

PRISON MARRIAGES

By

SUSAN SINN

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PRISON MARRIAGES

Thesis Approved:

Harjib S. Sandhu

Thesis Advisor

Jack C. Burnett

Richard Dolder

George E. Arquette

Thomas C. Collins

Dean of the Graduate College

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This research was initiated to explain marriages that occur when the male is incarcerated and the female is living in the larger society. The focus of the study was to find the motivations, rewards, costs, and perceived rationality of these marriages.

There has been no attempt to suggest that these marriages should or should not occur. Because of the lack of existing research in this area, this study was conducted in order to explain these marriages to those who wish a further understanding. The results may be used by prison administration, family members and society itself to understand the usefulness or dysfunctions of such relationships.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Marriage is an American institution that stands for a set of norms that are familiar to most of society. To most, marriage holds the hope of a lifelong commitment and leads to an expectation of sharing a lifestyle. This lifestyle contains sharing and working toward common goals, working through financial difficulties, maintaining a family unit and living together to achieve such goals. Few people may realize that there are marriages in society that strive for these things with one member incarcerated.

The focus of this research is prison marriages that occur after the male inmate has been incarcerated. Research was conducted in a medium security prison in a southwestern state to investigate the motivation of both partners to marry while they live in separate housing with no prospects of consummation of marriage for quite a long time, (sometimes the prospect may be quite remote). The results of this research will serve to answer some initial questions concerning this type of marriage. However, because very little research had been conducted before there will probably be more questions generated from the outcome of this paper than answered.

The social exchange theory was used to analyze these marriages. The exchange theory is based on the concept that individuals continually seek rewards from interactions. As long as the rewards outweigh the costs of the marriage the individuals remain satisfied with the interaction. When the interaction is seen as costing more than the rewards received, the interaction may be terminated or a dominant member of the interaction may evolve (Ritzer, 1988). This research qualitatively examines the costs and benefits of this type of marriage and if one seems to outweigh the other by interviewing fourteen inmates and ten wives of the inmates.

These costs and benefits as well as the rationality of these marriages are examined from qualitative interviews conducted with the members of these marriages. Quotes and common answers given during the interviews will be presented. The questionnaire may be found in the Appendix. The literature review may also lend some insight to these prison marriages.

### Assumptions

Because prison marriages differ from conventional marriages, there seem to be different reasons for marrying an inmate than marrying when both members are on the "outside." However, in some cases, as found in this research, the differences may be minor.

One major difference of prison marriages is that the couple is separated due to incarceration. The relationship is dependent on the

government and its policies. It is also dependent, according to published literature, on correctional officers in the prison. They determine when visitations are terminated, how long a wife actually gets to visit with her mate and how much of a hassle the wife receives on entering the prison (Fishman, 1990).

The marriage of a female on the "outside" to a male that is incarcerated surprises and perplexes not only the general public but also employees of the correctional system itself. There are currently seven states that allow conjugal or private family visitation, but the state where the research was conducted was not one of them (Amy, 1986). This research was designed to find the advantages, disadvantages, motivations and rationality of these marriages.

The members of these marriages supposedly have not consummated their marriages (the state allows no conjugal visitation). Their phone privileges are limited and visitations, in the presence of other visiting families, are on set days for a set amount of time. These factors are not considered in conventional marriages. Because of these differences, are the individuals that engage in the prison marriages different than those in conventional ones? The initial assumption was that wives and their incarcerated husbands' motivations were different from conventional marriages.

Initially, the assumptions of the motivation from the male's perspective was for material gain. The female was seen as someone needing to feel like a "savior," wanting a relationship where she could save her husband from not only the pains of incarceration but also from the "evil" side of himself. She was thought to feel that her love and devotion could change him. Using the exchange theory, she would believe that she had someone that would not (or maybe cannot) cheat on her. She received the status of being married and had someone who was dependent on her.

The men, on the other hand, were thought to receive material rewards from their wives. Material items could have been something that a wife could not receive from her husband. The most that an inmate would be able to give to his wife, materially, could be a card bought from meager wages earned from a prison job or something handmade. The wife could be the provider of material items. She could provide extra shirts, shampoo, socks, toothpaste and other personal hygiene items. The Department of Corrections supplies the inmate with only the necessities in the brands of its choosing. Wives are allowed to supplement necessities of inmates at this medium security institution. Inmates are allowed to wear street clothing if it is provided for them at the visit. If an inmate has no "outside" contact, he may be forced to make due with what he is given. It has also been suggested that inmates may persuade their loved-ones to smuggle items such as drugs or alcohol into the prison (Fishman, 1990).

It was under these assumptions that the research was initiated. These assumptions were based on literature reviewed for this project. The interviews were used to prove or disprove these assumptions.

### Research Methods

The individuals of this study were found in a medium-security prison in the southwestern region of the United States. The responses were analyzed through interviews with fourteen men and ten women all married after the male was incarcerated. They were interviewed through an open-ended questionnaire where members of the research participated on an entirely voluntary basis. The ten women interviewed were wives of ten of the fourteen inmates interviewed. Four wives chose not to participate.

Although this is a rather small sample, the answers to the interview questions immediately began to form a pattern. There were very few deviations from the answers given. Because of the small sample and the lack of randomness generalizability of this research is limited. However this research can be utilized in further research of this prison population.

Because of the privacy allowed by the institution in interviewing the prisoners and the privacy in interviewing of wives, truthful answers to the research questions were thought to be given. Interviews were conducted in a conversational atmosphere and all steps were taken to make the participants feel comfortable.

Questions were asked more than once in slightly different ways to ensure that the answers were accurate of the feelings of the participants. Because there was little discrepancy, the answers seemed to be accurate. This truthfulness allowed the research to be reliable and valid.

### Significance of the Research

There are many areas of the research that have proven interesting in studying inmates. What is the usefulness of this research?

With growing crime rates and high recidivism rates on incarcerated offenders, the question has been asked, what can we do about this situation? There have been researchers that suggest that strong family ties and community relationships are related to lower recidivism rates. This type of research can assist in evaluation of this suggestion. To be able to understand if strong family ties help in the rehabilitation of the offender, more studies must be conducted on the family of the offenders.

This study could explain the rules followed by the members of these marriages. It leads to a greater understanding of what the men and women are searching for, why they marry when a traditional marriage cannot be achieved until the inmate is released.

What reason does a woman have for this marriage when she is not able to live, sleep or have physical intimacy with her husband? Why can't she wait for his release? If the inmate is on death row or sentenced to life,

then why marry at all? The research enables those with these questions to understand the motives behind the decision to marry an inmate.

Similarly, the male must be seeking something in this marriage that the correctional system is not providing. If this marriage indeed aids in rehabilitating the offender, what can the Department of Corrections do to provide the same advantage of this marriage to inmates who are not married? Family members of the married couple as well as chaplains and other prison officials have wondered about this for a long time. Information from this research may help convince or dissuade the theory that attachments on the "outside" assist in the rehabilitation of the offender. Studying these marriages may help case workers provide these inmates with the same or similar source of comfort or compatibility these marriages provide for the man.

Finally, the results of this research can be used by prison officials, legislators, lobbyists and family members in understanding why men and women do desire to marry. This motivation to marry can be used in further regulations determining visitation frequency and length, marriage ceremonies or conjugal visitations.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Legal Aspects of Prison Marriage

Before 1983, there weren't any written laws concerning the marriage of prisoners. In the case of Bradbury versus Wainwright, marriage was found to be a prisoner's right. The case, however, put restrictions on prison marriages. Death row inmates weren't allowed to marry because a marriage to a death row inmate means that a "normal" marriage can never be fulfilled. This was found unconstitutional. Death row inmates are currently able to marry (Amey, 1986, p. 20).

In Oklahoma:

All inmates with the exception of those in maximum security may request to marry while incarcerated. A written request of intent must be made to the chaplain by the inmate, 30 days prior to the desired wedding date. The inmate will be assisted in meeting the prerequisites for acquiring a marriage license. (DOC Manual OP-090128, 1990.)

Inmates in Oklahoma have prerequisites before the marriage ceremony can be performed. They must provide divorce papers if an inmate has been previously married. They must also show approval of request by the facility head, provide a blood test, proof of age, and pay an application fee of



usually twenty dollars. The inmate and future spouse must then appear in person to sign the marriage book at the county clerk's office. When these prerequisites are met, the ceremony is scheduled in accordance with the institution's security needs. The chaplain or a legally authorized person performs the ceremony (DOC Policy and Operations Manual OP-090128, 1990.)

Along with these requirements, the chaplains of the institution have the authority to set additional conditions for a marriage. Ed Stolz, former chaplain of the Lexington Correctional Center implements these conditions for this institution:

1. There must be verifiable proof that the inmate is not already married.
2. The inmate must have a memo from the chaplain to acquire a blood test.
3. The prospective wife must have a blood test and apply for a marriage license at the courthouse, and she must have proof of her age.
4. Upon verification of his blood test, the inmate will be taken to the courthouse to obtain the license.
5. The marriage will be performed at a time prearranged with the chaplain.
6. The local minister will be contacted to perform the wedding ceremony. The bride must bring \$20.00 at the time of the ceremony to pay the visiting minister.
7. Guests may include two guests of the bride and those already cleared for the inmate's visits.

8. One camera will be approved by security during the wedding. Alternate pictures have to be arranged in advance, so that the camera man from the visiting room can be present.

In the institution studied for this research, the prison chaplain was able to perform the ceremonies. However, if the couple wished, an outside minister could be requested to perform the ceremony.

Chaplains often aren't required to perform marriage ceremonies. "A prison chaplain in California recently argued that he was responsible before God to be selective about conducting wedding ceremonies. He defended his belief that he should not be required to perform prison marriages. The court ruled in his favor (Roberts, 1982, p. 29).

### Theoretical Perspectives

Why do these marriages occur when, until the inmate's release, the marriage cannot function like other "normal" marriages? Because the individuals involved with this prison marriage exist in conjunction with the larger society, and their socialization experiences are not foreign, there is no reason that these marriages can't be conducted like other marriages. "That is, a prison marriage should initially be assumed to have the same intentions as any other marriage (e.g. to live happily ever after)" (Amey, 1986, p. 11).

However, these marriages cannot be conducted like other marriages. Although the intentions for marrying may be the same as other peoples', the marriage from ceremony to spending time with their mate is not the same as

married couples on the "outside." The "courting" stage of the relationship is not even the same. Any courtship of the couple, be it either by visitation, phone or mail, is under the scrutiny of the Department of Corrections.

Why do women marry inmates? Vicki Robertson talks about her marriage, "Randall (her inmate husband) is a wonderfully optimistic, powerful person. This was no act of mercy. He's been a tremendous strength for me." (Robertson, 1990, p. 58).

The social exchange theory may perhaps be applied to these prison marriages. George C. Homans was one of the earliest sociological theorists to develop its theory after hearing a seminar of Vilfredo Pareto. "Pareto's program for science was to classify a wide range of observable data and to search for regularity among them..." (Mitchell, p. 14, 15).

Furthering B. F. Skinner's studies, "Humans conceived behavior in its most elementary form as an attempt to gain awards while avoiding costs and punishment," (Cook, et al., 1990, p. 160). He argued that people will continue to choose what has been rewarded in the past and will stop doing what has cost them in the past.

Ritzer explained exchange theory in establishing that people form relationships for many reasons.

Once initial ties are forged, the rewards that they provide to each other serve to maintain and enhance the bonds...With insufficient rewards, an association will weaken or break. Rewards that are exchanged can either be intrinsic (for instance, love, affection, respect) or extrinsic (for instance,

money, physical labor). The parties cannot always reward each other equally; when there is inequality in the exchange, a difference of power will emerge within an association (Ritzer, 1988: 390).

