

## Heterosexual Romantic Relationships Inside of Prison Partner Status as Predictor of Loneliness, Sexual Satisfaction, and Quality of Life

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### Abstract:

This study investigated the differences in loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life among three groups of prison inmates: inmates in a heterosexual romantic relationship with a fellow prisoner, inmates with a partner outside the prison, and inmates without a partner. In-person interviews with 70 male and 70 female inmates from the Topas Penitentiary (Spain) were conducted. These inmates lived in the same facility but in gender-segregated modules. After controlling for age, nationality, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole, the results showed a lower level of romantic loneliness, and a higher level of sexual satisfaction and global, psychological, and environment quality of life for the group of inmates with a heterosexual partner inside prison. These findings highlight the positive attributes associated with heterosexual romantic relationships between inmates inside the same prison.

**Keywords:** heterosexual partner relationships | prison | loneliness | sexual satisfaction | quality of life

### Article:

Most prisons around the world are sex segregated: They are designed either only for men or for women. Some countries, especially in Europe (International Center for Prison Studies, 2008; Quaker Council for European Affairs, 2007), incorporate a women's wing or module into a men's prison. However, contact between men and women is not usually allowed. Some prisons in Spain that house men and women in the same facility allow inmates to share some activities, such as work, leisure time, workshops, etc., and they are allowed to be in contact with each other. If they are willing, the inmates can start a romantic relationship. This means that many prisons have the potential to permit this kind of relationship, although few of them actually do it. This study focuses on the differences in loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life among

the inmates who have a heterosexual partner inside the same prison, those with a heterosexual partner outside the prison, and those who have no partner.

The social versus emotional typology of loneliness (Weiss, 1973, 1998), the basic interpersonal needs theory (BINT; López, 1997, 2008), and self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) were used as a basis for studying the effect of partner status on loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life. This conceptual framework, based on the integration of these three theories, has already been applied to prison inmates in our previous work (Carcedo, López, Orgaz, Toth, & Fernández-Rouco, 2008). The present study poses an interesting and radical question: Is it logical, especially if we want the stay in prison to be helpful for inmates' rehabilitation, to deprive them of sexual and romantic relationships?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Romantic relationships form a type of bond that meets relational, emotional, and sexual needs. These relationships can foster both soothing and distressing feelings (e.g., companionship, emotional security, and well-being, but also loneliness, sexual frustration, and malaise). SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a contemporary theory that describes three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness—essential in promoting psychological growth, integrity, and well-being. Romantic relationships will especially affect the relatedness need. However, within SDT, this need can be satisfied via diverse types of relationships. This theory does not get precise enough. Romantic relationships can meet some parts of the relatedness need, but these relationships establish a more specific type of bond. Romances are different from friendships in that romances are more related than friendships to the emotional and sexual facets of human beings. Given this, we also used Weiss's typology of loneliness (1973) and BINT (López, 1997, 2008).

Weiss (1973, 1998) pointed out a distinction between loneliness arising from social isolation (*social loneliness*) and loneliness arising from emotional isolation (*emotional loneliness*). Whereas the former results from the absence of a satisfying social network, the latter comes from the lack of a close emotional attachment relationship. Weiss postulated that each type of loneliness can only be relieved by a particular type of relationship: having social network ties, in the case of social loneliness, and having a close attachment relationship (as a romantic relationship is), in the case of emotional loneliness. BINT (Lopez, 1997, 2008) also includes this distinction between *social* and *emotional needs*, adding the *sexual needs* (also called *pleasurable body contact and intimacy*). For both theories, not satisfying these needs could lead to unpleasant feelings, such as social and emotional loneliness (Lopez, 1997, 2008; Weiss, 1973, 1998), and sexual dissatisfaction or frustration (Lopez, 1997, 2008). Fulfilling these needs is necessary for the individual's well-being (Lopez, 2008; Weiss, 1973, 1998).

