

Intimate Partner Violence During the Transition from Prison to the Community: Perspectives of Incarcerated African American Men

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ABSTRACT. The thematic findings presented in this paper emerged from a pilot study designed to inform the Safe Return Initiative, a U.S. Office of Violence Against Women federally funded technical assistance project intended to enhance the capacity of domestic violence and prisoner reentry federal grantees to more effectively address relationship conflict and domestic violence during a man's transition from prison to the community. A series of focus groups were conducted with African American men who were incarcerated, African American men on parole supervision, and African American women who were currently or formerly involved in an intimate relationship with a incarcerated man or a man on parole to uncover respondents' perspectives on the sources of conflict between

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Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, Vol. 16(3) #49, 2008

Available online at <http://jamt.haworthpress.com>

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doi:10.1080/10926770801925577

men under correctional supervision and their female partners during and following incarceration.

KEYWORDS. Prisoner reentry, relationship conflict, domestic violence, African Americans

Research on prisoner reentry and parole recidivism has primarily placed emphasis on how factors such as unemployment, substance abuse, and inadequate housing among recently released prisoners adversely impact successful prisoner reentry (Petersilia, 2000; Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001; Visser & Travis, 2003). Consequently, very little is known about the intersection of prisoner reentry and intimate partner violence. In an effort to advance what is known about intimate partner violence following a period of incarceration, this paper reports selected findings from a larger pilot study designed to examine the intersection of prisoner reentry and intimate partner violence in the African American community.

IMPRISONMENT, REENTRY, AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

The disproportionately high rate of imprisonment among African American men is one of the most significant challenges confronting African American families and communities in contemporary America (Harris & Miller, 2003). For example, in 2002 the incarceration rate among African American males was eight times higher (3,437 per 100,000) than the incarceration rate of White males (450 per 100,000; Harrison & Beck, 2003). Furthermore, when incarceration rates are estimated by race and age group, African American males in their 20s and 30s have higher rates than all other race, sex, and age subgroups. For example, 10.4% of African American males age 25 to 29 were in prison on December 31, 2002, compared to 2.4% of Hispanic males and about 1.2% of White males in the same age group (Harrison & Beck, 2003). Furthermore, in 1991, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that African American males had a 29% lifetime risk of serving at least one year in prison, six times higher than the risk for White males (Bonczar & Beck, 1997).

In addition to being disproportionately represented among persons incarcerated, African Americans are also disproportionately represented

among perpetrators and victims of intimate partner violence (Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). For example, in a recent analysis of national crime victimization data, Rennison and Welchans (2000) reported that between 1993 and 1998 African American women were victimized by intimate partners at significantly higher rates than women of other races. Furthermore, for the same time period African American men were also victimized by intimate partners at significantly higher rates than any other race. They also reported that African American women experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of White women and 2.5 times greater than the rate of women of other races. Finally, it has also been reported that nearly one third of African American women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetimes compared with one fourth of White women. Among male victims of intimate partner violence, African American men experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 62% higher than White men and 2.5 times the rate of other race men (Rennison & Welchans, 2000).

Examination of the intersection between prisoner reentry, intimate partner violence, and prisoner recidivism is one of the missing links in the national offender reentry initiative. What we know about prisoner reentry and recidivism is that upwards of 600,000 prisoners are returning to communities throughout the United States annually (Travis et al., 2001). However, only 45% of parolees will successfully complete their parole term (Langan & Levin, 2002). It has been reported that within 3 years, 67% of returning prisoners were rearrested for a serious offense and 52% were returned to prison for a new criminal offense (Langan & Levin, 2002). Consequently, returning prisoners pose a number of public health and safety concerns for their intimate partners, families, and local communities (Hairston, 2003; Rose & Clear, 2002).

The high rates of recidivism among returning prisoners poses a number of challenges for the promotion of community health and public safety. Additionally, there is research that reports that incarcerated and paroled men experience significant levels of conflict with their intimate female partners during and following their incarceration (Fishman, 1990; King, 1993; Tripp, 2003). For example, in his study of incarcerated African American men Tripp (2003) found that "conflict between husbands and wives and with former partners . . . was a central subject in most of the inmates' descriptions of their current family relations" (p. 29). In addition, in a study of the social-psychological processes affecting recidivism and desistance from crime, Zamble and Quinsey (1997) found that interpersonal conflict with heterosexual partners was a common problem mentioned by recidivists.