Peter Singlemann has attempted to integrate exchange theory and symbolic interaction. He says that the mind intervenes between the stimulus and response. The mind defines the situation and allows a reward to be defined as a reward. He says that each party, in a relationship or interaction, takes the role of the other to determine what rewards they should offer and what rewards they should be receiving. In speaking of society, Singlemann says that exchanges are communication of symbols (Ritzer, 1988).

Thus, exchange theory attempts to explain why people interact and what they expect out of interactions. In looking at relationships, there are three types. The first is called a transaction, where the partners enjoy a reward jointly (when the reward is shared). The second is when the individuals contribute to the relationship separately. This is when one person of the relationship may give something but it is not on the basis of expecting something in return. The third is when "a helpful act is performed, not in response to any specific benefit received, but rather in honor of the social exchange itself," (Rosenberg and Turner, p. 33, 1981).

## Existing Research

So what does each partner receive out of this marriage? Laura Fishman conducted research in Vermont concerning changes in the family unit after the husband or father is incarcerated. She suggests that male inmates often pressure their wife to smuggle in drugs, give them money and/or bring them luxuries (such as televisions or radios). The husbands also expect faithfulness and total devotion from their wives. They often get jealous when they learn of their wives going to bars or movies. Prisoners allowed phone privileges check on their wives by calling at different times, expecting their wives to be there (Fishman, 1990). Fishman doesn't state in her research how often the men get what they desire or if there is a difference in the intensity or amounts of things desired of men who marry after they are incarcerated.

In Dennis Roberts article (1982), Bobby Novak, executive director of Prison Marriages, Inc., describes the details of how the inmates meet their wives and their motivations behind the relationship. Novak was once incarcerated himself and professes that while he was a non-christian he was also involved in the same activities.

Somewhere in the relationship, money usually becomes involved. Bobby knew men who received cash from as many as ten women at once. They exerted pressure on their girls to smuggle drugs and other contraband into the prison (Roberts, 1982, p. 30).

An example of what wives will do for their husbands is in a Colorado penitentiary. Two wives hijacked a helicopter, landed in a prison yard, and carried the inmates to a waiting van. They were captured in Nebraska. The men were returned to the prison and the women were incarcerated themselves (Reid, 1990).

What benefits does the wife receive? According to Laura Fishman (1990), the wives expect no threat of abandonment and complete loyalty. The appealing idea to these women is they know where their husband is at all times, they aren't practicing their former illegal activities (except for possibly drug deals) and they know their husbands are dependent on them.

Motivations of these marriages are seen to be different than motivations of conventional marriages. Roberts sees motivations different inside of prison also. He sees different motivations between Christian and non-Christian wives and inmates.

"In the case of non-Christians, women may be attracted to the mystique of the hard-core con. A key word in these relationships, both for the inmate and the woman, is 'fantasy'."

From his own experience, Bobby says the inmate may be motivated by loneliness or social status. The convict who has a woman to provide him with a conjugal relationship and money on a regular basis is envied by those who don't (1982: 29,30).

In the case of Christians, Roberts believes that there are different motivations:

"The relationship may begin with co-ed Christian group ministers at the prison' he (Novak) explains. Or the convict may write to Christian periodicals requesting pen pals. Many responders will be women...

Mystique and fantasy may even innocently compel the Christian woman, Novak believes. She gets her first letter and thinks, 'This man is so soft-hearted; God has really performed a miracle in his life!' That may be true. The man could sincerely, be a transformed Christian."

"...A new Christian in prison wants God to send him a good, clean, Christian girl. Having been treated badly by women throughout his life, he needs female attention and assurance of unconditional love. 'He oozes with all kinds of needs,' Bobby adds. 'This may be the thing that attracts a Christian woman'."

The inmate seems on top spiritually and commends the religious activity alive in prison. The woman might wish she could share this ecstatic Christian experience" (Roberts, 1982, p. 30).

According to Sheila Isenburg (1991), women have historically been socialized into thinking that they aren't successful and their lives will not be fulfilled until they are married. This marriage gives these women the feeling of fulfillment. They have the status of being married, but not the everyday routines of regular married life.

Dr. Mark Englander, chief psychologist for the Department of Corrections, states "Some people may want marriage as a socially

acceptable definition of a relationship, but they don't want to get as close to a person as marriage implies" (p. 5B).

"...The women are looking for--whether they know it or not--a kind of emotional rollercoaster. They're looking for a relationship with an incredible high," (Isenberg, 1991).

Another need of the wife is to have the feeling of helping her husband "change his ways." She sees herself as a savior. This savior-like quality is an example of codependency or love addiction.

"The paradox is that love addiction is an attempt to gain control by giving personal power to someone other than the self...we do not directly resolve our own problems but attempt to collude with others so they will take care of us and thus take care of our problems," (Schaeffer, 1987, p. 5).

Love addiction is often attributed to unmet needs of childhood.

We fall into it as an attempt to gain control of our lives, and in so doing we actually grant control to forces outside ourselves. Such willingness to give control away springs fear; fear of pain; fear of deprivation; fear of disappointing someone; fear of failure; fear of guilt; or rejection; fear of being alone; fear of getting sick or going crazy; and the fear of death (Schaeffer, 1987, p. 10).

This idea leads to the idea of why women want to marry inmates and why inmates want to marry while incarcerated. The fear of rejection may lead women to seek relationships where the husband can't abuse her or abandon her. Because she supplies him with luxuries, she may think he will not abandon her.



These fears can also be carried with the inmate, which may explain the inmates's obsessive need for control over his wife and his obsessive jealousy and fear that his wife may cheat on him with another man. Marriages often end in divorce after the prisoner is released. One reason for this is that the woman's fear of abandonment returns, she no longer knows where her husband is or what he is doing all hours of the day (Fishman, 1990).

In Women Who Love Too Much, 1985, Robin Norwood describes a situation between a man, Russell, and his wife, Monica. Russell was in prison and Monica stressed her willingness to wait for Russell until his release. What Monica didn't realize is that she was only interested in Russell while he couldn't be there for her.

Russell found in Monica the perfect partner, the ideal prisoner's wife. She willingly spent her life waiting and hoping that he would change and that then they could be together. Prisoners wives like Monica present perhaps the ultimate example of women who love too much. Because they are incapable of any degree of intimacy with a man, they choose instead to live with a fantasy, a dream of how much they will love and be loved someday when their partner changes and becomes available to them. But they can be intimate only in fantasy (Norwood, 1985, p. 108).

According to Isenberg, 1991, incarcerated men express the desire to meet women to their fellow inmates who in turn ask their wife or girlfriend to set the single inmate up with the female's friends. Some women begin

relationships with men when they visit the prison with religious support groups.

"Friendships with prisoners almost always begin with a letter. Convicts have access to periodicals that print letters requesting correspondence from compassionate females.

A convict may cultivate 'meaningful' relationships with a number of women. Letters begin on a platonic level, but the content soon becomes loving and, eventually, lustful. The inmate carefully adapts his approach to individual personalities. He may copy poems from prison library books and tell each woman he wrote them 'just for her'.

He tries to portray himself as a worldly-wise, but sensitive man who has seen it all. He convinces the woman he can make all her fantasies of love and security come true. Letter writing is an art, Bobby explains, and sexual prose is a specialty.

'Before long the convict suggests a photo exchange to see if the girl is good-looking enough to develop romantically,' he says. 'That sounds cold, but that's how it comes down. After he gets the photo, the inmate determines the slant his letters should take--sex, money, drugs, or just an outside contact.'

The prisoner also works the pyramid system: 'I've got this buddy in prison here. How about having one of your friends write to him?'" (Roberts, 1982, p. 30).

Carol Duning did research on prison marriages in Tennessee. Her results were published in a newspaper article there (the article was unable to be found when the literature review was conducted for this research, excerpts were found in Donna Amey's thesis):

...an unscientific query into marriages of inmates at the prison here discloses that in Tennessee there have been several in recent years. Many of them involved prisoners serving life sentences. Among them: Tim Kirk, whose escape and romance with Knoxville lawyer Mary Evans was steamy grist for a television movie (both have since married others); and James Earl Ray, Martin Luther King's assassin.

The men's motives seem apparent. A wife on the outside gives them someone they can count on to help gain parole, for visits, money, food, sometimes sex or contraband, and love and compassion in the brutal, all-male prison environment.

Again, no comprehensive studies exist, but in interviews with several women who have married men serving long sentences at the penitentiary, similarities emerge.

For the most part, the women previously have had poor marriages or bad relationships. Some were physically abused and many were emotionally neglected. The wives describe their current marriages in relative terms--better than the "free world" relationships they had before. Indeed, there is no neat formula or reliable stereotype for wives of prison inmates. The types of women who marry prisoners vary widely--in age, race, education, religious beliefs and even looks (Amey, 1986, p. 17).

"Duning interviewed Mike Miller, a sociologist at Vanderbilt University studying prison marriages. He believes that the women in these marriages are being used and the inmates are manipulators" (Amey, 1986, p. 17).

However, Reverend Jeff Blum, according to Duning, said that prison marriages aren't any different than conventional marriages. The marriages

meet the couple's needs in some way just like conventional marriages (Amey, 1986, p. 17).

In Duning's study, she interviewed a clinical psychologist, Dr. Les Hutchinson. He is formerly the director of psychological services at the Tennessee State Penitentiary. He states that women who marry prisoners fall into three categories:

1. Women who have had poor relationships in the past. Some may have been physically abused, for example, and see marriage to prisoners as "safe"-- a way to be married but to avoid the stress and demands of having a husband at home.
2. Women who are idealistic. These wives see their marriage to a condemned or sentenced man as heroic in some way. They find themselves fighting against the "system" on behalf of their spouse, the "underdog." In addition, the marriage may make the wives feel more important by "latching onto somebody else's fame or notoriety," says Hutchinson.
3. Women who are in it for the money. Wives of prison inmates have access to their husbands financial resources, be they government benefits or wages from prison jobs (Amey, 1986, p. 17).

Are all the marriages entered into in prison for the sole purpose of personal gain? The research was initiated with the thoughts that not all of these marriages are unhealthy or irrational. There are some where the partners are truly in love and marry for the same reasons as couples on the "outside." However, these thoughts were based on participants in these marriages knowing each other before incarceration.

"Although not mentioned as a conscious motive on the part of the inmate, two positive outcomes to the marriage might be (1) better attitudes and behavior patterns so as to earn the earliest release possible to be with the support of a new family; and (2) improved self-esteem and the feeling of belonging/importance to a new family," (Amey, 1986, p. 29)

These theory possibilities were kept in mind during the data gathering portion of the research. However, "no theory of two-person interaction will explain any major part of human behavior" (Nye, 1982, p. 25). So the reasons why these people married and the rationality of their behavior is explained by looking at these marriages individually.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY  
The Samples

The research sample consisted of fourteen inmates and ten wives of the fourteen inmates. The inmates were incarcerated in a southwestern state in a medium security facility. While two of the subjects were black men, the rest were white. No other minority was represented in the sample, and there was only one interracial couple. Ages of the males ranged from nineteen to forty-eight.

Nine wives were white, while one was black. The females ranged in age from twenty to fifty. All of the wives of these inmates lived within a fifty mile radius of the prison except one who lived approximately 120 miles from the institution. Further characteristics will be given in Chapter IV.

Research Procedures

Initial contact was established with the prison chaplain to explain the interest in doing this research project. He agreed to assist in finding the sample of inmates that have married after they were incarcerated. Most of this sample, however, knew their spouses before they were incarcerated.

