in 99 days. Amanda, who is 41 and Caucasian, is serving a three and a half year sentence for a drug violation. She had been using Methamphetamine.

Alan began "courting" Amanda on September 14, 2007. They met because they worked at neighboring restaurants. He describes their relationship: "We have always had a very unique, strong friendship. It has gotten stronger since she has been through county [jail], with the lawyers and everything."

The fact that Alan feels so close to Amanda is key to this relationship. Alan's friends have been urging him to leave Amanda since the beginning, saying



he should just forget about her. He refuses to do so, even though he is angry that she made the decision to use Methamphetamine, which led to Perryville. He explains: "I am not angry enough to say, "Hey you know what? Good bye... Because, you know, your wedding vows say sickness and in health...you know it does not matter. I will be here until she comes home." It should be noted that Alan and Amanda are not legally married. This represents how much he cares for her; in his mind that have already reached the marital stage in their relationship.

Prior to Amanda's incarceration, Alan was healthy and productive. Since the incarceration he has become stagnant. He states: "My daily routine has changed. Before I used to be up about two or three hours before work and go over and see her, or take a walk and then go to work. Now, I set my alarm clock to 15 minutes before I have to go. I really don't want to go." This indicates that with Amanda gone, Alan seems to have lost motivation in life. His friends do not approve of the relationship, so he has distanced himself from them. His current life is spent alone.

At the time of the initial interview, Alan had not yet been approved for visitation. This process should take 60 days and he had been waiting 99. During these 99 days he had only been able to communicate with Amanda via letters. He was desperately missing her and the sound of her voice. The ADOC did not provide any assistance. Every time he called with a question concerning visitation approval, he received a different answer.

In addition to his struggles with the ADOC, Amanda details her horrible living conditions in her letters. She describes the prison showers having black

and green mold growing in them. The inmates are assigned to scrub the mold to try to clean it up, without a face mask for lung protection. Amanda also told him that she and her fellow inmates are fed chicken five to six times a week. Not only does this become redundant, but she has heard that the chicken comes in boxes branded with the label: “Not For Human Consumption.” Another correspondent in this study, a former inmate at Perryville, shared that if she ever is sent back to prison, she would go back claiming Judaism as her religion to avoid the chicken diet. Jewish inmates receive a kosher diet that includes more fresh fruits and vegetables.

Both the showers and the chicken have Alan worried for Amanda’s health. Amanda asked him to contact OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) but, Alan is worried that it would result in additional mistreatment of Amanda. Amanda has also expressed concern about her assigned counselor. Alan shared: “...She is supposed to have a counselor there that is supposed to help her but, this counselors just looks at her as she is beneath her, talks down to her, and she [Amanda] says: ‘I have never been talked to like this lady talks to me. My counselor. And the best thing for me to do is to stay away from her.’”

Alan is left feeling hopeless which led him back to drinking, having beat alcoholism 12 years prior. He was consuming two 6-packs of beer a day, one in the morning and another in the evening. Alan recognized this as a problem, and sought medical help. At the time of the follow-up interview he was no longer

abusing alcohol. The stress caused by this situation has also triggered diabetes, high blood pressure and sleeping problems.

Alan's issues eventually began to affect his professional life. Due to bad performance at work, he was required to take a mandatory one week vacation. Eventually he lost his job. At the time of the follow up interview, he was still unemployed.

When Alan was employed, he was able to care for Amanda by sending her about \$100 a month. She used this money to buy extra food and toiletries not supplied by the prison. While this might seem like a lot of money, one must consider the cost of products sold in the prison store. For example, Ramen Noodles in a supermarket generally cost around 10 cents a pack, at the prison store they are 98 cents a pack.

Electronics are also subject to prison inflation. If an inmate is fortunate enough to have a TV or a fan, she has to pay a monthly fee of \$2.00 for electricity usage. Inmates must purchase a stinger in order to make hot coffee. At the supermarket it costs around \$3, but behind bars inmates must pay \$20. Because of this the \$100 that Alan sends Amanda, does not go far.

When he is unable to send Amanda money, he feels like he is neglecting his duty as caregiver: "Well I think I am letting her down...she's sayin' 'you know what you stop sending me money I can live off of what I have to. You take care of you.'" Even though Amanda insists that she will be fine, Alan sees this as a way to take care of her. In addition to the prison expenses Alan pays \$100 a

month for a storage unit to hold her belongings. He also assumed responsibility for paying her lawyer, which is about \$20,000.

Alan also periodically helps out Amanda's three adult children. From time to time, when they run into money problems, he will help them out. For example, Alan has purchased a set of new tires and helped pay the automobile registration fee for one of her daughters. He is also supporting his own daughter, who recently began studying veterinary science at a university outside Arizona.

Alan regularly finds himself going without: "Ah, I go down to the bare necessities...but I don't go with out...you know what? I do go without. I take care of the bills...I cut myself back so that I can make sure that my family is taken care of." Changes in his financial situation and his physical and mental health have affected nearly all aspects of his life. While his relationships with his daughter and Amanda's children stay strong, his relationships with his own mother and friends are wearing thin. Therefore Alan's support system is very limited.

About four months after the initial interview, Alan contacted me with good news. He was finally approved for visitation and was able to visit Amanda for the first time in seven months. When he arrived at the prison, they were performing vehicle searches. He passed the search and proceeded to the gate. Unfortunately, he went to the wrong gate, but the guards were understanding, and allowed him to cross the street to get to the appropriate yard without having his car searched a second time.

When Amanda arrived at the visitation area, Alan said: “I didn’t see anything but her. I over-kissed her, and she had to be like ‘hey quit it!’ so we didn’t get in trouble!” Throughout visitation they walked around, held hands and he even sneaked a kiss every half hour. Alan described his mood as happy, and that everyone else around him was happy too: “happy times.”

This happiness subsided when Amanda was yelled at for wanting to use the bathroom. Amanda approached a guard, leaving Alan outside, to ask to use the bathroom. Unbeknownst to her, inmates can only use the bathroom at certain times. The guard snapped at her while explaining the rules. Alan describes this situation as: “When she was with me, she was treated like a human, but when she was alone she was treated like a dog.”