### **Inmates' Partner Relationships**

The prison literature has highlighted the difficulties that prison inmates may encounter in having a satisfying romantic (Carcedo, 2005; Fishman, 1988) and sex life (Carcedo, 2005; Levenson, 1983; Maeve, 1999; Sykes, 1958) during their stay in prison. These difficulties have also been extended to relationships with loved ones, including friends and relatives (Biggam & Power,

1997; Carcedo, 2005; Cooke, Baldwin, & Howison, 1990). However, few authors have empirically investigated these alleged difficulties (Carcedo et al., 2008).

Not having a romantic or marital partner is the most common relational status for a prison inmate. Recent studies have reported inmates' rates of marriage to be between 15% and 18% for both genders (Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lindquist, 2000). For inmates who had a partner before imprisonment, divorce is a common occurrence during incarceration (Marsh, 1983), especially in the case of women (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Those who remain together show several difficulties in keeping in touch with their nonincarcerated partners, because of complications with visits in prison, which result in a low frequency of contact (Carcedo, 2005; Fuller, 1993). On the other hand, frequent phone calls, home visits (Fishman, 1988), family visits, and conjugal visits (Carcedo, 2005) are considered by inmates and their partners as very positive and helpful.

Most of the literature that focuses on consensual romantic or sexual relationships inside prisons is based on same-sex partners and is more focused on the relationships between women than men (for a review, see Koscheski, Hensley, Wright, & Tewksbury, 2002). Having both men and women in the same prison is a very uncommon fact in many countries, for example, the United States. However, in Spain (Benítez, 2007) and in other European countries (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and Slovenia), the most common prison organization is male prisons that incorporate a women's wing (International Center for Prison Studies, 2008; Quaker Council for European Affairs, 2007).

Therefore, the possibility of starting a heterosexual romantic relationship inside these prisons is relatively high in Europe. However, the prison administrations are usually reluctant to allow inmates to start a heterosexual romantic relationship with another inmate. This may occur partially because prison administrators are more likely focused on the possible risks of these relationships (e.g., sexually transmitted disease and gender violence) than on the potential positive benefits (e.g., lower levels of loneliness, higher levels of sexual satisfaction, and well-being).

Circumstances such as those found in many European prisons show us the importance of developing studies that focus on the possible positive effects of these relationships. The need for such research is made even greater because only two studies have partially dealt with heterosexual couple relationships inside the same prison (Carcedo, 2005; Carcedo et al., 2008). In those studies, which involved both genders but unequal subsample sizes (60 men and 20 women for the first one, and 110 men and 70 women for the second one), women were more likely than men to have a heterosexual partner inside the same prison. These results were expected because most of the prison inmates in these studies were men in comparison with women, so women had more potential partners to choose from. Seen from a slightly different vantage point, men were found more likely than women to be without a heterosexual partner inside the prison. In accordance with these results, our first hypothesis states that the percentage of women with a heterosexual partner inside the same prison will be higher than the percentage of men, and that the percentage of men without a heterosexual partner inside the same prison will be higher than the percentage of women.

## **Inmates' Partner Status, Loneliness, and Sexual Satisfaction**

Although not involving prison inmates, the presence or absence of a marital partner has been shown to be more strongly correlated with emotional loneliness than with social loneliness. The status of being in a romantic relationship has been found to be highly correlated with lower romantic-emotional loneliness (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993; Sum, Mathews, Hughes, & Campbell, 2008) and lower emotional loneliness in general (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006; Dykstra & De Jong Gierveld, 2004; Green, Richardson, Lago, & Schatten-Jones, 2001; Van Baarsen, Sniijders, Smit, & Van Duijn, 2001), weakly correlated with lower family-emotional loneliness (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993), and more weakly or not significantly correlated with lower social loneliness (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006; DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993; Green et al., 2001; Van Baarsen et al., 2001). Following these results, the second hypothesis states that partner status will be more strongly associated with romantic loneliness than with family and social loneliness.