Whereas very little is known about the situational context and the interpersonal dynamics associated with acts of intimate partner violence involving returning prisoners or how returning prisoners and their female partners attribute meaning to acts of intimate partner violence that occur during reentry, there is some data that describes the prevalence of intimate partner violence offending and victimization among correctional populations. For example, White, Gondolf, Robertson, Goodwin, and Caraveo (2002) have reported that 1 in 3 men incarcerated in federal prisons for low risk crimes acknowledged recent physical violence against intimate female partners and 1 in 10 reported severe violence toward women.

Most research on prisoner reentry has focused on the influence of unemployment, substance abuse, and lack of adequate housing on prisoners' post-release success (Petersilia, 2000; Visser & Travis, 2003). However, very little is known about the relationship between prisoner reentry, domestic violence, and criminal recidivism, even though many prisoners self-report high levels of violence against their intimate partners. For the incarcerated man and his intimate female partner, there are many barriers that make it difficult for family members to resume supportive roles when the prisoner returns home. These barriers can include new relationships, relocation, limited finances, and feelings of resentment (Travis, Cincotta, & Solomon, 2003, p. 7). The findings reported below represent an effort to understand the intersection of prisoner reentry and domestic violence by uncovering the perspectives of incarcerated men. The views offered by these men also provide a context for understanding the experiences of women involved in intimate relationships with men under correctional supervision.

METHODS

Research Design

The findings reported in this paper are derived from a pilot study examining samples of incarcerated men, men on parole, and women who have been romantically involved with such men to explore how these respondents characterize and attribute meaning to the various sources of conflict and circumstances that contribute to intimate partner violence in the African American community following a man's release from prison. The study used two primary data collection methods: focus groups and individual interviews of a sub-group of the focus group participants. The following discussion is limited to the prison focus group participants'

description of circumstances in which they or similarly situated men are likely to commit an act of intimate partner violence against their wives or girlfriends upon their return to the community from prison.

Sample

The men who participated in the prison focus groups were incarcerated in state correctional facilities in Wisconsin and New York and a county jail that housed misdemeanor and felony offenders in Tennessee. The focus group participants were recruited at each site through the posting of notices in areas designated for such announcements and the distribution of flyers that described the purpose of the study and participant criteria. The flyers instructed interested persons who wanted to volunteer to sign up for participation. In each correctional facility, pre-release program staff agreed to use the notices to make announcements at institutional activities such as classes or organizational meetings. Each focus group consisted of between 10 and 14 individuals. A total of 31 individuals participated in three focus groups. All of the respondents were African American males.

Data Collection

Prior to the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to complete a demographic survey. The survey was used to gather general demographic information about individuals who participated in the study.

The focus groups were conducted at the correctional institutions in appropriate areas designated by prison administrators (i.e., a classroom or other meeting space large enough to hold the group). Each focus group lasted 2.5 hours on average. To protect the privacy of incarcerated participants, prison administrators agreed not to require the presence of prison staff during the focus groups. In addition, each focus group participant was asked to assume a fictional name during the focus group discussion as a means of insuring anonymity. Administrators in all three correctional facilities had policies that prohibited researchers from providing monetary compensation to prisoners who agree to participate in research studies. Consequently, in return for their participation in the focus groups the Safe Return Initiative (SRI) research team was able to arrange that each participant receive a special lunch meal provided at the conclusion of the focus group.

Analysis Procedures

All of the focus groups were audio taped. When data collection was completed, the audio tapes were transcribed and subjected to systematic

coding using the content analysis procedure. To guide analysis of the focus group data, Thematic Code Guidelines were developed. The Thematic Code Guidelines listed thematic findings and corresponding codes that were observed by the lead researchers in their pilot analysis of the Wisconsin prison and parole focus group data. The overall approach to data analysis was to examine the major themes that emerged from the focus group discussions.