This reminded Alan of where they were, in prison. This is the same place where Amanda is subjected to moldy showers and substandard food. He wishes to get involved and try to make a change in the way Amanda and her fellow inmates are treated. However, he does not want to make conditions worse or affect his ability to communicate with Amanda.

In the end, being able to visit with Amanda affected Alan in a positive way. He explained: “The contact visitations are more meaningful. When we write to each other, you can’t see the emotion.” Alan also reflected that the time went by fast: “I thought those 15 minutes were fast [referring to the phone calls], these three and a half hours were fast!” In addition to these comments, it was obvious in Alan’s voice and attitude that his life has improved because of the visit. Even though he recently lost his job, it seems that being able to see that she

is alive and well, as well as sharing a few kisses really improved his mental health.

### **Mike and Susana: A Perryville Wedding**

I met Mike through GINA's Team. The interview was over the phone midday, midweek and was conducted on the first scheduled try. Mike described himself as open and positive. These traits became apparent early on in the interview.

Mike, a 53-year-old Caucasian, and his wife Susana, a 45-year-old Caucasian, met during Susana's incarceration. She is serving an eight-year sentence for fraudulent schemes. At the time of the interview she had been incarcerated for five years. Mike is unemployed and recently began attending college for an Associate's Degree in Psychology. Susana has multiple college degrees, and is currently working on a Master's in Law.

Mike and Susana met via a prison ministries program. A colleague asked Mike if he would be interested in being a religious mentor pen-pal for a woman at Perryville:

Actually we met...ah...I was sitting in church telling God about the terrible choices I made in life and how I am not going through it anymore cuz, I just got over a divorce about a year or so before that. He basically told me: 'you're right' and...haha...a friend of mine who was also in prison ministry just happened to walk up at that time and asked me if I would be interested in writing to someone in prison as a pen pal. I said,

‘well, I’ll think about it’ and, uh, he gave me three names and one was Susana’s. And that’s how we met!

This is of interest because the relationship started out strictly as a religious mentoring program. After about six months of writing, the letters turned into phone calls and in about six months after that, the phone calls turned into visits. This was surprising to Mike because: “I’m not one of those kind-of guys who chases after chicks in prison.”

Mike’s familiarity with people seeking out romantic relationships with inmates ties into his turbulent past. He has been in jail 40 times. He used to live a life full of motorcycles, parties and sex. He is now ten years clean from drugs and his past ways.

Mike’s relationship with Susana is unique, mostly because it was formed after he revamped his life. He explains:

All the women that I have known, which is quite a few, were involved... basically it was a weekend of hardcore drinking and partying and then sex and then trying to build a relationship around that. Whereas with Susana, it was totally different. We actually got to know each other from the very beginning without all the external things affecting us. You know, other than the prison. This is the first relationship I did not wake up the next morning saying “What the hell did you do Mike?!”

In Mike’s previous life, sex symbolized the beginning of a relationship. But now, since conjugal visits are not allowed in Arizona prisons, this will have to wait

until Susana is released. As he explained, this allowed them time to get to know each other first and to truly fall in love.

This relationship worked out so well for Mike and Susana that they married on December 8th, 2009. Since Susana was incarcerated at the time, the wedding took place in the prison. While people usually describe their wedding as very enjoyable, Mike and Susana had a different experience:

It was the biggest pain-in-the-ass I have ever experienced in my life! We had absolutely no support from the pastoral staff. Until I got to the point to where I called the main guy down in Phoenix and left a voice mail and told him ‘I want to congratulate you. You have taken every bit, pardon my French, every bit of fucking joy out of this that I could ever have imagined.’ Only after that did things start rolling smooth. It was absolutely incredible with the amount of red tape and BS we had to put up with just to do this. And then there was, once again, we were allowed two kisses and holding hands. And that’s all it was.

Their wedding was considered a special visitation session. According to prison policy on special visitation, only four people, including Mike, were to be allowed at the ceremony. Mike’s parents and Susana’s daughter attended the ceremony. As a special privilege, they were also able to have Susana’s daughter’s boyfriend at the ceremony.

In addition to restricting the wedding, the ADOC has rules regulating the style and the expense of bride/inmate’s wedding ring. It can only be a plain band and cannot cost over \$150. When I asked Mike about what they wore to the



ceremony he replied: “Well, I did shine my boots! I wore a sweater...but yeah she was straight up in orange.” Mike, his family, and Susana’s daughter were not allowed to take pictures or bring food. They were, however, allowed to purchase food from the expensive visitation vending machines. The prison did not recognize this event as a marriage, but just as a special two hour visitation session. This is exemplified by the allowance of only two kisses and the constant supervision from the guards.

Since the “red tape” was so limiting, it leaves one to wonder if this experience was worth it: “After I have been through it all I am glad it is over with. Would I ever do it again? No way!” However, Mike later recanted: “But, I think that [the marriage] has helped Susana with her emotional stability a little bit more, so I am good with that. I would have...if I had to do it again after being through all this again, that would be the only reason why I would do it.”

In long-distance relationships outside of prison, most people have access to phones and the internet on a regular basis. This communication has the potential to be more consistent. Since Mike and Susana’s relationship began with the prison barrier, their relationship was built on the notoriously poor and expensive communication venues.

Mike and Susana are able to navigate the various communication venues well. When relationships are formed prior to going to prison, couples are forced to change the way they communicate, and for the most part, the free spouse becomes the main emotional supporter. Communication in prison is not free. Letters, phone calls, and visitation all require financial investment. Regardless of

the cost, Mike and Susana utilize these to their fullest extent. For example, Mike explains letter writing: “I have never been a fancy letter writer. But, she does fantastic. I do my share. As a matter of fact, I got her a card today, you know. [Writing] allows us to focus more on the mental and emotional thoughts and processes that go through with a solid relationship.” To Mike, letters appear to be the most basic form of communication, meaning there are no distractions and they can say what they want and mean.