Having a romantic partner, especially in unsatisfactory relationships, can increase the feelings of loneliness and sexual dissatisfaction. However, in general, having a romantic partner tends to be protective against loneliness (Carcedo, 2005; De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006; DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993; Dykstra & De Jong Gierveld, 2004; Green et al., 2001; Stack, 1998; Sum et al., 2008; Van Baarsen et al., 2001) and sexual dissatisfaction (Ojanlatva, Helenius, Rautava, Ahvenainen, & Koshenvuo, 2003; Pedersen & Blekesaune, 2003). Notwithstanding, these relationships need further investigation when involving prison inmates during incarceration. It is not clear that these relationships have to be beneficial for them. For example, having a partner inside the prison might increase the need of these relationships, amplifying loneliness and sexual frustration levels because the inmates cannot see their partner anytime they wish it. However, these relationships might also be a relief from the sexual and emotional deprivation that the prison inmates usually suffer. Carcedo's (2005) previous findings pointed to this positive direction. He found that inmates with a partner inside the same prison showed lower levels of romantic loneliness and higher levels of sexual satisfaction than inmates with a partner outside the prison and without a partner for both genders. Nevertheless, because of the small sample size, we should be cautious about the results although they showed a logical and interesting pattern.

Looking at these previous results, and consistent with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the typology of loneliness of Weiss (1973, 1998), and BINT (López, 1997, 2008), our third hypothesis states that inmates with a partner inside the same prison will have higher levels of sexual satisfaction and lower levels of romantic loneliness than inmates with a partner outside and the inmates without a partner at the current moment. We will also examine if partner status and gender interact to explain romantic loneliness and sexual satisfaction. Will partner status remain significant when it is analyzed jointly with gender regarding these outcomes?

## **Inmates' Partner Status, Quality of Life, and/or Well-Being**

Partner status has not been studied in relation to quality of life in prison inmates. However, it has been studied with regard to psychological health (Biggam & Power, 1997; Lindquist, 2000; Lindquist & Lindquist, 1997). Contrary to the findings in samples not involving prison inmates,

as we will see below, being married (or in a suspended cohabiting relationship) has been associated with a poorer mental health status (Lindquist, 2000; Lindquist & Lindquist, 1997). To explain her surprising result, Lindquist (2000) pointed to multiple factors (e.g., married individuals being a minority group in prison populations and the greater stigma they feel from being incarcerated), in particular that due to the physical separation—“contacts with family and friends are painful reminders of what is left behind” (Lindquist, 2000, p. 450). From a discrepancy perspective (Perlman & Peplau, 1981), this physical separation may typically decrease the achieved support but not the desire of receiving it.

Consistent with this last discrepancy explanation, Biggam and Power (1997) found, in a sample of incarcerated young male offenders (16 to 21 years old, most of them nonmarried) with respect to their girlfriends, that (a) a higher discrepancy between the emotional support received and desired along with (b) a lower actual practical and emotional support from the girlfriend were related to worse mental health. Because of the physical separation, less emotional support can be received, but it is still desired. Although some pathways exist for giving support to the inmates (e.g., letters, phone calls, and home furloughs; Carcedo, 2005; Fishman, 1988), most direct forms of support are restricted, made more difficult, and/or prohibited altogether (Fuller, 1993; Hensley, Rutland, & Gray-Ray, 2002; Schafer, 1994). The effect of this situation on mental health is consistent with the idea that close relationships can not only be a source of positive feelings but also one of strain (Rook & Pietromonaco, 1987).

Because of this, the romantic relationship with another inmate might be a more effective supportive relationship because the physical separation is lower and the frequency and the possibility of contact are higher. From the theoretical lens we are using, having a supportive opposite-sex inmate as a romantic partner might positively influence inmates’ well-being by enhancing their ability to fulfil what self-determination theorists label *relatedness* needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000) or what Weiss and proponents of BINT call *emotional needs*. Unfortunately, there is no study that has investigated the effect of having a partner inside the prison on quality of life and/or other well-being-related concepts. However, in nonprison populations, having a partner has been shown to have a positive effect on well-being. Numerous studies have shown that married people, and also cohabiters, present better health, psychological well-being, satisfaction with life, and quality of life than unmarried ones (Bennett, 2005; Soons & Liefbroer, 2008; Stack, 1998; Yen et al., 2007).