FINDINGS

There are several circumstances that the focus group participants believe are likely to cause a man to resort to acts of violence against his wife or girlfriend after he returns home from prison, including (a) economic pressure and lack of household authority, (b) evidence of a second life, (c) unfulfilled promises and challenging a man to do right, (d) unresolved accusations, (e) displaced anger about having been in prison, and (f) parole threats and retaliation.

Economic Pressure and Lack of Household Authority

A major challenge confronting men as they transition from prison to the community is finding somewhere to live and finding a job (Nelson, Dees, & Allen, 1999; Taxman, Young, & Byrne, 2002; Visser & Travis, 2003). The majority of formerly incarcerated men typically are provided a place to live by family members other than their wives or girlfriends (Nelson et al., 1999; Taxman et al., 2002). Consequently, given that a significant number of men returning to the community following a period of incarceration are poorly educated, lack marketable skills, tend to have a spotty work history, and are at risk of experiencing employment discrimination resulting from their criminal history, such men are likely to experience a significant level of stress in their efforts to achieve economic independence and satisfy the economic demands and expectations of current or former female partners (Nelson et al., 1999; Visser & Travis, 2003). According to the focus group participants, the pressure associated with the lack of stable employment and economic resources to achieve self-sufficiency and to provide for one's family is aggravated in situations in which power dynamics in a relationship have changed as a result of a wife or girlfriend's increased economic independence and assertiveness following a man's imprisonment:

S3: She running the show. ..but he still thinks that everything is everything when he gets out. But now she done accomplished this; she done accomplished that without you. Now, he's upset . . . Because [she is saying] "You can't do this." "This is mine." "I did this." "You didn't do it." Now, he ain't wearing the pants no more. So, now here comes the violence. Here comes the left hand or the right.

Tehuti: Because of the strain of wanting to be the provider and what it means to be the man . . . to be the king of the castle. With all the strains . . . society might say we don't have no jobs here today. And so with him coming home, coming back into the household, the powerlessness of how he feels of being a man and he's not actually able to come into the household and bring in the meat, right. Where as the woman, now, has some type of authority. She's looked up to by the children, so when he comes in the house, he want to give orders and she's not having that. And so how does he deal with that? And he deals with that by taking out the stress, the baggage that he has, that he came into the house from off the street with. He brings that into the house and then things escalate to where before he know it, pop, pop, pop.

These observations support prior research that has reported that a potential source of conflict between men returning home from prison and their wives and girlfriends is the fact that their partners have become independent and self-sufficient (Fishman, 1990). Moreover, these respondents suggested that relationship conflicts precipitated by a man's lack of authority and their female partner's increased power in the household may sometimes escalate into acts of displaced aggression or overt acts of violence directed against their wives and girlfriends.

Evidence of a Second Life

A major factor contributing to conflict between incarcerated men and their wives and girlfriends during and following incarceration involves questions of fidelity, particularly suspicions, accusations, and actual knowledge that their wives or girlfriends have not remained faithful to them during the period of forced separation (Fishman, 1990; King, 1993). For some formerly incarcerated men, the challenge of dealing with evidence of a wife or girlfriend's unfaithfulness may be as important as

finding housing or a job. The accounts of the focus group participants strongly suggest that one of the major concerns of men returning to the community from prison is determining whether a wife or girlfriend has been unfaithful or, if it is known that she has been unfaithful, whether she is continuing to maintain a relationship with another man. There was general agreement among the focus group participants that the unfaithfulness of a female partner has great potential to lead to acts of intimate partner violence during community reentry:

S2: Catch her with a man. Or she's pregnant. Now, those things right there will cause a man to really go after the woman. Because sometimes women can be so devious far as talking bad to him on the phone, not accepting his calls, letting some other guy drive his car or if she has somebody else there in the home. Basically, the things that make men go off on their wives or girlfriends is [being] with another man, pregnant [by another man], let another man drive their car, or another man living in the house, or catching them with another man. I think these are the basic things that make men commit violent acts.

S3: If she done had sex with a friend or something, that's a beat down.