Along with general relationship-building, Mike and Susana regularly support each other. Mike shared the example of discussing parenting ideas with her: “I am able to use her as a sounding board and get constructive thoughts back.” He also explained that this is useful because they have lived different lives, so another opinion helps him gain new insight on particular topics.

Mike and Susana also have arguments like regular couples. The major difference is the financial burden of these arguments. Mike explains:

I mean we have our things that we disagree on, but the one thing we decided to do from the beginning is not to go to bed pissed off at each other. So, if we have a situation or a problem, it might be a \$20 phone call night but, we will get it worked out.

Out of all the communication venues, visitation remains the most important for Mike and Susana. This is a time when they can just hang out. However, they make sure they follow the rules: “There are plenty of times that I want to lean over and give her a kiss or her to me or whatever. But there are rules and as much as I don’t like them, I understand them...but, we can hold hands, you

can put your arms around her...stuff like that. It's not like we have to have a foot space between us at all times."

During visitation Mike and Susana sit outside, because it is quieter and Mike smokes. Susana does not smoke, and because of this Mike bends the rules to make sure Susana is not completely disgusted with his habit: "I'm a rebel, I sneak in three Tic-Tacs cuz I'm a smoker and I don't want my wife to have to kiss me at the end after smoking all day long." While this may not appear to be a security breach, Mike could potentially have his visitation ended if he was caught doing this. Since he is a regular visitor, chances are he will not get caught. While he still has to go through intake like everyone else, over the years he has proved himself to be low risk.

Being a regular visitor has its perks. One is that Mike and Susana periodically share visitation with other prison staff. He explains: "I've had guards come over and sit down and have a cigarette talking with us... We had one of the main guys from the prison come over, he has worked with Susana quite a bit, they have had a good relationship. He came over and talked to my mom, dad, Susana, and I for an hour one time"

Unfortunately, even regulars are mistreated by guards. Luckily this has only happened to Mike and Susana once: "I only had one CO [correction officer] that came over, she went "hey"...I don't remember what it was for to be honest. But, I found out later on that Susana has had a problem with this CO before." Mike and Susana want Susana to be released as soon as possible; therefore they make it a point to respect the rules. If an inmate is reprimanded for anything, she

risks having more time added to her sentence. It is in Mike and Susana's best interest to obey the visitation rules. This is a perfect example of how visitation helps maintain social control at the prison.

As a regular, Mike rarely runs into trouble during visitation intake since he is experienced and fully aware of the rules. Other than the inconvenience of setting off the metal detectors due to having both his hips replaced, he has only had one issue. On one occasion his parents accompanied him to visitation and they arrived two minutes late: "Once we got down there, and uh, and we got down there at 10:32...which is 2 minutes past the time to get in and we had to wait for an hour and a half. My dad is 74 years old and he has diabetes. That really was a pain in the butt."

His parents are very accepting of the marriage, and really care about Susana. This came as a surprise, as his parents had different views about incarceration earlier on:

My parents have always been pretty staunch conservative, shall we say. The amazing part about how their eyes have opened up as far as how the system works, more so now with my relationship with Susana. My parents told me when I was a lot younger, of course I was very very rowdy at the time, said 'you get thrown in jail don't call me.' And that was their whole outlook on it. And now they've seen all the ups and downs and the rollercoaster ride that Susana goes through, just to get reclassified or this, that, or the other thing.

Mike's eight-year-old daughter, Stacy, has attended visitation with her dad. Mike describes Stacy's feelings towards Susana: "She absolutely loves Susana. She even asked Susana if she can call her mom! Yeah, my ex [wife] is not too cool about that." His ex-wife eventually put an end to their daughter visiting, but Mike is currently working to get her back on Susana's visitation list.

Due to the divorce, Mike is only able to see Stacy on the weekends, which is also the only time he can visit with Susana. This poses a conflict. Even though Susana is at Stage 3 of visitation privileges, Mike only visits Saturday mornings. Since Stacy can no longer accompany him to visitation, he makes sure Stacy is alright with him going to see Susana: "I always ask her if it is ok if I go down. You know, I never just say, 'well I'm going down!' I figure, I owe that to her as my daughter. And, of course, she has never once has said, 'NO!' She is very happy with the fact that I do go down." Mike does his best to split his time by arriving to visitation at 8am and leaves at 3pm. This allows him to spend Saturday evening and Sunday with his daughter.

Due to this scheduling dilemma, Mike takes advantage of holiday visits whenever he can. These visits tend to fall on Mondays, which resolves the scheduling conflict. He is able to do this because he has been unemployed since the beginning of his relationship with Susana. This is the only good part of his unemployment. He generally lacks resources to be able to visit on a regular basis. Mike is only able to make the 200-mile round trip to visit Susana one to two times a month. He explains: "Well, with the old car that I got, going down there and back, that's about 40 bucks in gas and then I always try to take \$30 or \$40 worth

of quarters in... I can't tell you how many times that I've said 'I just can't come down this week babe.' Like last week, I had \$12 in my checking account. I could have chanced it...but you know."

Due to his financial difficulties, he is also not able to send Susana money regularly. But, when he receives his installments on his student loans, he tries to send her one to two hundred dollars. Susana has a job where she makes 30 cents an hour, so she is able to get by without consistent financial help from Mike.

Mike wishes he could visit more and be more of a financial supporter. Mike hit a streak of bad luck just months before meeting Susana. Due to the economic crisis his wood-working job disappeared. He went from \$750 a week to \$180 a week. Along with regular bills, he pays \$80 a month in child support. Mike explains: "Now, I still have bills. I have everything that I own in storage, my insurance payment, my phone payment and one other payment. So, I'm pretty limited." He is so limited that he moved back into his parents' home.

His financial situation and his wife's prison term affect him. But he loves Susana enough that he remains faithful to her, regardless of how lonely he gets:

I do miss the physical interaction but that doesn't necessarily...that is not swaying my thoughts or abilities to maintain a singular relationship out here. I guess what I am trying to say is I ain't going to screw around on her because I miss her. The actual physical part, although it is important it is not as important as just being able to share a movie together, you know, just hang out...poke the other one in the ribs when they are snoring too loud!