In summary, in terms of partners’ psychological health, marital or partner status could play a different role in couples from the general population and/or in couples in which partners are fellow inmates than in couples involving an inmate and a nonincarcerated partner. This difference might be explained by the physical separation and the subsequent lack of receiving support (or the desired level of support) from a partner. Based on this evidence and analysis, our fourth hypothesis is that the inmates with a partner inside the same prison will have a better quality of life (physical, psychological, social, and environmental, global, and general health) than the inmates with a partner outside the prison and the inmates without a partner. Gender interaction effects with partner status will also be examined to explain quality of life. Will partner status remain significant when it is analyzed jointly with gender with respect to quality of life?

## **Other Factors Affecting the Inmates' Loneliness, Sexuality, and Quality of Life**

In Carcedo's study (2005), the analysis performed to study partner status differences did not control for other variables that have also been related to our outcomes. A poorer mental health state has been showed by inmates who were younger, White (Lindquist, 2000), had a longer duration of incarceration, or had a longer time expected to serve until release (James & Glaze, 2006). More medical symptoms were found in older inmates; however, there were no differences in general physical health when compared with their younger counterparts (Gallagher, 1990). A higher level of general loneliness has been found among short-term inmates (less than 24 months; Brown & Day, 2008), and a higher level of social loneliness vis-a-vis peers inside the prison has been observed in inmates with less total time in prison (Ireland & Qualter, 2008). Also, aging inmates have reported a higher probability of having a confidant in prison (Gallagher, 1990). In view of all these findings, we decided to include age, ethnic group-nationality, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole as control variables.

## **Partner Status and Suggestions to Improve Their Current Romantic Lives**

As far as we know, only Carcedo (2005) has asked prison inmates about suggestions to improve their current romantic lives. The most frequent suggestions were sharing activities with inmates of the other sex, longer and greater frequency of conjugal visits, and being geographically closer to the partner. However, the collected suggestions were analyzed as a whole, and not based on partner status. Because of this, we inquired which suggestions are the most common for the different partner statuses.

## **Hypotheses and Research Questions Summary**

Finally, as a summary of the hypothesis advanced above, this study states the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* The percentage of women with a heterosexual partner inside the same prison will be higher than the percentage of men, and that the percentage of men without a heterosexual partner inside the same prison will be higher than the percentage of women.

*Hypothesis 2:* After controlling for age, ethnic group-nationality, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole, partner status will be more strongly associated with romantic loneliness than with family and social loneliness.

*Hypothesis 3:* After controlling for age, ethnic group-nationality, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole, the inmates with a partner inside the same prison will show a lower level of romantic loneliness and a higher level of sexual satisfaction than the inmates with a partner outside the prison and without a partner.

*Hypothesis 3.1:* Will partner status remain significant when it is analyzed jointly with gender regarding romantic loneliness and sexual satisfaction?

*Hypothesis 4:* After controlling for age, ethnic group-nationality, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole, the inmates with a partner inside the same prison will show higher levels of quality of life (physical, psychological, social, environmental, global, and general health) than the inmates with a partner outside the prison and without a partner.

*Hypothesis 4.1:* Will partner status remain significant when it is analyzed jointly with gender with respect to quality of life?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

One hundred forty medium-security prison inmates (70 men and 70 women) from the Topas Penitentiary provided data in this study. Their mean age was 34.88 years, with a range from 20 to 62 years. About 47% ( $n = 66$ ) were Spanish and 53% ( $n = 74$ ) were foreigners. Forty-two percent ( $n = 59$ ) had no partner, 15% ( $n = 21$ ) had partners outside of prison, and 43% ( $n = 60$ ) had partners inside the same prison. All the relationships studied were heterosexual, although 3 women reported sexual relationships with women in the past 6 months. The mean total time in prison (for the present and other offenses), actual sentence time served (for this offense), and estimated time to parole were 61.02, 42.87, and 16.65 months, respectively. At the start of the study, the size of the prison population was 1,212 men and 73 women, but during the study, the population size increased substantially. In the case of women, we collected more than half of the sample at the beginning of the study, and the rest a year later once the men's interviews were finished. Doing this we conducted 20 more interviews with new female inmates from among the approximately 30 women who arrived during the year of the study.