A nonrandom sample was used to facilitate the research and because there was no master file of married inmates established by the state. To ensure a random sample, every case history of every offender would have had to been reviewed to see if the inmate was married and when the marriage took place. This was not feasible. Therefore, inmates were selected on the basis of knowledge on the part of the chaplain and by voluntary participation of the respondents.

This created a chance for a certain bias. Because the inmates participated on a volunteer basis, the men that volunteered may have been the ones who weren't experiencing any problems in their marriage. These men could be the inmates that truly love their wives, while the ones that didn't want to participate may be the ones who had ulterior motives in marrying.

With the approval of the program director and prison warden, the chaplain researched who had been married in this medium-security prison in the past two years. He then approached these men and requested their participation in the research. Confidentiality was ensured and the participants were aware that participation was totally voluntary. There were no incentives offered for participation except a copy of the research results provided for the prison library and a summary paper provided for the participants. Originally, seventeen men agreed to be interviewed and to provide the names and addresses of their wives. Before the research was

complete, one man was discharged from his sentence, one was transferred to a new facility and the other changed his mind.

There has been a similar research project conducted on prison marriages consisting of different participants. However, the majority of the open-ended questions were answered in written form and sent through the mail.

This research project was conducted in face-to-face interviews with the inmates and their wives. This was done to 1) try to get more detail from the inmates and 2) encourage more participation of the wives of the inmates. The previous research had difficulty in getting the wives to participate.

The other difference from the previous project is that this research was conducted to look at the marriage as a marital unit. Responses were analyzed as a marriage rather than inmates versus their wives. The research was analyzed by using the exchange theory and looking at the rationality of the members of the marriage.

From the list of inmates that agreed to be interviewed, the chaplain would call the security guard in the unit that housed the inmate and asked that the inmate receive a pass to his office to be interviewed. Upon meeting the inmate, the project was explained and a consent form, used in the Department of Corrections procedure manual, was signed. The form stated that the inmate has given his consent voluntarily to participate in the project.



The consent forms were left in the possession of the chaplain who added them to the inmate's files.

The interviews were conducted in a private room where the only people present were the interviewer and the respondent. This privacy was necessary to obtain honest answers and to provide trust that the answers were completely confidential. This casual atmosphere was beneficial in putting the interviewer and the participant at ease. The diminishing of the incarceration of the individual allowed the interview to be conducted in a more relaxed, conversational atmosphere. If the interviews had been conducted in a room where there was a guard or other inmates or administration present, the answers may not have been as honest. From meeting with the inmates, there was a feeling that they didn't trust the administration to keep their responses confidential. The absence of other people in the interview room was a necessity in order to obtain honest answers. It helped the inmate feel more relaxed and trustworthy of the confidentiality of the research.

Initially, a tape recorder was used if the inmate agreed. Later, after seeing apprehension of a respondent, the tape recorder was abandoned and notes were used to record the participant's responses. The time it took to record various responses often led the respondent to elaborate on an answer or provide more detail. This added detail probably was given to avoid an uncomfortable silence. Nevertheless, the added detail was valuable to this

research and added a richness that was hoped for in the initial stages of the research idea.

At the end of the interview, every inmate interviewed provided his wife's name, address and telephone number if there was one. The wives were contacted through the mail or telephone. Two women did not respond to the request of an interview and one wife became under the supervision of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. One woman was a fiancée of an inmate who had married the first time he was incarcerated and was awaiting a divorce. He will marry the fiancée when the divorce is final. In the meantime, his fiancée was in the hospital having a baby when the research was being conducted so that interview was not possible.

The women that did respond had already been told about the research by their husbands and the ten were willing to participate. Because of little previous research, many were excited to help in the project.

Most of the women were interviewed in their homes. A few were interviewed in an agreed-upon meeting place in their community where the interviews were conducted in the quietest and most private place possible. The women, who felt a common bond with other inmate wives, were much more detailed about their relationship with their husbands, their feelings and their reasons for marriage. They also signed a consent form agreeing that participation was voluntary and no promises other than a summation of the research findings were offered.

## Using Qualitative Analysis

Existing literature dealing with prison marriages is scarce. Most research that has been conducted on prisoners and their wives or families has to do with conjugal visitations. The research found on the conjugal associations dealt with the men and women who were married before incarceration. Bibliographies of these articles, however, did prove helpful in finding some data about the marriage relationship.

Near the end of the search for existing data, a book was published by Sheila Isenberg, a journalist, who researched women who marry murderers. This book developed a psychological profile of these women and proved to be a very helpful source in reviewing the subject. The author of this book did the talk show tour, and transcripts from these shows were obtained.

Because little research has been conducted in this area, a qualitative approach was chosen for this research to provide rich details from the members of this marriage. The research was initiated to see how the members of this marriage viewed their reasons for marriage and how rational they viewed their decision. In-depth interviews seemed to be the best avenue to pursue in obtaining the detail. Often quantitative analysis does not allow for the expression of feelings and emotions beyond the questions and the choice for answers. The qualitative approach aided in exploring the emotions of these marriages.

Another reason for choosing interviews was to probe further into the initial open-ended questions. If an inmate or his wife seemed to be able to provide more detail on certain questions, he or she was asked to elaborate. This gave the researcher the opportunity to explain what was meant by the questions if they were not understood or to record the responses given in a conversational manner. This qualitative approach in face-to-face interviews proved to be very valuable in answering the questions that arose in the beginning of this project.

After more research is conducted in this area, a quantitative study would probably prove to be beneficial. An attitude survey of marital attitudes and satisfaction would be of value. Tracking couples and finding the statistics of how many of the marriages survived, how many actually achieved their goals after the inmate discharged and the number of marital couples who actually lived the way they expected when the husband was released would be interesting research to further explain the phenomenon of prison marriage.

#### Reliability, Validity and Generalizability

Because the sample of this research was small, generalizability was limited. To say that ten married couples interviewed were representative of all married couples in prison was too presumptuous. However, couples

married in a medium-security prison under the same rules and regulations as this prison may be said to have married for similar reasons as these couples.

This study being an initial study can aid further research in this area by enabling a quantitative study where the numbers can be measure for a much larger group. This would allow for further generalizability.

A partially-structured interview was used with the participants of the research. "An unstructured interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order." (Babbie, 1983, p. 270).

The partially-structured interview has specific objectives. "The interviewer is permitted some freedom in meeting them. The scope of the interview would be limited to certain subtopics, and key questions probably would be developed in advance," (Singleton, et al., 1988, p. 236).

This partially-structured interview style aided in probing participants to further describe what was meant by a certain comment or answer. Further, it enhances the systematic collection of data. It also allowed the participant to elaborate on a response. Many times a participant would begin talking about a subject that was placed toward the end of the interview agenda. Rather than interrupt their train of thought, the respondent was encouraged to continue talking about the subject.

"From a qualitative perspective, reliability is viewed as the fit between what actually occurs in the setting under study and what is recorded as data," (Stainback, et al, 1988, p. 101.)

Reliability can be enhanced by taking detailed notes. When the researcher reviews the notes, feeling and perceptions can be separated from what actually occurred during the data collection (Steinback, et al, 1988).

The reliability of the data rested on the ability of the researcher to encourage honest responses from the participants. This was done by attempting to ask open-ended questions in different ways and looking for a discrepancy in the responses. Where discrepancies existed the respondent was asked for further explanation of the responses. This was done without alerting the respondent that he/she answered a similar question differently. These differences were taken into account when the data were analyzed.

If the respondent believes what she claims, then there are real consequences in that she may well act on the basis of such beliefs, whereby it would be important to accept them as her truth. They could be more carefully investigated by trying to find the meaning of distortion for her by empathic interpretation, back-checking and making sense of the interview as whole. In this way the analysis would be particularly sensitive to the respondent's own interpretation of her situation, and tolerant of ambiguity, contradiction and the unexpected, which may quite accurately reflect how she feels (Hagan, 1986, p. 346).

A researcher must be careful in stating a causal relationship in qualitative research. A presumed causal relationship can often involve the

subjectivity of the researcher. In using qualitative analysis it is often beneficial to use comparative evaluations, identifying how one couple compares to another. (Babbie, 1989).

The qualitative research should provide validity. Measuring the reasons for this kind of marriage, exposing the motivations and rationalization of it seems to be most effective using face-to-face interviews. Further explanation of the questions were offered, watching the respondents reactions to certain questions and allowing for a conversational atmosphere aided in measuring the objectives of the research.

Validity in this type of research may be provided more than in quantitative methods. The ability to gain insight into the person's thoughts and feelings of these marriages allowed the researcher to actually measure the motivations and rationalizations of these marriages. A survey does not allow the researcher to probe into the individuals' responses.

"Findings can be considered valid if there is a fit between what is intended to be studied and what actually is studied. That is, the data represents what the researcher was attempting to study, (Steinback, et al, 1988, p. 97).

Many sociologists believe that qualitative research is valid.

As [qualitative researcher] systematically define the properties of the classroom, observe events in it, and listen to people talk about them, patterns of the events and the interrelationships among them will begin to emerge...The eventual critical description is validated in two ways: referentially - the explanatory generalizations must be consistent with repeated

patterns of events recorded in the observational data; and situationally - the explanatory framework must be consistent with the meanings teachers and students draw from and impose upon the classroom situation (Bosler, 1983, p. 304-305).

"The kinds of comprehensive measurements available to the field researcher tap a depth of meaning in our concepts generally unavailable to surveys and experiments" (Babbie, 1989, p. 287).

A study was conducted on inmates to test the quality of prisoner self-reports on number of arrests and number of arrest convictions. The study found that there was high reliability in correct self-reports of convictions. There was lower reliability on self-reports of arrests. This however was attributed to the inmates not correctly classifying their arrests. For example, they did not know the correct title of the offense of writing bad checks (Marquis, 1981). This research showed that inmates did not knowingly respond to their records in error, they were as honest as they could be in their answers.

Because participants volunteered in the research, it is felt that the responses given were as truthful as possible from the couples. Any discrepancy of answers between the couples is thought to have been of little importance to the participants. Because these questions could have been unimportant, the inmates may have never considered finding out such information.



The data were analyzed by looking at the couple as a marital unit. Their responses were compared to each other and to the other couples. The rewards, motivations and rationalizations of the couple were measured by consistency of answers of the males compared to the females and the wife compared to the husband in the married unit.

### Limitations of the Research

The biggest limitation in this study was not finding a random sample of married inmates for the research. The participants in this research are not representative of all prison marriages. It would have been advantageous to interview inmates in different security levels of prisons and of different minorities in order to make the results more generalizable.

Being able to interview all of the wives of the inmates would also have made this research more beneficial. The wives that did not choose to participate could have been the wives that supported the idea that the inmates married for materialistic rewards or they could have further supported the responses of the other wives.

Those who agreed may be the wives that believe in what they're doing. They believe their husbands love them and all that they're going through will be worth it when their husbands are released.

CHAPTER IV  
RESEARCH FINDINGS  
Summary of Sample

After contacting the prison chaplain at a state medium-security facility about this research project, getting permission from the prison warden and project director, the chaplain found 17 inmates that had been married after they were incarcerated and these inmates agreed to participate in the research. By the time the research began, one inmate had discharged from his sentence, one had transferred to another facility and one had decided not to participate. When contact was made with inmates concerning the research, they first signed a consent form showing their understanding that their participation was completely voluntary and no promises had been made for their participation. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

At the end of the interviews with the inmates, they were asked to provide their wives' names and addressees so that they may also be interviewed. All fourteen of the inmates were willing to provide this information. These wives were contacted either by phone or mail, and ten of them agreed to be interviewed. Three women did not respond.

The women that did agree to be interviewed met for the interview in various places. Some wanted to be interviewed in their homes. Some agreed to meet in a common meeting place. These women also signed the same consent form and were asked basically the same questions as their husbands. The questionnaires can be found in the Appendix. These interviews lasted approximately an hour.