Mike is fortunate to have his parents as a support system. In addition to his parents, Mike met a couple during visitation that he became close to. They helped him adjust to his new relationship through prison bars: “They helped me a quite a bit with things that I did not understand. Why it works this way or how it works this way. She was in there for 10 years flat, so they had a lot of experience.” Mike also found some of the prison staff to be helpful: “Susana’s counselor has been really wonderful. I have only talked to her once, but she has helped Susana, who has relayed the information to me.” These relationships help Mike cope with the current hardships in his life.

It appears that Mike is able to engage in a functional marriage with Susana. This is evident in the high levels of communication and mutual support, even though their relationship was formed with Perryville as a barrier.

### **Chuck and Kelly: Visitation Every Weekend**

I met Chuck through GINA’s Team. Chuck met me after visitation with his wife at a restaurant about 15 miles from Perryville. I provided lunch prior to the interview.

Chuck, a 37-year-old Caucasian, and his wife Kelly, a 40-year-old Caucasian, have been married for almost 8 years. Kelly has a year left of her four year and 6 month sentence for aggravated assault. During this time Chuck has visited her every weekend and has dedicated his life to making sure she has everything she needs while incarcerated.

Prior to the incarceration, Chuck and Kelly had a good life. Kelly had a high-paying job with a bank, making around \$250,000 a year. Chuck has a good

job, but Kelly was the “bread winner.” They frequently took vacations and even built a 4,000 sq ft dream home. Due to their financial situation, they were able to hire a good lawyer and Kelly avoided a 15-year sentence.

Kelly was facing a 15-year sentence for aggravated assault. This translates into a crime where the perpetrator intentionally hurts the victim, like a stabbing. Chuck explained that aggravated assault is not what happened. Kelly and Chuck had been out drinking and Kelly was driving them home. She caused a car accident, where the other driver had his leg broken. While this was essentially a DUI with an injury, in the courts this translated into aggravated assault.

Chuck and Kelly have a good relationship. Chuck explains:

We are married, and extremely really happy. I waited a long time to marry. I had strict guidelines...well not strict guidelines but I had to make sure...I guess, I told myself a long time ago that I was only going to get married once. So when I got married I was 29 and she was 31 or something like that. When we met it was just, um, I don't know how to explain it...it was just unbelievable. It was like instant soul mates, we just could not be separated at all. And we got married pretty quickly, it only took about 8 months and we were married! And we both feel like we just found the right person for each other. I mean if you see us out in public you would think we are newlyweds...always holding hands. We are just crazy in love and stuff like that.



Chuck was initially worried that the incarceration would have a negative affect on their relationship:

I could see that she was a little concerned. She was asking “are you going to wait for me?” and all these other things...it was kinda sad....

Essentially, I just wanted to take every precaution possible so that we could still continue with our lives, because I really believe she is my soul mate. So, I made a pledge to her that I would always come visit her every day. Which I have. She is very nice about it, if I ever want to go play golf she understands that I will come in the afternoon...things like that.

Chuck’s worries proved to be unfounded; because the incarceration has helped them to grow closer. He explains: “We’ve continued to fall in love, deeper and deeper.” They are able to maintain their relationship with visitation and phone conversations. Since Chuck still has a good job, he is able to accept phone calls from Kelly 2-3 times a day. He wants to make sure Kelly can get a hold of him whenever she wants.

During these phone conversations they mostly talk about their future together. They would like to be able to talk about what Kelly is experiencing in prison, but all phone calls are monitored by prison staff. He explains: “I don’t want to say stuff to anger whoever could possibly be listening to it....Sometimes I get upset and I’m afraid that if I say something over the phone and they are going to hear it, there might be repercussions against it towards my wife, which has happened before. They’ll never admit it, but it does.”

In addition to frequent phone conversations, Chuck is also able to attend visitation on a regular basis. Even though Chuck does not live near the prison, he makes the long drive on both Saturday and Sunday to spend this special time with Kelly. He goes out of his way to make sure everything is perfect for Kelly. He explains:

I always go first thing in the morning, because I want to see my wife first thing in the morning...first possible moment. They start checking in at 7:30, I'm usually there at 7. They won't let you into the yard where visitation occurs until 8 o'clock. So, I usually just sit there until 8 o'clock and then after that we turn in our slips and we go on a mad dash to the vending machines, haha!! To get the best food, that's kinda the other reason I like to get there early, so I can get her whatever she wants. Well, it's really not a mad dash, it's more of a formalized walk...but it depends on who's behind ya! Haha! If they're going to dash, I'm going to dash!

Being able to purchase food from the vending machines is the only way a loved one can directly "take care of" their partner. Chuck states that he "cooks food for her." Even though cooking during visitation is preparing boneless chicken wings or burritos in the microwave, this is a way he can take care of her. Visitors can't bring flowers to visitation, so the vending machines and microwaves are the only option.

Other than eating, Chuck and Kelly spend their time enjoying each other's company. They sit inside but walk outside to smoke and hold hands throughout the visit. Sometimes they sneak kisses, which is against the rules. However,

since they have been visiting for almost three years, they know which guards are strict and which are not.

Visitation is a special time, however Chuck finds it to be emotionally difficult:

We are always holding hands while we walk down the street [around the visitation area] and stuff, its so hard, I'm so close to her I want to hug her all the time and roll around with her on the ground, like steam roller her down, haha. It's just very difficult to be so close to someone you love so much and not be able to embrace, you know what I mean? So, that's what I am really looking forward to.

During this portion of the interview, Chuck expressed great sadness and was holding back tears.

Even though Chuck is a regular, he has encountered issues with guards.

One particular instance:

I had a problem with one guard, her name is Officer Weston, she just seems to pick on me for some reason. Um, one time I was checking out and she made me wait like 47 minutes, and that's not necessary. She walked by me three or four times, she just wouldn't let me out or hand me back my ID. I mean 15 minutes I can understand, after 15 minutes you're illegally incarcerating me...is the way I saw it...especially when she saw me waiting, things like that. So, after that, I let her know my two cents about the situation and say 'hey just because you don't respect other peoples time, that's fine but you can't make me wait for 47 minutes.'