We selected participants to have balanced numbers of men and women. After stratifying by gender, 80% of the participants were randomly selected, whereas 20% were selected under a "snowball" sampling scheme (Goodman, 1961). Participants were excluded from this study if they (a) had been in prison for less than 6 months, the time considered necessary to be adapted to prison life and develop new relationships inside the facility; (b) did not speak Spanish or English; (c) had been diagnosed with a serious mental disorder; or (d) were not in an optimal condition to be interviewed (e.g., under the influence of drugs or expressing high levels of anxiety or distrust toward the interviewer). Only eight participants declined or stated that they were not interested in the interview. All of the participants found the interview to be a positive experience and that it gave them a chance to express their personal feelings and worries.

### *Procedure*

This study is part of a larger project that involved two interview sessions with each participant in a private room located in his or her module, separated from the rest of the inmates. All the

interviews were conducted by the same interviewer to foster consistency. Both sessions consisted of questions formulated specifically for this project, as well as standardized questionnaires. We mixed both kinds of measures in the two sessions, and the duration of completing all the interviewer-administered questionnaires was kept short (approximately 30 min) to ensure that participants did not get tired and to avoid “interrogation effects,” which can easily create distrust among the prison inmates.

In general, the first session lasted between 60 and 90 min. Before starting the interview, we spent a significant amount of time building a trustful relationship with every inmate (usually about 20 min, but depending on the inmate rapport, in some special cases it took up to 2 hr). Afterwards, participants were invited to partake and were informed about the possibility of leaving the study whenever they wished to do so. Also, participants were informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of the study, which means that any information given during the interview would not be divulged and their names would not appear in any printed reports. The second session, conducted during the following day, lasted only about 30 min. We consider that respecting all of these conditions is extremely important in collecting good-quality data from this population.

## **Measures**

### *Predictor Variables*

*Partner status.* Partner status was evaluated by asking participants about the number of partner relationships they had at the time of the interview, allowing for the possibility of multiple partners. Two males reported having two partners outside of prison, and two women reported a partner outside and another inside. For our study purposes, we asked them to choose the most important partner for them at that current moment. Partner status was coded to have three categorical levels: no partner (0), partner outside the prison (1), and partner inside the prison (2).

*Gender.* This variable was coded as 0 for females and 1 for males.

### *Control Variables*

*Age.* Inmates were asked directly about their ages, and confirmed against inmate penitentiary records for accuracy.

*Nationality.* This variable was dichotomized into Spaniards (0) versus foreigners (1).

*Total time in prison.* This time was defined as the sum of all time spent in a prison for previous and current offenses. This information was collected by reviewing inmates’ penitentiary records, and it was recorded in months.

*Actual sentence time served.* This variable refers to the time spent in prison since the last entry (i.e., during the current prison term). It also was extracted from inmate penitentiary records and was recorded in months.



*Estimated time to parole.* After talking with the Topas Penitentiary legal advisors, we chose to take three quarters of participants' actual sentences as the expected time to parole because it was the modal parole time. This fact was well known; thus, inmates were likely to expect parole around this time. Obviously, actual time to parole varies depending on inmates' characteristics and behavior. This variable was also computed in months.

### *Outcome Variables*

*Social and emotional loneliness.* The short version of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA-S; DiTommaso, Brannen, & Best, 2004) was used to measure both types of loneliness. In fact, SELSA-S consists of three subscales labeled (a) social loneliness, (b) family emotional loneliness, and (c) romantic-emotional loneliness. Participants rated 15 items (5 per subscale) on a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The total score of every subscale is obtained by adding the item scores and dividing them by the number of items answered. Possible scores range from 1 to 7; higher numbers reflect greater loneliness. No "total loneliness" score is computed because the measure assumes a multidimensional perspective on loneliness. Alphas were .85, .90, and .90 for social, family-emotional, and romantic-emotional loneliness, respectively.

*Sexual satisfaction.* The sexual satisfaction subscale of the Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire (MSSCQ; Snell, 1995) was used to measure this construct. A total of five items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*very characteristic of me*). The total sexual satisfaction score is obtained by adding the item scores and dividing them by the number of items answered, resulting in scores that range from 1 to 5, with higher numbers reflecting greater sexual satisfaction. Coefficient alpha for this scale was .96.