The ages of the men ranged from 19 to 48. The average age was 36. The ages of the women range from 20 to 50. The average age was 41. Twelve of the inmates were white, two were black. Thirteen of the inmates wives were white, one was black.

The offenses of the inmates ranged from knowingly concealing stolen property to first degree murder. Six of the inmates were incarcerated on a murder charge. Two were in for rape. The offenses of the other six inmates varied. Sentences ranged from two to 25 years for an inmate all the way to life imprisonment. None of the inmates expect to serve their entire sentence. They expected to be released early either on parole or for a shortened sentence for serving "good time." Of the 14 inmates, nine had been incarcerated previously.

After the data were gathered from 14 inmates and 10 of their wives, it was analyzed by looking at the responses of the wives as a group, at the inmates (husbands) as a group and then each couple was analyzed as a

marital unit. Consistencies and discrepancies of answers were looked at comparing the husbands to wives individually and as groups.

The research was conducted to find the rewards and costs of such marriages, the motivations behind such marriages along with the perceived rationality of the decision to marry. The initial inquiry of the research was to explore why a woman would marry an inmate when a conventional marriage is not possible until his release.

#### Differences in Prison and Conventional Marriages

Many women involved in prison marriages may say that their marriage is no different or better than marriages on the outside (Raphael Transcript, 1991). These women said that on visiting days they talk about the same things that other couples do.

A major difference between prison and conventional marriages is that the prison marriages are constantly under the scrutiny of the State Department of Corrections. Wives are limited on how long they can visit, on what days they can visit, and what they can do during their visits.

The Department of Corrections allows no loud arguments in the visiting rooms, definitely no physical violence; and the couples can only engage in activities approved by the State. The visiting takes place in a

large room with all the other inmates and their visitors. It is loud and conversations are often overheard.

This state does not provide conjugal visitations so sexual contact is not permitted among the inmates. Inmates that marry while they are incarcerated and often are not able to consummate their marriages until the inmates are released. There has been suggestions in previous literature, however, that often in the visiting rooms, inmates and their partners do engage in sexual intercourse when the prison guards are not watching. From my research, some women said that they will not risk getting caught by officials in prison. They said that they refuse to have sex in the prison, despite their husbands' pleading.

In Carol Duning's article (1985), an inmate wife said, "I have a sex drive and my husband does, too. But to have sex once and get caught is not worth it. It's the end of your visiting privileges--and they can be terminated for however long the prison officials want" (Amey, 1986, p. 38).

### State Policies of Prison Marriages

There are only eight states that allow conjugal visitations. The state where the research was conducted is not one of them. Visitations are in a public room with all other prisoners and their visitors. The couple is not allowed to be alone. Therefore, consummation of these prison marriages are

forbidden in the prison under the laws of the State Department of Corrections.

Bradbury versus Wainwright allowed marriages for prisoners during their incarceration. In this state, in order to get married the couple must follow the laws for other married couples, and they must also follow the regulations set up by the individual institutions. Most of these regulations are enforced in order not to jeopardize the security of the institution. However, a prison chaplain said that some of the regulations are to make sure that the couple is not acting on impulse. Some institutions want the couple to wait for 30 days after the request before the marriage is made. Waiting for 30 days give the women and inmates the chance to change their minds. When the couple is given permission to marry, the prison chaplain may perform the ceremony or the couple can bring in an "outside" authorized person for perform the marriage.

#### Research Results

After interviewing the inmates and their wives, a pattern of similarities and discrepancies formed between the couples on the reason why they married, their motivations, and their rationalizations. The discrepancies were mostly in the length of their courtship, the inmate's offense and how the couples met.

When the research was originated, the hopes were to find inmates that had met after the male had been incarcerated. A surprise in this

research was that most of the couples knew each other before the incarceration. Some had dated or lived together, broken up and resumed their relationship after the incarceration. Some had been separated for years.

Specifically, nine of the inmates knew their wives before they were incarcerated and five of the inmates met their wives while they were incarcerated. Of the men that knew their wives before they were incarcerated, five had not been in contact with their current wife for a while before they had been incarcerated. Four of the inmates had relationships with their current wives before they were incarcerated and their wives had been with them through the arrest and court processes.

As was expected, the women talked more than their husbands. They provided more detail and expressed more of their feelings of the marriage and their common dislike for the Department of Corrections and its policies. The men were more withdrawn about their feelings and said nothing about the Department of Corrections or its policies. Reasons for this may have been the setting of the interview (the men being interviewed in the penitentiary, the women interviewed in their homes or in a public meeting place) or the men being more accustomed to their surroundings. They know the policies and have to abide by them 24 hours a day. Women only have to abide by them during the visitations.

The women were also more detailed than their husbands about the offenses that caused their husband's incarceration. The men stated their charge and seemed to want to move to another topic. Most of the women, however, wanted to talk about the offense and justify their husbands' actions. Of the 14 men interviewed, three men still had appeals working in the courts.

### Analysis of the Marital Unit

The findings of the prison marriages were discussed in a case-by-case analysis. No names were given to protect anonymity and the cases were identified by letters. Details that may personally identify the participants were excluded. Analyzing these couples as a marital unit involved detailing the arrangements of the marriages and explaining the reasons for their marriage. The research revealed a pattern among most of these marriages. The questionnaires used in the interviews can be found in the Appendix.

#### Couple A

This inmate had been incarcerated before on charges that were similar to the charge (a non-violent offense) he is serving during the interview. His sentence is 35 years, however, he expects to be released soon after being incarcerated for two years. He lived with his current wife before he was incarcerated. She visited once a week and stayed for eight hours. They



wrote each other every day and married six months after he was incarcerated. They have known each other for three years.

He said the reason he married his wife was that he loved her. The advantage of being married to her was that he had someone for him. His first marriage ended when he was incarcerated on a previous offense.

The problems they have because of the incarceration is the "loneliness, not being there with her, spending time with her, and buying her things." He said that the marriage helped him straighten his life out and realize that there is more to life than drugs. When he is released he hopes to get a job, "become a taxpayer," and "stay out of the fast lane."

The family members of this inmate and his wife are happy with the marriage. He sees his in-laws about five times a year. They each have children by previous marriages. He said that his friends were the cause of the incarceration and that he does not want to have anything to do with them when he is released. He does not care how they feel about the marriage.

His main motivation for marrying his wife was for love. He felt that his decision was not rational because he should have married her before his incarceration. He also said that he would do the same thing over again in marrying his partner. He is happy with his decision.

The inmate willingly provided his wife's name and address and said she was interested in participating. However, after sending two letters she

did not return the contact. After double-checking with the inmate on the address, no more contact was made so as not to give an impression of coercion or intrusion.

### Couple B

This inmate is serving a 30-year sentence on a violent crime involving a family member. He knew his wife before his incarceration but they had been separated before his incarceration. The inmate was brought back into contact with his wife through his son, who was conceived when the inmate lived with his current wife.

He had been incarcerated for five years before he was married. After his wife came to visit him, he proposed to her by phone. She was living in another state at the time. When their relationship resumed, she moved back to the state to be closer to him. She visits with her inmate husband three times a week for a total of 12 to 16 hours a week. They phone and write up to three times a week.

"The relationship has improved. I've become more patient since incarceration. The marriage has enhanced my goals, it makes me more positive." He said she provides him with a link to the outside. "I can confide in her." He said that is difficult to do with people in prison.

Another advantage of this marriage is that there is no jealousy between them and she knows that she has changed. He said that being

settled down is what he wants out of life and being married will make things easier when he is released.

In the wife's interview she said the advantage of being married to him while he is incarcerated is that they have "established really good communication. Before, the physical part was the basis of the relationship. There has been a lot more caring...." The advantages she sees him receiving from her are "regular visits, female companionship, security, and a future."

Both have said that their motivating reasons for the marriage was for love and commitment. Both feel they made a rational choice in marrying while incarcerated. "As time goes on it becomes more rational. No one going through it really knows what it is until they live. it. I had no idea what challenges I would be facing until I did," she said.

This marriage has not been without costs. The husband does not feel the marriage has cost him anything. She said, "It's been hard to become stable; I sold a house (in another state) to be with him. He was supposed to be moved to a minimum-security when we got married and that didn't work out." She said that her husband's incarceration creates the problems of not being able to live daily with him. They do not have the freedom to go wherever they want to, obviously, during his incarceration. When he is released, he must live in this state unless the parole board give him permission to move.

She said her parents feel the marriage is fine. The wife said that she does not really know how her siblings feel about it. She said she does not care because if it was negative it would become a burden and her place is with her husband. She said the son they share loves the idea.

They both expressed the same desires for their future (when he is released). They want to live near where the wife lives now. They want to build a home on land that the wife owns. He wants to start his own business again, but the wife said "he's limited until he gets going again." Before his incarceration, his wife said that he was "making good money," owning his own business. He now gets paid \$12 a month tutoring in prison.

### Couple C

This couple met while the inmate had escaped. When he was caught, he lost contact with her. He then wrote her while he was in prison. They began to correspond through the mail. After a year she came to visit. She then returned to the state where she was living, "tied things up," and moved to the state where he is incarcerated. After she moved, they married.

They were engaged for a year before they married. He is serving a 40-year sentence and comes up for parole in 1994. He has served eight years of his sentence. He was charged with armed robbery.

"She sees a different person than what I've always been. But I try very hard not be this person. I don't want to come back here and she recognizes that," he said.

"I don't see that side of him," she said. "At the time of the crime he was in a lot of pain. That alters the perception of the crime. I don't condone it, but I understand it."

"I've never known anyone who's been in prison, have been robbed, or robbed anyone," she said.

They visit each other twice a week for about 15 hours a week. She currently does not have a phone. When she did have one they talked once a day. She sends him six to twelve letters a week. He does not write because he cannot afford stamps.

The inmate finds advantages from this marriage. He said that they include a renewal of hope and peace of mind. "You want out. I see a brighter said of life." He said that she does send him things when she can afford it.

She said that he helps her by "keeping me in touch with myself. He sees things realistically, something I haven't always done. Incarceration causes introspection. He has come to know himself and myself very well."

She believes that the lack of sexual contact in prison gives her the "concrete notion that a relationship can survive without sexual contact. It is a cause of frustration but also an advantage. We can develop a purer

relationship." She said that knowing that someone cares is an advantage of being married to her husband.

She also said that he benefits from knowing that there is someone who cares for him. "He has the knowledge of being capable of being loved. DOC robs inmates of their self-esteem. He knows that I am willing to listen and that I understand."

He sees problems in the marriage because being incarcerated "causes turmoil. It makes me want out." The other disadvantages are "that I can't sleep with her, see her, I don't know her daily problems. She wants to help and take care of me. She wants to give me things that DOC doesn't. I tell her to take care of herself."

She sees the disadvantages of the marriage while he is incarcerated as primarily the physical separation. "It creates unbearable stress." She also said that this marriage creates a financial burden for her. She said that she has problems getting a job. Employers look at a prisoner's wife as being an element "of the other side of life."

His motivating reasons for marrying were because he fell in love with her and felt that she needed him, and he feels she married him for those same reasons.

She said she married him because she loved and cared about him. She also wanted "to protect him as much as possible from the system." She also said that the Department of Corrections does not always recognize

a non-marital relationship. She said that if something would happen to him in prison the Department of Corrections is not required to notify her.

However, they will notify her now that they are married.

He said that he believes he made a rational choice in marrying his wife because he loves her. She believes that her marriage was also rational.

"My husband is a very special human being and I'm not likely to run across someone like that in life again. It doesn't matter where he is, when you find it, you find it; and that outweighs all other considerations."