Furthermore, these findings strongly suggest that while men are incarcerated they are very concerned and aware that their wives or girlfriends may be unfaithful to them. Consequently, during their incarceration as well as during reunification with their intimate female partners these men are preoccupied with searching for evidence of a wife or girlfriend's second life. The men generally agreed with the view that one's anger toward a woman for being unfaithful would be enhanced in those situations in which she was continuously giving him the impression, by way of "the sugarcoated message," that she was being faithful to him while he was away. Consequently, these men expressed the view that it was not uncommon for women to lie about their romantic and sexual activities as a means of avoiding conflict with the man in prison and simultaneously satisfying their emotional and sexual needs. The term *the sugarcoated message* was the phrase that the respondents used to characterize the manner in which wives and girlfriends of incarcerated men try to maintain a conflict-free relationship with the incarcerated man and simultaneously seek to satisfy their emotional and sexual needs through intimate involvement with another man:

Terrance: You know, because a lot of times they sugarcoat it. You know, they don't want to hurt our feelings. They don't want to tell

us the things that they're feeling. So we never know, and we just continue on and go along with that blown up sense of understanding that they've given us, and we continue to be misled [about] the relationship.

I: And the sugarcoated message is?

Terrance: "Baby, everything is all right. I forgive you." You know, things like that. Instead of saying, well, you know, you messed up. Then you know what you've done instead of saying, "man, you know, I'm hurting out here, you know. I'm going through a thing, and you did this to me or you did that to me, and you need to change this here." We don't hear that. We don't hear that.

In her study of prisoners' wives, Fishman (1990) reported that, "Those wives whose husbands had correctly guessed or discovered evidence of sexual infidelities [while they were incarcerated] were amazed at their fury. Most men reacted by threatening their wives and actually attempted to strike them" (p. 167). Similarly, our findings suggest that a woman's past communication of a sugarcoated version of the status of the relationship, when assessed against the contrasting realities a man may confront upon release from prison, may provoke some men to engage in violence as an expression of anger, hurt, and retaliation based on peer-supported definitions of such situations as evidence that a man has been made a fool of while he was incarcerated:

Hyziem: One thing is a gentleman coming out of prison and all the time that he been locked up, his fiancé telling him that she has been faithful to him. And he come out, you know, he get around a couple of his homeys, and his homeys get to telling how she was . . . laying up with all kinds of Tom's, Dick's, and Harry's. He come back and asks her and confront her about it, and she lie to him constantly. So he get his friends around and they both confront her, and then the truth comes out. You get drunk, go out, you don't know how to deal with the problem. Come back in and she rubs it in his face, you know. Then he just, out of the blue, just reacts without thinking.

Day Day: Another conflict that might occur once you get released from prison . . . is that she's still having that second life. You're slowly starting to find out about it when you get the 3:00 in the morning call and then somebody hangs up. Or you catch her in the bathroom, you

hear her talking about how I love you too, and you're wondering who is she talking too, and she tells you I'm talking to my mama.

Based on the perspective of many of the focus group participants, these findings suggest that women who lead incarcerated men to believe that they are saving themselves for their husbands or boyfriends yet are having intimate relationships with other men are acting in a manner that enhances their risk of experiencing intimate partner violence following the man's release from prison.

Unfulfilled Promises and Challenging a Man to Do Right

It is very common for incarcerated men to make promises to their wives or girlfriends that they will settle down when they complete their term of imprisonment as a way of expressing regret about the wrongdoing that has led to their imprisonment or as a means of maintaining the woman's commitment to the relationship during the course of forced separation (Fishman, 1990). Furthermore, research has shown that returning prisoners who adopt conventional roles (e.g., working consistently, assuming family responsibilities, refraining from substance abuse, and avoiding peers committed to activities that increase the risk of becoming involved in criminal activity) within their families and the community have greater success in managing the transition from prison to the community (Hairston, 1998; Maruna, 2000; Nelson et al., 1999; Visser, Kachnowski, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004). In contrast, returning prisoners who assume unconventional roles are more likely to experience conflict in their relationships with their intimate female partners (Fishman, 1990). Consistent with prior research which has examined the transition from prison to the community, the focus group participants reported that returning home from prison and getting back into "the streets," rather than adopting a conventional lifestyle, is a major source of conflict between formerly incarcerated men and their wives and girlfriends, particularly wives and girlfriends who sacrificed and supported them while they were in prison. Getting back into "the streets," that is, resuming a lifestyle involving abuse of illegal drugs, spending time with friends who are engaged in criminal behavior, and spending an inordinate amount of time hanging out in various street corner settings (e.g., bars, drug houses, high crime street corner settings, etc.) signals to female partners that a man does not intend to follow through with the promises he made while in prison to settle down when he returns home from prison:

Terrance: Association with drugs and the wrong neighborhoods and wrong friends.

I: And how does all that translate into conflict or violence with the woman?

Terrance: Well, the woman, first of all, will probably be upset about you taking all the money, spending it . . . using it for drugs, and hanging out with your buddies or whatever. She might be feeling a lack of closeness or security . . . because you're never at home and you're not sharing her grief or . . . you're not supporting her . . . One factor is when a woman challenges your position as a man out there if you're, so to speak, not doing the things that you're supposed to be doing, as far as taking care of the home, paying the bills, and this and that, and she might challenge you and come to you and say, well, you're not doing this, and the man might get kind of upset and, you know, strike at her or whatever.

What is being suggested by these men is that returning prisoners may provoke conflict with their female partners by resuming their involvement in street-related activities and that the efforts of wives or girlfriends to encourage them to desist from such activity may result in the man engaging in acts of retaliatory violence in response to criticism of his involvement in problematic behavior.

Unresolved Accusations and Conflict

Many marital relationships and nonmarital relationships are strained by the stress of a man's imprisonment and are often terminated by wives and girlfriends (Hairston, 1995). Thus, communication among many men in prison and their current or former female partners is often contentious rather than cordial (Fishman, 1990; Jefferies, Menghraj, & Hairston, 2001). Sources of conflict between incarcerated men and their female partners tend to involve a broad range of issues, including accusations of either unfaithfulness involving the incarcerated man prior to his incarceration or unfaithfulness on the part of the wife or girlfriend following the man's incarceration (Fishman, 1990); a woman's termination of the relationship during the man's imprisonment and the man returning from prison wanting to be reunited with her and/or his children (Bobbitt & Nelson, 2004; Rose & Clear, 2002); a woman's anger and resistance toward being monitored and the man's efforts to control the household from inside prison (Fishman, 1990); conflict related to the management of

children (Tripp, 2003); and fear of being replaced in the lives of their children by another man (Hairston, 1995, 1998). Consequently, conflicts that emerge between incarcerated men and their current or former female partners while the men are incarcerated have the potential to lead such men to anticipate relationship conflict and committing acts of intimate partner violence upon their return to the community. For example:

Prince: Accusations that were made by her while you were in prison and things that hadn't been resolved while you were in prison between you and her and within yourself. Just unresolved issues . . .

Displaced Anger About Being in Prison

Many incarcerated men return to the community and their intimate female partners angry, frustrated, poor, and socially stigmatized (Bobbitt & Nelson, 2004; Rose & Clear, 2002; for a discussion of African American men and displaced anger see, in this issue, powell, 2008). These emotions combined with other reentry challenges may serve as a catalyst for interpersonal conflict and violence in their intimate relationships (King, 1999). For example:

Junior: A lot of times we go out, we leave prison with the ideology that we've been wronged or everybody turned their back on me. I got this madness in my heart, and I don't care who in my path I'm going to let it happen. I'm going to let you feel my wrath. Nine times out of ten that wrath happens to be one person, and that's that woman who has stuck by you, who has helped you when nobody else did. They stuck closer than your family did.