*Quality of life.* The short Spanish version of the World Health Organization's Quality of Life scale (WHOQOL-BREF; Lucas, 1998) was used to assess four domains of quality of life (physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment), as well as global quality of life and general health. Twenty-six items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged, with various anchors, from 1 (*not at all, very dissatisfied, never*) to 5 (*extremely-completely, very satisfied, always*). Domain scores were obtained by adding the items scores (for the items in each domain) and dividing them by the number of domain items answered. For each domain, possible scores range from 1 to 5. The global quality of life and general health scores on this measure are each represented by individual items. Alphas for the domain scores were .69, .73, .68, and .68 for physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment subscales, respectively.

### *Other Descriptive Measures*

*Suggestions for improving romantic life.* To obtain inmates' ideas for the improvement of their romantic lives, we asked the open-ended question "What suggestions would you make to improve inmates' romantic lives?" Two members of the research team coded the responses into categories.

## Results

### *Analytic Strategy*

The primary research goal addressed by this project is how the partner status of male and female prison inmates is related to their loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life. Because of the nonorthogonality of the design (i.e., women being more likely to have a fellow inmate as a partner than men; see Table 1), the individual and combined effects of gender and partner status on outcome measures were assessed using the model comparisons strategy recommended by Appelbaum and Cramer (1974) and Cramer and Appelbaum (1980; see also Maxwell & Delaney, 1990). Following their recommendations, a logical sequence of model comparisons are undertaken, beginning with the test of the interaction, proceeding to a test of each main effect in the presence of the other (eliminating tests), and finally a test of each main effect in the absence of the other (ignoring tests). Only the minimum number of tests necessary to logically determine a final statistical model is performed, allowing valid conclusions to be drawn even in the presence of highly nonorthogonal ANOVA and ANCOVA designs (Appelbaum & Cramer, 1974; Cramer & Appelbaum, 1980; Maxwell & Delaney, 1990). In all analyses reported here, participant age, nationality, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole were controlled because previous research has linked them to prisoner psychosocial outcomes (Brown & Day, 2008; Gallagher, 1990; Ireland & Qualter, 2008; James & Glaze, 2006; Lindquist, 2000). Also, participant age, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole were centered before entry into the models. Thus, the parameter estimates associated with gender and partnership status are referenced to an “average” Spaniard prison inmate (i.e., one of average 35 years old, who has served an average 61 months of total time in prison, who has been incarcerated for an average 43 months during the current stay, and who has an average estimated 17 months remaining until parole).

**Table 1.** Percentages and Frequencies of Inmates' Gender and Partner Status

	Inmate gender, % (n)	
	Male	Female
Partner status		
No partner	70.0 (49)	14.3 (10)
Partner outside	21.4 (15)	8.6 (6)
Partner inside	8.6 (6)	77.1 (54)
	100 (70)	100 (70)

### *Romantic Partner Status and Gender in Prison*

As noted above, because of the nonorthogonality of the design, an exact test of the association between gender and partner status was performed. As expected, the relationship was highly significant; exact likelihood ratio  $\chi^2(2) = 76.24, p < .001$ . Essentially, a substantially higher fraction of women in the sample had a partner inside prison (77.1%,  $n = 54$ ) than men did (8.6%,

$n = 6$ ). Although the majority of men had no partner (70%,  $n = 49$ ), only a few women were in this position (14.3%,  $n = 10$ ). Regarding inmates with a partner outside, more men had a partner outside (21.4%,  $n = 15$ ) than women did (8.6%,  $n = 6$ ). Thus, our first hypothesis was confirmed.