He does not have any family except for a son. The wife said that he thinks the marriage is okay. Her children "think I'm out of my mind." Her daughter feels that she has subjected her grandchildren to an element of danger, and her daughter has no desire for the grandchildren to meet the inmate husband.

When he is released, he wants to move away from the state and start all over. She also wants to leave the state and wants to go to counseling to help him adjust back into society and the marriage.

#### Couple D

He is serving two 25-year sentences for robbery with a weapon. He had served 10 years before he met his current wife. They met through a friend in the institution who had his girlfriend bring her to meet this inmate.

She said she met him through her niece. She said that she had always wanted to meet someone in prison. "We were just supposed to be friends, but we fell in love and got married. I've got more respect for him than the men out here. He was wanting to meet someone as a friend. I saw him in a picture and wanted to meet him. After meeting him, I've changed a lot of people's minds about prisoners."

He said that since they have been married their relationship has grown. "We respect one another and communicate better. We don't have any major fights or spats. It's great."

When asked how she felt about his offense he said, "I explained my family history, my problems between my parents. She asked me if I got out could I stay out. I told her that I've been down long enough that it isn't worth it. I was straight up with it. I told her about my alcohol and drug problem that I'm still battling."

She said that she told him that he deserved to be punished. His crime did not get him anywhere. "He's learned a lot. You don't abuse your freedom."

The advantages he receives from his wife are having a close companion, someone to confide in, "someone to lean on when I'm depressed, that will always be there." He said that he also receives visits, letters, and moral support. He said "if she'll wait, one day I'll make her a fine husband."



She said that her advantage from being married to him is that the "guys treat you better than they do out here. Guys out here take advantage of you. It's hard not being with him. It has gotten hard to leave him." She said that she has provided him a friend. "He has love in his life where there's never been before--he's stable."

He didn't speak of any disadvantages to the marriage. She said that her only disadvantage is loneliness. "It's hard for one person to make it."

His reasons for marrying her were "I fell in love with her and I needed love in my life at the time." She married him because of his attitude and the way he cares. "He cares more than the guys out here. He's what I've been looking for."

He feels that he made a rational choice in marrying her. She said "I think I made the best choice in the world. Irrational would have been to marry someone out here."

He had been married before and divorced before his incarceration. She has been married twice before. "They ran around on me and beat up on me," she said.

He said that his brother loves the marriage and her children are not close and they do not talk about it. She said that her kids think that as long as she is happy so are they. "They're tired of seeing me abused. He (her husband) said that's one thing he wouldn't do. I've found something that I

can't find out here." She said that his family loves it and that it is about time he found "someone who treats him good."

They visit on every visiting day allowed by the institution for the maximum amount of time allowed. He calls her collect every night and they write each other every day.

They plan on staying in the area when he is released and own their own home. They both said that they know that they will have to work.

#### Couple E

This couple knew each other as children. They met when two of their relatives married. She lived in another state when he was incarcerated. She began to write him. When she came to the state where he is incarcerated to visit relatives, she went to visit him. She visited him when she was here on vacation for the next few years. One time when she was here on vacation, he proposed. After this she moved back to be closer to him.

He is incarcerated on four charges involving rape. He has served six years of his sentence and hopes to be paroled in 1999. She said that he did not commit the acts that he was sentenced for. They accused him because of his previous offenses and he did not have any witnesses testify that could prove his innocence.

When they married, they hoped that he would be released through an appeal; however, nothing happened with that. They do not know when he will be released. "All we can do is pray for a miracle," she said.

He said that the advantages he receives from being married are the visitations and letters. He has someone that does things for him. She brings him clothes and whatever else he needs. She also brings other visitors. He sees no disadvantages or costs of this marriage to him.

She said that she does not really see any advantages to being married to him while he is incarcerated except that she really has had a chance to get to know him. "We became friends before we were married." Specific advantages she provides for him are food packages (on food visiting days), t-shirts, socks, and other items he needs. He also "has someone that cares about and loves him. He's more content and has changed a lot."

The problems she experiences from his incarceration are lack of privacy and standing in line for visits. The cost of this marriage was that she gave up her life in another state to move here.

She visits him at least once a week and sometimes two. When she visits, she visits for the maximum time allowed for visits. This is 11 hours one day a week and four hours on two week days. During their visits they play cards, talk and walk around the visiting grounds. She said she hates visiting at the prison, not because of him but what the women have to go through during the visits.

He said that he really does not know what motivated him to marry, but he now looks forward to the weekends. The visits make the weekends go by faster.

She said that she married him for love and companionship, "someone to care for and to care for you." She thinks he married her for the same reasons. The marriage has given her someone to love and "someone who loves me." In the future she said that the marriage will provide for her physically, emotionally, and financially.

She said that she did make a rational decision in marrying him and that she thought about it a long time before she did it. She said that if she had it all to do over again, she would have married him but would have stayed in the state she was living before she moved. He said that he did not have anything to lose from the marriage and she wanted to do it. He has never been married. She has been married twice and has five children.

Both of their families support the relationship. She said that her friends are also prison wives and that the only person from her employment that knows about her marriage is her boss.

He said that they have not made plans for the future when he is released. Her only hope is to move from the community where they are living.

Couple F

He is serving a sentence of rape. With the "good time" he is receiving, he should be discharged in nine years. However, he is appealing his case. When he married they did not have any idea of when he would be released.

He met his spouse through the mail. A friend of hers asked her to write him. She went to the prison to visit him for two years before they were married. He proposed to her through a letter and they talked about it when she went to visit him.

She visits him at different times. She lives close to the institution, so she is able to visit the institution on every visiting day. However, she said that the institution and the crowded visiting room "gets to me" so she limits her visiting time. When they visit, they talk and eat.

He said they never talk about his reason for his incarceration, but she has read the transcripts of the trial. The woman that introduced them told her why he was in prison and that they have talked about it all that she wants to. He said that he will answer her questions when she asks about it but she is more interested in what happens with the appeal.

She said that he told her he did not do it but there is a little fear that he did do it and "this is just a lie." She read the transcript and believes that he was belligerent to authority and that made it easier for the prosecution to prosecute the wrong person.

When they married, she said that he wanted her to move out of state so he could get an out-of-state parole. She said that the parole board sometimes is more likely to parole an inmate early if the inmate wants to parole out-of-state. She told him she would not do it. She said that they fought for three weeks over this and he finally backed down.

According to the husband, the marriage has not changed their relationship except that she is more comfortable in their relationship.

"Marriages don't change much in here, they can't."

She said that the relationship has changed in that they no longer have the romantic intensity they had when the marriage first began. They are now like an old married couple. They are comfortable with each other. "I want him out much more than I did before."

He said the advantage he sees from this marriage is the visits. She visits every visiting day and holiday. He said that he cannot see any advantage for her.

She sees his advantages as belonging to someone and having somebody that cares. "It's nice to have someone send him things. He has a visit every week and contact with the outside world."

The advantages she said she gets from the marriage are that they had an extended "glorified dating stage" and that she still has a lot of freedom to make her own decisions. She has a lot of free time and is able to avoid

some of the responsibilities of being a wife. "I just like the idea of being married."

He said this marriage has not cost him anything. He thinks the marriage is uncomfortable for her and her friends. Her friends see a woman being married and not having a husband around and going to the prison all the time negatively.

For her, she said the number one problem of the marriage is the social stigma. "It messes up relationships." Her parents are still angry about the marriage. She said she receives "static and persecution from people."

Her motivating reasons for marrying were "I like being married, it's all I wanted to do as a kid" and "I wanted this particular man." She feels the marriage has been a growing tool for her and it has given her a safe environment to finish growing up.

He said that he married her because he loved her and felt he could make her happy when he is released. He said this marriage will make him stay home more in the future and has made his time in prison easier.

They both said that they made a rational choice in marrying each other. His family supports the marriage. Her children feel fine about it. "They don't feel such a responsibility to me. They won't have any contact with him. They don't want to be associated with it in any way."

Their plans when he is released are to live in the community where she lives now and for him to resume his former trade profession. She also wants to further her education.

### Couple G

This couple was dating before he was arrested. They have a son together. They married after he was incarcerated for one year. He hopes to pre-parole in 1993.

He said that their relationship has not changed since they were married. She said that the relationship has gotten stronger and that they have grown closer.

She lives near the prison. She visits every Saturday for approximately 11 hours. During their visits they talk and play with their child. She takes their child almost every visiting day. He calls twice a week and they write each other once a week.

She said that she hates what caused her husband's incarceration but they both think he should not "have done any time." His charge is first-degree manslaughter. They thought that he should have gotten off because it was self-defense. Both of their families are behind him while he is incarcerated.

He does not see any advantages to this marriage while he is incarcerated. He does get to see her and his son often. He said that he is



always worrying about what she is doing. "It's pretty rough on her. She loves me. Sometimes I think that it's harder on her than it is on me." The hardest part for him, he said, is not getting to spend time together when they want and not being able to do what they want.

She mostly agrees with him. She said that there really are not any advantages to this marriage. Her advantage is being there for him and spending time together. "We give each other support with our problems." She said that his advantages are that he gets emotional support and getting out of the cell helps him. "He gets to eat other food and gets to see his son."

The disadvantages she experiences are money and freedom. "It's hard going up there when you don't have much money." Not being able to have sex is another disadvantage.

His motivating reasons for the marriage were for love and their son. The marriage "made me feel more hopeful about the future."

She married him because she loved him and wanted to be there for him. They had planning on being married before he was incarcerated. She said he married her because he loved her.

He believes he made a rational decision. "We'd been together for three years and we have a son. We knew we'd make it because she's been going through it for two and a half years. I didn't want my son to be five years old before we got married."

She said her parents did not want them to get married because they did not think he would change. "They're really supportive of us now. They've been right there beside him and us now."

His family has not expressed their feelings. "I guess they like it. His step-mom and real mom were at the wedding," she said.

When he is released he wants to go to a welding school. They will stay with her parents until he gets a job. They want to move as far away from their hometown as they can because of the bad influences of their friends.

#### Couple H

This couple worked together before he was charged with Murder I and given a life sentence. She was a character witness at his trial. She began visiting him after he was sentenced. That is when the relationship began. He had served a year when they were married. They are hoping he will be released in six years.

She has been married once before and it ended bitterly. This marriage has helped her by "learning to share, how to give of myself, and to know that I've got a man beside me that loves me and will stand by me the rest of my life. He is interested in what I do and say and is interested in building a family together."

He said that the relationship has not changed since the marriage. She said that the relationship has just gotten better.

She is not scared by the murder charge on which he was incarcerated. She said that she just had feelings of sorrow for her husband because it was an accident.

This wife lives the farthest away from the prison of any wives interviewed. She visits every other Saturday for 11 hours. During their visits they play games, hug, and kiss. He calls her twice a week and they write about once a week.

The advantage that he receives from his wife is support and her being there for him. He does not think his wife receives any advantages from being married to him. He said that his incarceration causes tension in their marriage.

She said that he is the kindest, most sensitive man she has ever met in her life. She gives him hope, something to live for and to have something good to think about in what he has to live in. Money is the biggest problem along with him not being able to see his children. Other problems are not being able to see him and not being able to talk to him when she wants to talk to him.

He married her because he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her, "whether it is in here or out there," he said. She said that she married

him because she had "never had a relationship where I knew that person was all for me, in every sense of the word."

They both feel they made a rational choice in marrying based on their feelings. She, because of the circumstances involving his incarceration, thinks that him marrying again may look as though he is not remorseful for his crime.

Both of their children (from other marriages) accept the marriage. Her parents tend to ignore it. "Right now it really doesn't matter if they accept it. When he gets out, if they don't accept it, I can't be in their life anymore because my life is with him," she said.