Then she went back and told my wife that I was being rude and all this other stuff.

This confrontation resulted in retaliation directed towards Kelly:

Then the next thing you know my wife had to go do a urinalysis. And she is on prescription medication, one of them happens to be a narcotic, and I am pretty sure Weston was there while they were checking the sample. And every time it comes up dirty...and it didn't come up dirty...they just didn't know if it was clean...it was a decision call at that point in time. So, they decided to send it off, which basically caused me to lose my visits for about two months...while they were awaiting the results...because they were unsure.

Chuck usually would not argue with how things are because he understands why the rules are in place. However, he found the suspension of visitation to be ridiculous:

I think it's a policy that if someone's caught with dirty urine, visitation is automatically canceled, because they automatically assume that it [drugs] comes through visitation but in actuality, you go through a dog, you go through a metal detector, if anyone is bringing it in it's the guards...it's not the people. No one sneaks anything in there without the dogs knowing about it...it's just kinda dumb...but at the same time I do understand their policy. But, at the same time it wasn't certified dirty, they just didn't know. So, I was upset about that because they are essentially punishing us.

In times like this, Chuck and Kelly are fortunate to have the financial means to be able to talk on the phone daily. Chuck always knows how she is doing and Kelly can feel secure in knowing about Chuck. Kelly's situation is about as good as it can be. She is friends with her cellmate and is housed on a good yard. In addition to this, Chuck makes sure Kelly has everything she needs by keeping \$1,000 on her books. This is significantly more money than many of the inmates receive.

Unfortunately, Chuck still has concerns. Prison is not known for exceptional medical treatment and Perryville is no different. There have been a number of high-profile inmate deaths, and this has Chuck worried: "The quality of care she is receiving, especially medical is just sickening, it's worse than a third world country."

Ironically, medical is what they depend on to keep Kelly with her cellmate, on the same yard, and at Perryville. Due to being on medication, she is on the "Watch and Swallow" yard (a phrase for when a nurse supervises inmates taking medication to make sure they actually swallow it). If she stopped the medication, she could change yards. This would be difficult because she would have to start making new friends and could have an undesirable cellmate. However, this is not the worst-case scenario; she could be moved to SACRAC, which is a low security facility in Tucson, AZ. This would be devastating for Chuck and Kelly because he already has a long commute to Perryville. Tucson would be much more difficult.

Even while Kelly is incarcerated, Chuck's entire life revolves around her. Because of this, his distribution of money and time has completely changed since the incarceration. He explains:

She is my priority, basically. But, at the same time I want to make sure I have enough for the house and everything else. I just try to maintain and be as frugal as possible. I do my own landscaping where I never used to do that...stuff like that. I don't go out or anything either. You are going to find me at one of four places: work, home, Wal-Mart, or the gym.

Haha, that's it! That's all I do; not only to conserve money but so my wife...I don't think it's fair that she's doing this alone. Because the way I look at it, it's like we are both in prison, just different locations.

Unfortunately, all the scaling back Chuck has done was not enough to save their home. Due to being on a single income, Chuck had to sell their dream home.

Chuck has had difficulty coping with this situation and he finds himself depressed. Luckily, he has support from both his and her family. Chuck was worried about his relationship with her parents:

I think hers [family] was kind of concerned at the beginning...that I may not stay with her because this is her second marriage. I think they are a little unsure about me as a person because I have only met them several times. Now that we are nearing kind of the end [of Kelly's incarceration], I think they really realize what type of person I really am. I'm not a typical guy. Everyone has been real supportive.

Chuck also found support in a friendship he made at the prison. He found himself surprised by this: “Hope this does not come out wrong...that’s not the kinda person I am. Generally, most of the people that are in prison are actually people that I would not associate with.” Chuck and his visitation friend were going through similar situations and shared similar socioeconomic status.

Due to Kelly’s charges, she will never be able to work in her field again. Chuck has come to terms with this, and it is very clear that all he wants in life is to have Kelly free. Through this hard time, their love has only grown stronger.

### **George and Sara: Gotta Take Care of my Girl**

I met George through GINA’s Team. The interview was conducted at a shopping mall food court, where I provided lunch. At the time of the interview his girlfriend, Sara, would be released from Perryville in 21 days. George is familiar with prison, having served time in both county jail and in state prison, for separate offenses.

George, a 42-year-old Hispanic, and Sara, a 23-year-old Hispanic, have been dating for a little over a year. They met while out clubbing and began dating a week prior to Sara’s incarceration. This means that they barely knew each other before prison. However, George felt strongly for Sara right away, so he made an effort to build their relationship through the prison barrier.

Sara is serving a one-year sentence for a parole violation, having been on parole for a drug offense. The first three months of her sentence was spent in Yuma county jail. George lived in Yuma at the time; therefore he was able to visit her frequently. However, after sentencing she was moved up to Perryville

and he was not able to attend visitation until he moved to Phoenix several months later.

During the time George was unable to visit, they relied on letter writing as the primary form of communication. This is because George was unable to accept phone calls from Sara due to his cell phone plan. Letter writing has always been very important to George. He shows this by saying: "I've kept every letter she's written." These letters represent some of the beginning stages of their relationship.

George eventually moved to Phoenix to be closer to Sara and other family. The first time he attended visitation at Perryville, it was a surprise for Sara. They had not seen each other for three months. Moreover, this was the first time they could hug in six months. This is when they shared their first kiss.

George has attended visitation every weekend since he moved to Phoenix. Sara is only at visitation Phase 1, so he only visits on Saturday afternoons. George spends \$50 each time he visits on gas, a pack of cigarettes, and quarters for the vending machines. This is financially straining due to being on government disability. For supplemental income, he works periodically as a Karaoke DJ. Unfortunately, he only fills in when another DJ can not make it; therefore it is not a steady income.