Parole Restrictions, Parole Threats, and Parole Retaliation

Finding a way to effectively deal with being on parole and the various conditions imposed on their freedom in the community in order to avoid parole revocation is a major concern and challenge confronting men returning to the community from prison (Irwin, 2005). Among the focus group participants, considerable concern was expressed about the challenges and restrictions associated with returning to the community with "paper over your head" (i.e., being on parole) and how it affects a man's ability to address relationship conflict. For example, many of the respondents supported the view that being on parole restricts the ability of a man

to argue with his wife or girlfriend because she may seek retaliation by informing his parole officer about his involvement in problematic behavior:

Joe: I feel . . . that when I get home and get upset I am not going to be able to speak my mind. Since I did make these mistakes and, you know, I got to this point. Now you feel like you got me at a cross-roads of my manhood. I'm going to speak my mind. If it takes it to an argument or you calling this PO or whatever you choose to do . . . you know, it could come to a conflict. It could come to an argument because I know that's all it takes is a phone call with these papers going to be over my head. And with 23 years of marriage I got on the line, I'd rather give it up before I start playing this game of putting you people back in my business.

The views of Joe exemplify the general themes that emerged regarding how the focus group participants perceived the intersection of community reentry, parole restrictions, and relationship conflict. That is, it was the view of these men that being on parole imposes limitations on the capacity of a man to express himself and to be free from external interference in managing his relationship with his wife or girlfriend. Furthermore, analysis of the focus group discussions suggests that how these men perceive the relationship between parole status, relationship conflict, and intimate partner violence should be discussed in terms of two distinct concerns: (a) fear of arguing with his female partner because of the belief that such conflict will lead to parole being revoked and (b) concern that a woman will use his parole status to retaliate against him for engaging in behavior that is inconsistent with her expectations of him. For example:

Prince: That's a big issue with me, and especially in this status, and that's because of the way this state system is set up, and the probation and parole department is set up, and they know what they're doing, and also the spouses know. So what they do is they use that as a hinge or hammer over the man's head to say, "if you mess up, I know that I can pick up this phone and the accusation will lock you back up. So I have you under my control and now I can use you and manipulate your integrity, your mentality." And maybe you did deal with your issues, but when you go back out there, she hasn't dealt with or forgiven. She uses that against you . . . And the system is pushing that.

CONTRASTING VIEWS

In addition to the general findings reported above, two contrasting themes (i.e., thematic findings that reflect a viewpoint that is in opposition to the general direction of the focus group participants' responses to a particular question) emerged during the focus groups that represented strategies that some of the incarcerated men adopted to avoid resorting to violence against one's wife or girlfriend during the transition from prison to community. Included among these strategies were (a) avoiding violence and (b) recognizing that women have needs.

Avoiding Violence

The focus group participants listed several strategies that they adopted or believed that men should adopt as a means of avoiding resorting to violence against intimate female partners during the reunification phase:

S3: I learned to let the past live in the past. I was in prison and the girl did this. So, what she did back then is back then to stay. I don't care. Either me and her gonna start something new, or we gonna go our separate ways. Because I'm not gonna dwell on what she did in the past. If I dwell on that past, I'm gonna be messed up and be back in the penitentiary, because I'm still living in the past. You can't live in the past. You gotta live in the future. So, the past will hurt you. The future will help you. And live for today, you can't live for yesterday, because yesterday's gone. So, let that go and move on and live for today.

Recognizing that Women have Needs

Wives and girlfriends of incarcerated men often experience problems involving economic, emotional, and/or sexual deprivation and experience difficulty accepting the prospective duration of the enforced separation from their husbands and boyfriends (Fishman, 1990; Travis et al., 2003). A subordinate and contrasting theme offered by several focus group participants was the view that it is important that men recognize that the female partners of incarcerated men have needs and that women should not be faulted for seeking out someone to meet their needs when their husbands or boyfriends are not available as result of committing criminal acts. The views asserted by these respondents represented a coping strategy that they felt would allow them, as well as other incarcerated men, to

avoid committing acts of violence against intimate female partners upon returning to the community from prison:

Man: Turn around the tables, switch it around. We out there and they are in here. What would we be out there doing? So otherwise you got to come home with an open mind. You know what I mean? You got to understand that, hey, I been locked up for 10 years, you know what I mean. She stuck with me for the whole 10 years, you know what I mean, but I got to try to look over what she did to try to survive out there, you know what I mean.