When he is released he wants his wife to be able to quit working. She wants to try and get an out-of-state parole so that maybe he can get out sooner.

### Couple I

This couple was dating when he committed the offense. He is serving a sentence of 25 years. They became engaged when he entered the Department of Corrections system. They were married two years later according to the husband. According to the wife, they were engaged only six months and they married nine months after his incarceration.

They both agree that their relationship has grown since their marriage. During their visits they talk a lot and go through everything that happens

during the week. They have become closer, more compassionate, and understanding of each other.

She recently moved to the community where he is incarcerated when his appeal did not go through. She said that their marriage is the most important thing to both of them and she wanted to see him the three days allowed by the institution.

When asked the advantages of the prison marriage he said, "I have a very good friend. It is difficult to have friends in prison." He said that her visitations are the most important thing that she provides for him. He said that he provides the advantages of being a "great, caring husband, patient, and a communicator." She said that he fills a void and respects her. The marriage has made him a better person, given him inner peace, and gives him hope. "It has been a reason for personal growth," she said.

She said that her advantages of being married to him are that he is a very loving, kind person. "He has taught me a lot. He has taught me how to communicate." She provides food on their food visits and money for the things he needs or wants. She said that if she did not provide these things for him, that his parents would. "He has someone that loves him special. It takes a strong person to marry someone while he's incarcerated. They have a special time together and he gets a lot of moral support from me."

He said the disadvantages of the incarceration is loneliness and the feeling of inadequacy as a father and a husband. She said that she feels

sexual frustration, also frustration of being married to someone and not being intimate.

They have both been married once before and they each have one child. Her first husband was physically abusive to her. His marriage ended because of adultery. Their children from another relationship as well as their parents support this relationship.

This relationship has helped the wife in that she said that she has grown. "I was shy and backward in a lot of things because of my first marriage. He has the ability to bring the best out of people. When he's home it will be wonderful. He is very romantic and we aren't able to act on that. We talk about what we want out of the marriage. Because of our communication our love will grow. Outside marriages are often based on sexual feelings. Because that isn't allowed, we learn to communicate."

He said he married because of "self-commitment and self-discipline." She married for love and commitment.

He felt he made a rational decision in marrying. "Marriage is appropriate when people care about each other. They're supportive through ups and downs. Women become very independent in the marriage. The men become aggressors and manipulative because prisoners are manipulated in prison."

She said that her decision was also rational. "We love each other. God put us together. We would have married even if he had been out."

When he is released they want to work with the homeless and with inmates. They will go wherever the need for this is. He also wants to write. He said that he wants to go back into business.

#### Couple J

He has served 11 years on a life sentence. He goes in front of the parole board in 1996. This date is the same as when he was married.

The couple dated when they were 18. They separated and he got in contact with her through letters when he was incarcerated. She had not heard from him in 15 years. After they wrote for two months, she visited him. They married after he had served five years of his sentence. At the time of the marriage, he was incarcerated in another state. When he was transferred, she moved to the community where he was incarcerated. Since she has moved, she has been going back and forth to where she used to live because her daughter hates it where she lives now.

She said that the first-degree murder charge that he is in prison for does not bother her. She thinks that the sentence that he received was a mistake. He said that she understands the offense and that he was only defending his own life.

She said that their relationship has not changed since they have married. He said that they have grown closer. He has been married once before and divorced when he was incarcerated on another offense.

She visits the three visiting days allowed by the institution for the maximum time allowed. He calls her twice a week and they do not write very often. During their visits they said that they talk, play games, and kiss.

The advantages of being married to him, she said, are that it helps him deal with the loneliness of prison and he knows that someone cares. He is worried for the well-being and the negativity that can happen in the relationship.

He feels that his disadvantages are the pain of infidelity and knowing that he cannot do anything for her. Her disadvantages, according to him, are the sacrifices she has made to move. She has financial problems and the pain from knowing that he is in a dangerous environment.

She said that she does not have any advantages from this marriage. The advantages she sees her husband receiving are visitations. She said that this marriage has cost her the love and respect of her daughter.

She married him because she loved him and thought he would make a good father for her daughter. The daughter, however, is jealous of their relationship. She thinks he married her because he loved her and wanted visits.

He said that he married her because he was lonely and wanted affection. He thinks she married him because "she likes the way I kiss, the affectionate side of me, and the security of having someone to call your own."



She said that the marriage has not helped her. He said that the marriage "has helped me to deal with this environment. It has positioned love in my environment that I wouldn't have any other way. It's hard to live in prison without any love. My family was only visiting me one time a year." Because of this, he feels his decision to marry was rational. She also felt that her decision was rational because she loved him.

His family will not acknowledge that they are married. They do not like her. When they were married, his family stopped visiting. Her family is not fond of the relationship either. Her mother did not have a problem with it, but her daughter dislikes him and the marriage. This marriage has caused her to choose between him and her daughter.

When asked what their plans were when he was released she said, "to get away from people and no picnic tables."

#### Couple K

This couple met in the visiting room of the prison when she came to visit a relative of hers. They became friends and eventually became emotionally involved. At this time, he had three women friends on his visiting list and she made him take them off the list.

He is serving a life sentence for Murder I. He is hoping to be released in 1992. He had served five years of his sentence before he was married.

She visits one time a week and he makes her leave early enough that she does not have to drive after dark. They do not talk on the phone or write. He demands that she visit on food visits.

They feel committed because they asked God to choose a mate for them. They feel that God chose this for them. He said that they have the same ground rules and objectives as other marriages. They always support each other.

He said that prison wives are often more loyal than some men who are married before incarceration. They do not argue like couples do on the "outside." He gave the reason of not basing their lifestyle on material things. Their marriage is based on love, human emotions, and feelings.

He married her because of the physical attraction and because "she is everything I would look for in a woman." She knows where her husband is and that he is not promiscuous.

The advantages of this marriage to him are her love, companionship, her caring and that she does anything for him that he asks her to. The advantages to her, he said, are that she has someone she can trust, that loves her, supports her. He is intelligent, responsible, and courageous. Her disadvantage is that she has to do "all the leg work for the relationship." Because he is inside prison he is limited in what he can do for the relationship.

They feel that they made a rational decision in marrying while he is incarcerated. It has helped him emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. It is a relief from the anxieties in prison, he said.

His family supports the marriage. Her family does not understand why she married someone that is in prison. Her friends keep their opinions to themselves.

After their release he plans on spending some time by himself, "dangle my foot in a stream." he then hopes to establish his own landscaping business.

#### Couple L

This couple dated for a while and separated long before his incarceration. He got back in contact with her by seeing her mother visiting someone else in the visiting room.

He is incarcerated for second-degree murder, serving a 50-year sentence. He has been incarcerated for four years and comes up for evaluation in 2037. He had been incarcerated for three years when they married. He said that she understands the circumstances that led to his incarceration.

He said that their relationship has not changed since their marriage and there really are not any advantages to being married while incarcerated except for having someone who is there for him and cares. He has someone

who loves him for who he is. He said her advantages are that she gets the same love back. However, he is limited in the things he can do for her and there are no costs in a relationship when a person cares about somebody.

His motivating reasons for the marriage were having the same interests and the joy and happiness that she brings to him. He thinks she married him for the same reason and feels their marriage was a rational decision and would do it over again.

She visits him three times a week for the maximum time allowed by the institution. They do not talk on the phone and they write about three times a week.

He said that this marriage had given him hope. "I'll have someone beside me, to share together. We'll conduct the relationship on the outside the same way we conduct it in here," he said. Their only plans when he is released are to share together and be as happy as they can.

The wife of this inmate would not return any letters concerning the research and the request for an interview.

### Couple M

This couple met while he has been incarcerated. His mother introduced them. They had been writing for two years before that. He had served five years of a life sentence when they were married. He thinks that he will probably parole in 2000. She has been incarcerated recently herself. When married inmates are incarcerated they are not allowed to contact each

other. This happened during the time when research was being conducted, so she was not able to be interviewed.

He said that their relationship had gotten better since the marriage. They have gotten to know each other better. He trusts her, relies on her and she provides him with everything that he needs. She moved to the community where the prison is to be closer to him.

He said that the advantages of being married to her are that he has someone other than his family that supports him and when he gets out he will have everything he needs to make it in the "real world." He said that she provides him with money, clothes, food packages, school books, and things he had never had before. His parents were too poor to provide him with those things.

He does not see any advantages for her. He said that the problem that they have from their incarceration is that they cannot have sex. He does not see any costs of the marriage to either one of them.

His motivating reasons for the marriage were "God says we're suppose to be married" and "I loved her." He thinks she married him because she loved him.

The marriage was a rational one to him because he wanted to wait until he got out but she did not want to wait. He said that he gave in after she persisted for three months. He said that the marriage has given him

hope in life and financial support. He said the he now has someone to spend eternity with.

His family thinks the marriage is great, he said. Her parents have not had anything to do with her for while but her kids visit him.

He said that when he is released he wants to move to another state, build a house, and "make babies."

### Couple N

This case is the most unusual case researched. Currently, this inmate is engaged to be married to a women he met when he was out on parole. She was expecting to have a baby at any time, so she was not able to be interviewed. However, when this inmate was incarcerated on a previous offense, he married a woman he met while he was in prison. He is now trying to get a divorce from that woman whom he blames for his current imprisonment. He said that she was so jealous of his present relationship that she set him up to make it look like he had committed a crime.

He met his girlfriend while he was out on parole. He met his wife the time before this incarceration through another inmate. He asked an inmate if his girlfriend had a friend that he could write. He began writing her and after a year-and-a-half of writing she visited him at the prison. They began seeing each other every visiting day. He began to realize that if he did not play the "love game" he would not get what he wanted. So he proposed.

He said that the things she provided for him were the advantages of this marriage. He married for a companion to provide him with money, mail, and visits. The advantage he provided her with, he said, was that he was someone that told her things that she wanted to hear.

The problems they experienced when they were married while he was incarcerated were that they could not have sexual relations when they wanted. He said that the visiting days were affectionate but when she left he had to go back to his cell and wonder what she was doing and if she could be trusted.

He said that he married her for money and companionship. He said that he thinks his wife married him for companionship. Looking back, he said that his marriage was a rational one. He said that he needed someone to be there for him. He did not think of love in any way. He said that if he had it all to do over again he would not have married his first wife.

When the inmate was released, he said that he tried to make the marriage work. She began writing bad checks and he left her because of that. His wife is now writing an inmate at another institution.

### Analysis of the Inmates

Many of the inmates stated during the interview that most inmates marry someone to bring them things, not because they love them or want to spend the rest of their lives with them. However, of the men that said this,

none of them said that their marriage was included in this. "I've seen inmates that want to take a woman for everything she is worth. When she runs out of money, he takes her off his visiting list. When she writes to say that she has more money, he puts her back on his list."

The same inmate said that women with low self-esteem try to reinforce that idea of them being worthless by becoming involved with the rejects of society. "Women are often very overweight. They feel they must be punished for a marriage that failed or they have been abused and led to believe that this is the life they deserve."

The amazing thing about such comments from the inmates is that it validates the existing literature (Isenberg, 1991). However, the subjects that made these comments said that this does not apply to them or their wives.

One inmate said that if an inmate did not know his wife before the incarceration, it is hard for the relationship to be any other way than a manipulative one.

If this is the case, are the women really abused in some way? The research did not reveal this. If the women did make sacrifices for their husbands to live this life, it was not because the inmates demanded it. The data revealed that the women did this voluntarily. In all the interviews of the women and the inmates, not one of the participants said that he made her move or bring him things. The women said they did these things



because they wanted to and to make their husband's lives easier. A majority of the inmates stated that the most important asset that the marriage provided for them was visitations. They said that their wives provide them with a link to the outside world. Many said that their wives are an escape from loneliness. Many inmates do not receive any visitors or receive them infrequently. This isolates them from the outside world. Having a relationship with someone on the outside eases this feeling of isolation. One husband's parents came to visit only once a year. This left many holidays with the prisoner totally isolated from family.