George always makes sure to get Sara her favorite foods during visitation, which ends up costing close to \$20. George explains: "She's my girlfriend; I gotta take care of her!" This is important to George because he describes himself as a gentleman and more old fashioned about dating. He also



takes pride in this because: “She’s never had a real relationship...never had somebody treat her right.” He takes pride in being the first boyfriend to take care of her, so visitation has been a very positive experience for him.

Visitation has allowed their relationship to grow so strong that Sara has introduced George to her parents. This happened much like it would in the free world, except it was at visitation. Sara also met one of George’s five children during visitation.

Since visitation has been such a positive experience for George, he hardly gives any thought to the times when mistakes were made by the guards. Regardless, he has had bad experiences. For example, the yard Sara is on usually has the same guard working visitation intake, which allows the line to move quickly. On one occasion George arrived to a very long line. A different guard was covering intake that day and it was taking him about 15 to 20 minutes to check in one person. In addition, Sara was not called to visitation right away, so George had to wait an hour to see her.

Another instance, George was almost denied visitation due to the regular guard misreading the paperwork. She thought that George and Sara’s parents had already attended the morning visitation session, when in fact they had not. Luckily, the guard noticed her mistake and ran out to the parking lot to let them know they could attend visitation.

Since both of these experiences led to seeing Sara, they did not appear to agitate George. In fact, he did not immediately remember these situations. George does find the “stickler rules” to be ridiculous. He shared a story where a

visitation session was ended due to an inmate wearing her husband's sunglasses. So, even though George has never missed out of visitation, he is fully aware of the consequences of not following the rules.

George's easygoing demeanor can be attributed to the fact that he has served time. This has become apparent to the guards who work visitation intake. For example, when he first attended visitation at Perryville he stood with his "hands out to [his] side like an inmate would" while being sniffed by the drug dog. The guard responded to this by saying: "You don't have to do that, you're the good guy." George responded: "It's habit!" The guard inquired where he had done time and after George told him that was the end of it. George was actually surprised that he was approved for visitation in the first place, having a felony in his background.

Outside of visitation, George tries his best to financially support Sara. He sends her about \$50 a month, which she uses for toiletries. George sees this as another way to care for her.

Regardless of the fact that George and Sara had to build their relationship while apart, George does believe that prison has been a positive experience for Sara. Not only has she adopted a more positive attitude, she completed her GED. This has inspired her to get a job and to continue with school once she is released.

Even though Sara is making positive changes in her life, not everyone approves of their relationship. Some people focus on their age difference, while others comment on George's tendency to date "the bad girls." However, George

believes that when she is released, everyone will see how she has turned her life around.

George's sister and roommate are the only people who support his relationship. They show their support by expressing general happiness that he has found someone who he really cares about. His roommate has even loaned him money so he can attend visitation. This support is helpful because these are the people he spends the majority of his time with.

When Sara is released from Perryville, George will be there to pick her up. He plans to take her out to eat and then to drive her to her parents house, where she will spend the remaining three months of her parole. George was ecstatic when sharing this with me. He is confident that this relationship is going to last.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

#### **Results**

Meaning-making and the maintenance of romantic relationships are difficult in the prison setting. The men of women incarcerated at Perryville Prison revealed that good communication skills as well as direct and indirect financial support are how these relationships are sustained and made meaningful. By doing this, the men believe that they are fulfilling their duty as the provider in the relationship.

The reliance on financial support was also documented by Comfort (2008). All the men send money monthly to help support their wife or partner, which is indirect support. There is no way for the man to know what his partner is spending the money on, as opposed to buying something specific with the money and giving it to her as it possible on the outside. Comfort (2008) verifies the inflation of supplies available to incarcerated persons (p. 228). The women send money and care packages to show their support. This support continues regardless of the fact that many partners and loved ones of incarcerated persons live in poverty (Arditti, 2003; Fishman, 1990).

Direct financial support is the form of tangible support for the free partner. By purchasing or bringing in food for visitation, both partners enjoy the act of taking care of and being cared for. Both Comfort (2008) and Girshick's (1996) partners of incarcerated men bring money to visitation to purchase food or bring food for the periodic food visits. Comfort (2008) attributes this action, regardless

of financial difficulty, to fulfilling the female gender role of “feeding the family” (p. 106). Due to the inability to actually prepare the food at visitation, bringing in or purchasing food is the only alternative. To make the best of it, the women take pride in the meal they are able to purchase from the vending machine, or bring in by following the strict institutional guidelines.

The men of women incarcerated at Perryville Prison also enjoy the action of purchasing food or bringing prepared food to the periodic food visits. However, the men described the reasoning and enjoyment about these actions as their *husbandly* duty. This reasoning is reminiscent of the good provider role. Even though the act of preparing food is not a conventional male gender role, the act of working to purchase the supplies is. The feelings of failure that the men hold when they are unable to provide for their partners further reinforce this. However, it appears that the men will do anything in order to provide, even if it means making major lifestyle adjustments.

When couples are limited, as they are when a partner is incarcerated, they must make meaning out of their relationship somehow. Sending money and purchasing food for or during visitation are the only ways that the men can provide for their partners. Therefore, money and food mean something more to these couples. They are representative of activities and gestures that loved ones make and do for each other on the outside.

In addition to financial support, the use of all communication venues is also important for relationship maintenance. While not every participant utilized every form of communication, they seemed to find what worked best for their

relationship. Comfort (2008) explains that some of her participants use letters as “body substitutes,” where the women of incarcerated men treat reading letters from their partners as a date (p. 73). While the men do not describe their actions with the letters they receive as intensely, George shared that he saved every letter.

Phone calls have the ability to include the incarcerated partner in decision making. This form of communication is connected with instant gratification, as opposed to waiting for a letter to arrive or waiting for visitation. These phone calls are used by the men to help their incarcerated partners feel more secure about their whereabouts and fidelity. This is contradictory to some of the experiences Fishman (1990) reported on. Her participants revealed that their incarcerated partners used the phone to control their lives and to insure fidelity (Fishman, 1990, p. 213).