Tehuti: But speaking from personal experience, when I came to prison 22 years ago, and being a younger felon, being 21 years old and my spouse being 20 years old. And over time, although I knew she had love for me and that we had a child together, but [I] also [knew] something was missing. The same way that Grant said that [women need] someone there, that aspect was missing. And so . . . our relationship broke up . . . But . . . I felt that that it was wrong for her to [break up with me and get with another man]; this is my spouse. But, I was to be forgiving of that over time. And the one question that I asked myself, that allows me to be forgiving is: What would I have done? What would I have done if I found her in prison with 18 years to life? What would I have done? Would I seek to have someone to hold at night?

I: How did you answer that, my brother?

Tehuti: I would have done the same thing that she did.

Respondents who offered the view that it was important to recognize that women have needs also suggested that devoting too much time to exploring a woman's relationships with other men while a man was incarcerated has the potential to seriously impede the reestablishment of a relationship with one's female partner when a man returns home from prison:

S1: Somebody in the group said that [imprisonment] makes us have a tendency to wonder if our wives or if our girlfriends are faithful to us. We are here and there's nothing we can do about out there . . . to me that would make a person's time awfully hard. You know, thinking like that all the time. So, we've got to take a reality check. [We need to] look at ourselves and say, hey, man, you put yourself in here.

And that woman, you know, she's out there alone, by herself, and she's having to manage and do what she has to do in order to make it. And once you get out of here, you know, that's the worst thing you can do is confront her about relationships and what she's been doing and all that kind of stuff. I mean, because that can cause some serious problems.

Among the men who asserted the view that it was important to avoid engaging in violent acts against their intimate female partners, they also subscribed to the view that prison can function as a place of personal transformation. Thus, for men committed to using the prison experience and resources available in the prison to transform themselves, personal transformation in prison might help mitigate conflict between incarcerated men and their female partners during and following their imprisonment by increasing their understanding of how they have contributed to relationship problems and a greater understanding of the challenges that wives and girlfriends are dealing with while their husbands or boyfriend are incarcerated.

REENTRY, POLICY, AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings reported here strongly suggest that men in prison need assistance in reuniting with their wives and girlfriends when they return to the community in order to avoid engaging in behavior toward them that may lead to domestic violence, parole revocation or other problems. In addition, men who have experienced the termination of their relationships with wives or girlfriends during the course of their incarceration need assistance in managing their feelings and behavior toward women with whom they formerly maintained an intimate relationship and/or are the mothers of their children. To achieve these goals, correctional and parole departments must assume a proactive role in developing staff trainings, prisoner reentry curricula, and programs that address the intersection of incarceration and intimate partner relationships as a component of comprehensive offender reentry initiatives designed to reduce prisoner recidivism.

To advance understanding of the intersection of prisoner reentry and intimate partner violence, there is a need for research that explores situations in which a man's parole has been revoked as a result of committing violent acts against their current or former wife or girlfriend. Hence,

research in this area should examine the experiences and perspectives of women who have experienced intimate partner violence after their husbands and boyfriends returned to the community from prison. We need to know what these men and women identify as the sources of conflict and how they attribute meaning to acts of intimate partner violence following the man's return to the community from prison. Additionally, there is a need for research that examines how relationship conflict following prisoner reentry contributes to criminal recidivism and parole revocation. Finally, the safety of women at risk for experiencing domestic violence in situations in which the batterer is under correctional supervision would be enhanced by research that examines how the criminal justice system (e.g., parole departments or criminal courts) respond to allegations of intimate partner violence and/or actual acts of intimate partner violence committed by men on parole. How are decisions reached as to whether an individual's parole is revoked or is not revoked? Are parole revocations involving allegations of intimate partner violence less likely to occur in situations where parole officers or parole departments maintain strong collaborative relationships with domestic violence service providers or where parole officers have been trained to pursue graduated sanctions depending upon an assessment of the seriousness of the incident?

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SUBMITTED: January 27, 2005

REVISED: April 30, 2007

REVISED: October 10, 2007

ACCEPTED: October 10, 2007