One inmate's wife said that she frequently visits her husband and tries to bring him up to date on the changes in society. "He's been incarcerated for 10 years and he doesn't realize how much a loaf of bread costs."

#### Analysis of the Wives

Most of the women interviewed had some sort of a relationship with the prisoner before he was incarcerated. The majority of these relationships, however, had ended before the inmate entered the judicial process.

Some of these women said that it takes a stronger person to be married to a prisoner than a person on the "outside." They believe that going through the pains of long visiting lines, crowded visiting rooms, and most importantly, bearing the separation stoically is a sign of strength.

They often complain of harassment by prison guards. They said they are treated as prisoners themselves when they are visiting. A few women said that they feel like they are doing time with their husband.

Two women said that they were convinced that they are "crazy." They are crazy for going through everything it takes to maintain a relationship with their husbands. Making the trip three days a week to sit in a crowded, noisy visiting room creates a hardship for these women.

Why do they put up with it? The majority of the women said that they are in love with their husbands and that is what it takes to make the relationship work. Very few of these women expected to begin a romantic relationship when they visited the prison.

How did a romantic relationship begin? The women that knew the inmates before their incarceration said that they immediately hit it off with these men when they began visiting them. Some said that they wanted to be a major source of support for their husbands. These women feel needed by their husbands.

Two women that married after the male was incarcerated had experienced a physically abusive relationship previously. These women both said that their incarcerated husbands cannot abuse them. One woman that met her husband after his incarceration had experienced an emotionally abusive first marriage. She said that the biggest advantage of this marriage was that she just liked being married.

The most common answer given by these women concerning the advantage of their marriage was that it made them content to know that there was someone that cared for or needed them. This seems to be the main reason why these women married.

### Costs of the Relationship

The costs of the relationship while the husband was incarcerated were common for both husbands and wives. The pain of separation was the answer given most often by the husbands and the wives. Some said that it came in the form of sexual frustration, while others said that it came in the form of not being able to do what they wanted when they wanted to do it.

The women said that another cost of these marriages was the hassle of the visitations. They often wait in long lines before they get into the prison. This shortens the time they have to spend with their husbands. They are subjected to the same observation and rules as their husbands are 24 hours a day. Because this scrutiny and regulations are not familiar to them it often leads to a stressful atmosphere during the visitation. The men, being used to these regulations, and scrutiny, do not feel so uncomfortable with this.

The men also commonly stated that it was hard after visitation was over to go back to their cells and maintain their structured schedules. When visitations were over, they said that they came to the realization that they

were not having a conventional marriage and they could not be with their wives when they wanted. A few men said that it was hard, when their wife left, to think about what their wives may be doing. They said that it was hard not to be jealous of things they may be doing.

## . CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Research Objectives

The objective of this research were to investigate what the rewards and costs might be of a marriage occurring after the husband was incarcerated. Other knowledge gained from this research was concerned with the motivations of the individuals and the perceived rationality of these individuals in marrying while the husband was still incarcerated. Interest in this project was initiated when the question of why these people marry before the husband is released from incarceration and what these members of the marriage gain from it.

The data gathered from this research were analyzed in terms of social exchange theory. The central concept behind this theory is that individuals continually seek rewards from interactions. When the interaction or relationship begins costing more than the rewards received from the relationship, it is usually expected to be terminated. This led to the question of what the members of these marriages are gaining from such a marriage.

Because the inmates that were studied were not allowed conjugal visitation, the consummation of the marriages was also a source of intrigue.

Not only are the members of these marriages separated from each other, they are not allowed to participate in sexual relationships that are deemed normal in conventional marriages. The individuals of these marriages are constantly under the scrutiny of correctional officers when they are with each other. They have never spent a minute totally alone as conjugal partners since they were married.

When the research was initiated, the thoughts on these marriages were that the women were giving up a lot to be married to these men. What are they getting in return? The men only seemed to benefit from having a relationship with someone on the outside. The question of these marriages costing the husbands was also discussed. In the beginning the motivations of the women sacrificing their freedom, money and time on men that they couldn't even lead a normal life with was in question. The men were seen to be reaping the benefits of a marriage that provided them with material items, visitations and contact on the "outside." Because the exchange theory says that each individual must be receiving some reward from a relationship, the research was initiated to find what the women were receiving from the relationship. What do they see it costing them and what do the inmates perceive the cost and benefits of this marriage to be? The perceived rationality of each member's motive to marry was also probed.

## Summary of the Research

So what are the rewards of these marriages to the inmates and their wives? According to the research results, the most valued reward of the marriage to the men is the visitations the wives regularly provide. Every woman interviewed and every inmate interviewed said that the wives visit regularly. Twelve of the wives visited at least once a week; a majority visited even more. The two women that lived further away from the prison visit their husbands at least every two weeks. They also said that they visit more when they are able.

Another common response from the men was that their wives provide them with a contact to the "outside" world. These women keep their husbands informed in what happens on the outside. One woman commented that her husband had no idea of the cost of things and the value of money.

An inmate commented that when a person is incarcerated long enough he forgets what it is like in the larger society. Everything becomes so structured and regimented in the prison that they forget what freedom is like. The inmate commented that having a regular visitor provides a piece of sanity and freedom; they don't feel so isolated.

Another common answer to the question of advantages to this marriage, by the inmates, was the feeling that there is someone out there who cares about them. Many of these men didn't have regular visitors

before they stated having the relationship with their wives. A majority of the men had visits a few times a year. These men expressed loneliness before they were married.

Others answers to the advantages their wives provide were food on food visits and material items. One wife said that the Department of Corrections provides the inmates with only the essentials. The wives often provide shampoo, toothpaste, soap and other things in the name brands that their husbands prefer.

The prison also lets the inmates wear street clothes if they are provided by someone else. These women supply the inmates with sweatshirts, jeans, coats and shoes. One woman said that the Department of Corrections has only provided her husband with one shirt.

Food visits are very important to the inmates. Food visits are days when the visitors can bring food for the inmates on their visiting days. This is a chance for the inmate to eat something besides prison food. The wives said that they try to bring their husbands' favorite food. The prison allows food visits on every state holiday. This adds up to fifteen days a year.

The research did find that the men feel that there are disadvantages to these prison marriages. The most common answer to the disadvantages was no sexual contact. One inmate pointed out that everyone in society is a sexual being and being denied that is very frustrating. He said that if an



inmate does not choose to be homosexual he would have no place to turn to.

Some inmates also said that this causes concern and jealousy of what their wives may be doing on the "outside." The inmates also understand that their wives have a sex drive that the inmates are not allowed to fulfill. One inmate said that he understands that there is nothing to stop his wife from satisfying her needs with someone else.

Another disadvantage stated from the inmates was not being able to do things to provide for their wives. These men seemed to feel that because they were married they should be able to provide for their wives. This is not possible in prison. Many of these same men said that when they were released they didn't want their wives to have to work, although they realized that their wives may have to work for a while until they get "on their feet."

A common disadvantage stated by the inmates and their wives was that they couldn't be together whenever they wanted. They can't sleep together, eat together or watch television together. One wife said that she would just like to cook for her husband.

The wives said that one of their disadvantages (or costs) of the prison marriages is being treated like inmates themselves. They said that when they are at the prison on visiting days they must follow the same rules and regulations as their incarcerated husbands. Violation of rules can result in suspension or termination of visits. The length of the suspensions depend

on the severity of the infraction and the number of regulations that have been broken in the past.

These women said that their relationships with their husbands are based on visitations that are allowed by the institution three days a week. The visiting rooms are very crowded and uncomfortable. The room becomes very noisy and conversations can be overheard by other prisoners and their visitors. Some of these women said that these visits can become strained.

The other problem with the visiting rooms is long lines to get to the visiting room. Many women said that a visitation may begin at four o'clock on a weekday, but they for sure do not see their husbands before four forty-five. Sometimes it may be after five o'clock before they see their husband. Visitations end at eight o'clock on Mondays and Fridays.

The lines are longer when there are food visits. The correctional officers are required to search the food for illegal items that may be smuggled into the prison. It takes longer for them to do this; therefore, it takes longer for the wife to see her husband. Some of the wives said that after the officers go through the food it looks horrible. These women often have to awaken at four o'clock in the morning to cook for their husbands so they can be in the waiting line by eight o'clock in the morning when the food visit begins.

Another disadvantage to some of these women are finances. Some are paying lawyers for appeals. It is also very expensive to afford to visit

their husbands. They have to pay for gas and the food they eat out of vending machines in the visiting rooms. They also have to pay for the phone calls and the material items that they supply for their husbands.

Many of these women are unable to find employment. They are either living in the community where the prison is where there aren't many employment opportunities or employers won't hire them because they are married to inmates. The women who said this said that potential employers never said that to them outright, but they assumed that was the reason.

Most of the men said that their number one motivation for marrying while they were incarcerated was that they loved their wives. The other answer most often given for the motivation of marriage was companionship. The companionship issue is related to the loneliness and isolation mentioned previously.

The majority of the women also said that their number one motivation for the marriage was they loved their husbands. They spoke of a loyalty to their husbands. Many of them expressed that it didn't matter where their husbands were, they would stick by them no matter what. Some said that they were stronger than most women for sticking by their husband while they were incarcerated.

They feel that their actions of marrying their husbands under these circumstances was an act to prove exactly how much they love their

husbands. Their loyalty is something that they alluded to that should be admired.

Another often expressed motivation of the women for this marriage was to be there for their husbands. This answer seemed to be more of an advantage to the husbands than the wives. However, being available for their husbands whenever they need them is something that is important to many of these women.

The majority of the participants felt that their decision to marry was a rational one. Very few said that their decision wasn't rational.

There were nine inmates that said their decision wasn't rational. One said that he didn't feel his decision was rational because he should have married her before he was incarcerated. The other inmate felt that his decision wasn't rational because he has put his wife through a lot of pain and she has made many sacrifices for the marriage. This wife, however, felt her decision was rational because she loved him and the things she sacrificed for the marriage were worth it.

Most of the women said they made a rational choice. Some said that the choice was rational because they loved their husbands. Others said they felt their decision was rational because they had a while to think about their decision before they were married.

One woman was concerned about her decision. She said she doesn't doubt her love for her husband, but she's worried how the marriage will hurt

his possibility of parole. Her husband's incarceration is due to violence involved with his last wife. The prisoner's wife said that the parole board may look on this unfavorably and think that he isn't remorseful for his actions.

There was only one participant that regretted his decision. He was the inmate that is in the process of a divorce. He did say, however, that at the time of the marriage, his decision was rational because he needed someone to provide material items and visitations to him.

#### Contributions and Suggestions for Further Research

The use of a qualitative interview lends itself to a detailed description of the life of a prisoner's wife. This may aid in her decision making.

Another use of this research may be for the family members and friends of the married couple. It can assist them in understanding the decision to marry while the husband remains incarcerated. It explains the loneliness of the inmate and what the wives can provide for them and at explains the devotion these women feel for their husbands.

This research may also be used by the general public to shed light on something that they don't generally understand. These marriages were something that was not really understood by the initiators of the research. These participants are not a part of society that needs to be ostracized.

Their reasons for their marriage are just as normal for them as other people's reasons for marrying in a conventional marriage.

There is further research that needs to be conducted in this area. If time permitted, it would be ideal to track these couples five or ten years into the future and measure their feelings of the marriage. It would also be interesting to see how many of the expectations were met after the husbands were released.