The diligent use of the communication venues allow the men of women incarcerated at Perryville Prison to support and be supported. This is important because the men have limited social support. Having a family member or loved one incarcerated carries a great deal of stigma (Condry, 2007, p.61). As the men revealed, many of their friends and family abandoned them after their partner became incarcerated. However, when asked, the men stated that they did not need or want help or a support group. This suggests that even while alone, these limited resources that assist in making meaning and maintenance of the relationship might be enough for the men. Although they are lonely, they are surviving.

## Symbols

These men dedicate ample amounts of time and money to caring for their incarcerated wives. While each narrative displays major differences in the actual relationship and status, all the men have the same common goal in mind. This goal is met through financial support and the various venues of communication, with visitation being the most significant.

The majority of reoccurring symbols are linked to this goal. All men cited financial hardship in one way or another. In this case money symbolizes indirect care. While the men are unable to purchase necessities for their wives directly, they all make a point to send as much money as possible so she can shop at the prison store. When the men are not able to send as much as they would like, they feel like they are not fulfilling their role as her care taker.

Visitation is the only time when a man can purchase something directly for his partner. This is done through purchasing food from the prison vending machines. In this case food symbolizes direct care. While out in the free world couples enjoy dinner and a movie, behind bars this is equivalent to sharing snacks from the vending machines.

Finally, every venue of communication symbolizes the endless support offered by the men. This dedication helps the women through their sentences. In a desolate environment, they offer a window to the outside world and supply endless amounts of love, when it is so desperately needed in the prison.

## **The Importance of Visitation**

Visitation is an important activity for all who are involved. As this paper and past research has shown, the prison, the inmate, the inmate community, and loved ones all benefit from this activity. Visitation can impact public safety, because it has been shown to lower recidivism rates.

From the visitor's perspective, visitation is a time to see a loved one, despite the necessity of conforming to the harsh rules and regulations of the ADOC, which can be stressful. The rules are a reminder that the prison is set up to punish offenders, even while allowing community ties to continue to exist. These ties allow for better reintegration into the community. Perryville thus achieves two of the classic goals of imprisonment – rehabilitation and punishment – at the same time with its strict visitation rules and practices.

While the idea of getting tough on crime resonates with politicians, visitation should not be sacrificed. When relationships are upheld through visitation, the offender has a greater chance to be released into an approved home in the community, as opposed to a halfway house or homelessness. Having a home and a family to belong to carries obvious benefits. One of the most important benefits is to help reacclimatize the loved one to how the world has changed since she began her sentence.

Having a peaceful stay at prison also aids in rehabilitation. As shown in previous research, visitation promotes higher inmate morale and lowers instances of violence. As a reward for good behavior, good time is allotted. This allows



inmates to get out of prison early, providing an additional benefit to society: early release helps save tax dollars.

The benefits to prison visitation are great enough to suggest that the hurdles that visitors experience should be critically scrutinized. There are no sound institutional justifications for the inconsistencies, sub-par conditions, and overall mistreatment of visitors described in these accounts. The visitors in this study do not argue for lower security; they seek only a level of respect for themselves and their loved ones. Most visitors do not have any qualms with going through security or other restrictions on food, dress, or visiting hours.

Even within the limits ADOC imposes, these informants see visitation as an aid to maintaining, and even deepening, their intimate relationships. This suggests the possibility that if visitation were a more positive experience, because of more reasonable procedures, its effectiveness could potentially improve. In short, my findings suggest that the benefits of visitation extend far beyond the couples involved in this study. Tangible benefits afforded by visitation include better rehabilitative outcomes and lower imprisonment costs (through early release). The prison and its personnel also benefit. Prisons depend on incentives to maintain control and a safe environment. Visitation privileges are a powerful incentive to good behavior. ADOC implicitly acknowledges this in its provision of escalating visiting privileges, depending on behavior and experience in visitation. It thus seems reasonable, from the previously mentioned perspective, to explore ways that the visiting program could be improved and expanded.

### **Future Research on Men of Incarcerated Women**

Future research on the partners of incarcerated women should aim for a broader sample of partners of women who are imprisoned. This could be accomplished by looking at multiple institutions, more diverse partners/inmates, or by examining more varied types of relationships at a particular facility. It would be beneficial, for example, to explore lesbian relationships with the prison barrier.

The relationships in this study were all self-identified as healthy. In past research (Comfort, 2008; Girshick, 1996; Fishman, 1990), many relationships were turbulent. The methods used to sample for this study allowed for self selection; and, perhaps knowing that I was looking to find out more about the relationship between a man and his incarcerated partner discouraged men in bad relationships to participate. It would be useful to know about all types of relationships: good/bad or functioning/nonfunctioning.

At the time of the interviews, all the incarcerated women were in prison for the first time; therefore it would be beneficial to look at relationships between career criminals and their free partners. In addition to this, a greater array of offenses would bring more insight to this population. Three out of four partners in this study were incarcerated for victimless crimes. It would be beneficial to know more about relationships between free men and women convicted of violent offenses.

It would be informative to also interview incarcerated women along with their partners, individually. This could bring new dimensions of the relationship

to light. In addition, interviewing the female inmates would also reveal fidelity on their side of the relationship. It has been documented that when incarcerated, both male and female inmates may engage in temporary homosexual relationships. When they complete their sentence they enter the free world resuming their heterosexual lifestyle. In addition to this, female inmates create families structures behind bars (Clear and Cole, 2003, p. 302). Different inmates act out the family role of father, mother, daughter, son, cousin, etc. These roles may fill the void created by the separation from their loved one.

In order to meet these needs, it would be advisable to work closely with the Department of Corrections. Unfortunately, this was not an option for this study. I volunteer at Perryville Prison with the organization GINA's Team, which is a potential conflict of interest. Because of this, I maintained distance between my study and my GINA's Team activities. However, other members of GINA's Team connected me with participants. None the participant's partners were involved with any of my GINA's Team activities.

Future research would also benefit from a theoretical basis in gender roles. It became obvious to me during the first interview that the men were not forthcoming with their emotions. This could be for a number of reasons, such as socialization or lack of relationship established between researcher and participant. A more clear understanding of this would assist in analysis as well as prepare the researcher for this possible issue.