Since this isn't possible, it would be interesting to see how a couples feelings change when the inmate is released. Comparing couples that were married while incarcerated and now is released to the couples where one mate is still incarcerated would be interesting.

Another avenue of research is to compare marriages where the female is incarcerated to marriages where the husband is incarcerated. Are there different amounts or kinds of support when the female is incarcerated? How faithful are the husbands of the female inmates? Are the motivations and rationalizations different? These are interesting questions yet to be answered.

Are the divorce rates any different in inmate marriages than conventional marriages? Often prison marriages are viewed with a feeling of doom. However, with the high divorce rate in the United States today, are the divorce rates any higher with prison marriages?

Finally, a very important source of further study is to compare recidivism rates of offenders that were married when they were incarcerated to offenders that were not. There have been suggestions that close family contact leads to lower recidivism rates. This type of marriage is something new to be studied with this in mind.

Along with this study goes a comparison of recidivism rates of inmates married while incarcerated in a state where conjugal visitations are not allowed compared to those marriages in states where conjugal visitations are allowed. Many of the women that were interviewed for this research project were interested in states with conjugal visitations. Because conjugal visitations allow the prisoner to spend extended amounts of time with his family, it may assist in the adaption of the prisoner back into the community and his family when he is released. This is definitely a topic to be investigated to answer these questions.

### Conclusion

The wives that were interviewed do not see themselves as being any different than wives that are leading a conventional married lifestyle. However, because of the circumstances of prison marriages, there are some differences in these wives of inmates as well as the marriages.

Some of these wives seemed to think of themselves as being reformers of their husbands and their husband's actions. In many instances, the wives of these inmates stated how they have changed their husband's

views of illegal activity through their love and devotion from the marriage. Forty percent of the women said that their husbands have changed since they have married. Twenty-nine percent of the men said that they have changed their attitudes since they have married. They often expressed how they have a renewed hope in life and they now have something to live for or to "keep them going" while they are in prison. These wives see themselves as reformers of their husbands. Because of their husbands' reformation, these women see this as an added incentive for their husbands to be more dependent on them.

In thirty percent of the cases the women said that their husbands have changed them for the better. These women said that their husbands have brought a confidence in them they have never had. These women seem to have lacked self-confidence before they were married to their inmate husbands. In these cases, the women are dependent on their husbands for their self-esteem.

Three women said that they have been in abusive relationships in the past and that their inmate husbands would never dream of hurting them. Their husbands, however, have not been given the chance to prove this since there is no violence allowed in the visiting room. The visiting room is the only place where the inmates have been able to visit their wives since their incarceration. The women also said that, because their husbands have never been violent toward them, their self-esteem had increased and they



are now able to express their emotions more freely than before they met their current husbands.

There was an expressed denial of their husband's illegal behavior by these women. Thirty percent of the women said that their husbands were innocent of their convicted crime. Forty percent said that they understand why their husbands committed the crime or that their husbands should not have received such harsh sentences. Fifty-seven percent of the inmates said that their wives are supportive and understanding of their conviction. One wife said that her husband deserved the sentence that he received.

This data supports the idea of denial of the wives concerning the criminality of their husbands. Seven out of ten wives said that their husbands either didn't commit the offense they are convicted of or shouldn't have been treated so harshly by the justice system. In either circumstance, they are shifting the blame of their husbands' incarceration to the criminal justice system rather than on their husbands' behavior. In the instances of violent crimes, this may be a denial, on the wives part, of the violent nature of their husbands. This could also be explained as the "love is blind" cliché. Seventy-nine percent of the inmates that participated were incarcerated for a violent offense. These women do not want to admit that their husbands may be directly responsible for their breaking the law. Admitting their husbands' responsibility for their actions may mean a conflict within these women's value systems. As long as they deny the criminal actions, then

their husband's behavior will not go against the women's values. It also helps them to deny that there was any victimization inflicted by the hands of their husbands.

In one case, the wife admitted that she enjoys the freedom that she has because her husband is incarcerated. She said that she has all the positives of having a husband and none of the negatives that accompany marriage. She said that the idea of being married appealed to her, that is why she married her husband. This marriage also provided her with the extended courting relationship. The romantic portion of the relationship lasted longer than she feels it normally does. However, with her husband incarcerated, she doesn't have to cook, clean or do his laundry, which are duties she views as accompanying marriage. This woman seemed to think that being married is the norm and by marrying an inmate, she is still able to adhere to the norm and also maintain her freedom.

Twenty percent of the wives expressed some form of possessiveness toward their husbands. They said that they were happy with their husbands and their husbands' ability to make them feel loved and to make them feel that they have someone who cares just about them. With the isolation of the inmates, often it is only the wife that visits the inmates so the inmates focus all their attention toward their wives. The attention is appealing to these women. These women seem to expect this attention after the release of their husband.

Thirty-six percent of the men were possessive with their wives. They requested (or demanded) their wives to move near the prison to be closer to them or they demanded that their wives visit a certain amount of time or a certain number of times a week.

These women often meet the demands of their husbands and see this as an altruistic service to their husbands. When the wives meet the wants and demands of their husbands, they often see it as an act of loyalty to their husbands. This loyalty, according to the wives, should be commended. The men perceive their control over their wives as manly. The men lose all other control to the Department of Corrections when they are incarcerated. Having someone meet their requests (or demands) shows they still have power.

While many people in society may see these women fulfilling the requests and whims of these men as foolish, the wives of the inmates think they are stronger than most women because they are going through so much to maintain a relationship with their husbands. The wives of the inmates believe that they should be commended for their stamina and support they give their husbands. The inmate wives believe that they are stronger than conventional wives because they are going through more turmoil with their inmate husbands than conventional wives and because the inmate's wives rarely, if ever, consider divorcing their inmate husbands. This is why the inmate wives see their relationships with their husbands as

being stronger than that of conventional marriages. One phrase used to express this consisted of the wives saying that it takes a stronger woman to endure the relationship with an incarcerated husband. One wife said that the wives must be crazy to go through all that they do for their husbands. However, when she said this, she was smiling and said it in a way that she was proud of this "craziness" that she endures for her husband.

Fifty percent of the wives have earned some college credits. One woman is in the process of obtaining her Masters degree. Only two women do not have a high school diploma. Sixty-four percent of the inmates interviewed have a high school diploma. So, for this sample, a majority of the cases have a high school education and a majority of the women have had some college. These data say that the sample is educated.

Five of the fourteen women are on government assistance, eight have jobs and one woman has retired. So, 79 percent of the wives have a high school education, but 36 percent of the wives are on government assistance. There are a few reasons for this. One reason is that the women are unable to find work in the community where they live because of job opportunity or because of hours flexible enough to allow the women to visit their husbands as often as the prison allows. The women also said there was distrust among potential employers because they are married to an inmate. Seven of the ten women interviewed expressed financial difficulty attributed to their husbands' incarceration.

Fifty-seven percent of the wives said that their families are supportive of their marriages. Seventy-nine percent of the inmates said that their families are supportive of the relationship. None of the inmates' relatives disagreed with their relationship while only twenty-nine percent of the wives' family disapproved of the marriage. The other fourteen percent did not have families. While there is some disapproval of the wives' families, it is a small percent.

In all but two couples there was no significant age difference between the inmates and their wives. One couple had a ten year discrepancy and the other couple had a fourteen year discrepancy. In each case, the woman was older. Because a majority of these women have been married before, they may have seen this marriage as a last chance for them to marry.

Thirty-five percent of the women were in professions where they provide nursing or home-health care services. This was the only pattern of professions among the wives.

The percentages involving income, education, age, race and family approval seems to have little to do with the decision of the wives to marry the inmates. The majority of the sample has an education, most of the women have employment and the majority also have the support of their family. These factors seem to have had a positive effect on the women's decision to marry.

Only one man admitted that he married his wife for material items. This inmate is in the process of divorcing this wife. Fifty percent of the inmates said that the most important thing that their wives provide them with is visitations. They said that their wives provide an escape from isolation from prison and a link to the outside world.

In looking at the exchange theory, it seems that the data gathered proved that the men receive most of the rewards from the relationship. They are provided with support, visitations, a link to society and material items from their wives. The requests that they make of their wives are most often fulfilled (see Table I).

The wives, on the other hand, said that they are also provided with moral support, love and commitment. They, however, are only provided that within the boundaries of an institution. They prove this love and commitment by supplying their husbands with the things that they request, whether it is visitations, letters or material items. The women said that their ability to support their husbands give them satisfaction. However, it is still the women providing this support. What actually are the specific benefits the women gain from the marriages? The most often response was in the form of love and commitment from their husbands. However, the husbands are limited in the ways in which they can express this love and commitment; and the wives are willing to live with these limitations.

Theoretically, the husbands are provided with much more moral support and love from these women. This response was often given from the men and women concerning the benefits the inmates receive from their wives. The wives however said that the benefits they receive from their husbands is the knowledge that the women can provide and make their husbands happy. With this response, it seems that the whole relationship is spent on making the husbands happy (see Table II).

TABLE I

## INMATE

Rewards	Response % (N = 14)	Costs	Response % (N = 14)	Motivations	Response % (N = 14)	Rationality	Response % (N = 14)
Someone to need and depend on me.	21%	Being separated, no physical contact, loneliness	29%	Love and commitment.	71%	My choice was rational	86%
Provides security and love.	29%	Hassles of visitations.	14%	Someone to care about me.	7%	My choice was not rational.	7%
Provide status of being married.	7%	Financial burden	21%	Self esteem.	7%		
Someone who won't abuse or cheat on me.	7%	Family relationships	7%	Parole advantage.			
Establishing a relationship not based on sex.	7%	Don't know.	14%				
None.	29%	None		Don't know.	14%	No answer	7%



TABLE II

## SPOUSE

Rewards	Response % (N = 14)	Costs	Response % (N = 14)	Motivations	Response % (N = 14)	Rationality	Response % (N = 14)
Visitations, someone on the "outside" to provide companionship	64%	Being seperated, no physical contact, lonliness.	43%	Love and committment	71%	My choice was rational.	64%
Provides a sense of security and someone to love me.	29%	Jealousy of what the wife is doing when she's not visiting.	79%	Companionship, someone to care about me.	21%	My choice was not rational.	36%
Material gain, for personal items.	7%	Financial burden for wife.	7%	To raise my self esteem.			
None.	7%	None.	50%	Don't Know.	7%	No answer.	

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How has this marriage helped you and how will it help you in the future?

What were your two most motivating reasons for this marriage?

What were your wife's two most motivating reasons for this marriage?

If you had it all to do over again, would you do the same thing?

What would you change?

Sociodemographic Data:

What is your age?

race?

occupation?

income?

number of school years completed?

any physical illness?

Your present offense?

Any previous offenses?

What is your wife's age?

race?

occupation?

income?

number of school years completed?

any physical illness?







If you had it all to do over again, would you do the same thing?

What would you change?

Sociodemographic Data:

What is your age?

race?

occupation?

income?

number of school years completed?

any physical illness?

Any previous offenses?

What is your husband's age?

race?

former occupation?

former income?

number of school years completed?

any physical illness?

## VITA

Susan Dawn Sinn

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: PRISON MARRIAGES

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Red Bud, Illinois, 15th March, 1966, the daughter of Noal and Catherine Sinn.

Education: Graduated from Sparta High, Sparta, Illinois 1984; attended Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky August 1984-December 1984, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma 1985-1988; Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism from Oklahoma State University, May 1988; completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree at Oklahoma State University in July, 1992.

Professional Experience: Research assistant, Oklahoma State University Developmental Disabilities Services, Department of Sociology, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1991-1992.