## **Recommendations**

This study continued to reinforce common issues found with relationship maintenance among couples consisting of an incarcerated partner. Due to the benefits associated with relationship maintenance, correctional policy makers and employees should strive to make this action easier. This can be done in a variety of ways, including reducing phone costs, making visitation a more enjoyable experience, and working towards community support.

By reducing the cost of the phone system, more people would be able to use it, which could make up for the inability for the free loved one to attend visitation. As past research has shown, ties to the outside world are correlated with reduced recidivism rates, and phone calls should not be an exception to these findings.

In contrast, if visitation was easier and more enjoyable, phone calls may not be needed in the extent as they currently are. Since visitation has been found to be important and inexpensive for the institution to administer, there is no reason why the problems with visitation have not been addressed. Many people would benefit from adequate transportation to the prison. There is not a bus that goes out to Perryville prison. In fact, the closest bus route, the 17A McDowell route, which stretches across the greater phoenix area, ends just six miles east of the prison. Extending this route these final six miles on Saturday and Sunday during visitation hours would allow more people to attend visitation.

Visitors would also benefit from consistent administration of institutional rules. This would lessen confusion during the entire visitation process and make

for a more enjoyable experience. This would also reduce the feelings of victimization that many visitors experience, which results in resentment towards correctional staff.

Visitors would benefit from more reasonably priced and healthier vending machine options. While food visits allow for some flexibility in visitation eating, regular visits are limited to expensive, sugary and processed selections, as opposed to healthy, wholesome foods. There is no reason why food in visitation vending machines costs more than it would out the outside. This would allow for visitation to be more affordable, and some healthier choices can help with behavioral issues children may exhibit due to higher sugar intake.

Finally, visitation could also be improved by offering more for the children who attend visitation. This bleak environment is hard on children, and at Perryville there is nothing for them to do. Everyone would benefit from a play area, as it could allow active children to release energy by playing. This could be done by providing age-appropriate toys in a small area of the visitation room.

It is important to consider that the responsibility of lowering recidivism rates is not only held by the institution and family members of incarcerated people, but by the entire community. The majority of incarcerated people are not serving life sentences. Large numbers of ex-offenders are currently entering our communities and will continue to do so. Incarceration needs to stop being out of sight, out of mind, and community members must become involved with reintegration. This is currently done on a small scale with non-profit or

community organizations, but the majority of society still aligns with Not in my Back Yard (NIMBY) viewpoint.

The department of corrections could ease the transition into society by working with the community to help soon to be released inmates find jobs and housing. Over time, this may help community members feel more comfortable accepting ex-offenders, and perhaps help people accept that he or she has completed their punishment and must now become active members in society. These actions will reduce recidivism for the same reasons visitation does, only the offender or ex-offender will have increased ties to society and a more places to belong.

It is time for society to demand affective rehabilitative programs and to accept that ex-offenders have completed their punishment, as opposed to aligning with the political rhetoric of getting tough on crime. After all, when an offender is sentenced for anything less than life, there is an assumption that the sentence will end. The evidence is clear, in order to have the most effective reintegration, a collaborative effort must be made between the Department of Corrections, loved ones of incarcerated persons, and the offenders community.

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APPENDIX A


UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION – NOVEMBER 2009



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

**To:** Doris Provine  
WILSN

*fo* **From:** Mark Roosa, Chair   
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 11/20/2009

**Committee Action:** **Amendment to Approved Protocol**

**Approval Date:** 11/20/2009

**Review Type:** Expedited F12

**IRB Protocol #:** 0909004394

**Study Title:** The Significant Others of Female Prisoners

**Expiration Date:** 10/11/2010

The amendment to the above-referenced protocol has been APPROVED following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** if you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

Arizona State University  
Office of Research Integrity and Assurance  
IRB  
P.O. Box 871103  
Tempe, AZ 85287-1103  
Phone: 480-965-6788  
Fax: (480) 965-7772



For Office Use Only:  
Date Received:

### Modification Form Institutional Review Board (IRB)

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION		
<b>PROTOCOL TITLE:</b> Study of Spouses/Significant Others of Female Prisoners		<b>HS #</b> 0909004294
<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Dr. Doris Marie Provine		<b>DEPARTMENT/CENTER:</b> Justice and Social Inquiry / School of Social Transformation
<b>CAMPUS ADDRESS:</b> Wilson Hall 207, Mail Code: 4902		<b>PHONE:</b> (480)965-7682 <b>EMAIL:</b> Marie.Provine@asu.edu
<b>CO-INVESTIGATORS:</b> Elizabeth Rivard		
<b>FUNDING STATUS:</b> If project is funded or funding is being sought, provide list of all sponsors and grant numbers: Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA), Grant # unknown at this time.		
<b>TYPE OF MODIFICATION (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)</b>		
<b>Please attach any revised documents (forms, scripts, etc). Attach a brief summary of the proposed changes as well as a justification.</b>		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	New Procedures	Attach a description of the new procedures and a revised consent form.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Study Title Change	What is the new title?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change in Study Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Add (include the name, role, and contact information. Include copies of training certificates: <a href="http://researchintegrity.asu.edu/training/humans">http://researchintegrity.asu.edu/training/humans</a> <input type="checkbox"/> Delete
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change of Site	<input type="checkbox"/> Add (include the name and location. If this changes the enrollment, that should be noted below.) <input type="checkbox"/> Modify <input type="checkbox"/> Delete
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change in Enrollment	Attach a narrative justifying the change. If this will affect the consent, send a revised consent form as well.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consent Change	Attach a copy and describe the change(s).
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Advertisement	Attach copies of the advertisement or announcement.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Instruments (surveys, questionnaires, interviews, etc)	Attach copies of the proposed instruments and describe any changes from the approved protocol. If you are adding or deleting any instruments or items to an instrument, describe what the changes are and submit the revised materials.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other	Describe the changes. If this affects the consent process, submit a revised consent form.
<b>SIGNATURE</b>		
<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b>	Name (first, middle, last): Doris Marie Provine	
	Signature: Doris Marie Provine	Date: Nov 18, 2009

Revision 05/09