### *Partner Status, Gender, Loneliness, Sexual Satisfaction, and Quality of Life*

Correlations among the control, predictor, and outcome variables have been included in Table 2. It is important to note the high correlation between not having a partner and romantic loneliness. Although feeling romantic loneliness is plausible for both people with and without a partner, this correlation might be bigger in the case of prison inmates without a partner because of the lack of a partner and opportunities to have one. In addition, following Guilford's (1956) suggestions to interpret correlation coefficient values, the correlations among the outcome variables did not exceed in any case a moderate level ( $r = .40-.70$ ). The majority of them were in the range of .2 to .4. These generally moderate-sized correlations suggest that although the domains overlap, they cover conceptually distinct areas of psychological functioning.

Table 3 summarizes the results of analyzing the effects of gender and partner status on loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life, controlling for age, nationality, total time in prison, actual sentence time served, and estimated time to parole. The top part of the table shows parameter estimates and the fit of models that only included the control variables. To maintain consistency in the base model, control variables were retained in the model even if nonsignificant. The lower portion of the table shows the parameter estimates and fit statistics of the final model derived from the model comparisons strategy described above. They always include the control variables of the base model, plus the gender and partner status terms found necessary by the model comparisons. No adjustments of Type I error rates were made because the power of statistical tests for parameter estimates are already limited by the sample size and degree of imbalance in the design.

In short, no interaction effects between gender and partnership status were found for any loneliness, satisfaction, or quality-of-life outcomes. Neither gender nor partnership status was a useful predictor for family loneliness, general health, or physical health, suggesting that whatever factors are related to these outcomes, they operate similarly for men and women and over all types of romantic partner statuses. Gender was consistently a more important predictor of social loneliness and quality of social relationships than partner status, whereas partner status was the most significant predictor of romantic loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and global quality of life. When partner status and gender were analyzed together as predictors of psychological health and environment, no gender effects were found ( $p = .287$  for psychological health,  $p = .616$  for environment), and only the effects of partner status showed trend-level significance for psychological health ( $p = .066$ ) and environment ( $p = .079$ ). Because of the nonsignificance of gender and the trends found by partner status with relation to psychological health and environment, gender was dropped from the final model. When partner status was analyzed individually, this variable showed to be significant for psychological health ( $p < .01$ ) and environment ( $p < .01$ ). These results show that gender is the variable actually influencing social loneliness and social relationships over partner status (women are less socially lonely and have higher quality of life in their social relationships than men). However, answering our two research questions, partner status was more influential than gender for romantic loneliness,

sexual satisfaction, global quality of life, psychological health, and environment. Moreover, partner status explained more variance of romantic loneliness than any other kind of loneliness, supporting Hypothesis 2.

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlations Among Control, Predictor, and Outcome Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
1. Age	–																			
2. Nationality	–.049	–																		
3. Total time in prison	.270**	–.288**	–																	
4. Actual sentence served	.187*	–.145	.674***	–																
5. Estimated time to parole	–.024	.135	–.091	.089	–															
6. Gender	.037	.057	.310***	.241**	–.128	–														
7. Partner inside	.071	.050	.252**	.121	–.052	.693***	–													
8. Partner outside	–.120	–.156	–.012	–.012	–.021	–.180*	–.364***	–												
9. No partner	.016	.063	–.244**	–.113	.067	–.564***	–.739***	–.359***	–											
10. Social loneliness	.144	.096	.189*	.176*	.065	.428***	.315***	–.038	–.288***	–										
11. Family loneliness	–.041	.095	.083	–.084	–.009	.117	.079	.109	–.158	.227**	–									
12. Romantic loneliness	–.103	.009	.225**	.154	.002	.562***	.700***	.228**	–.866***	.346***	.117	–								
13. Sexual satisfaction	–.015	–.015	–.180*	–.130	.014	–.491***	–.591***	.129	.499***	–.236**	.084	–.604***	–							
14. Global QOL	–.041	–.115	–.029	–.071	–.160	–.132	–.302***	.112	.221**	–.317***	–.266**	–.266**	.321***	–						
15. General health	–.166*	–.011	–.107	–.114	–.122	–.108	–.179*	.012	.170*	–.265**	–.135	–.135	.103	.361***	–					
16. Physical health	–.084	.244**	–.163	–.074	–.121	–.075	–.164	.083	.105	–.252**	–.077	–.077	.094	.354***	.461***	–				
17. Psychological health	–.055	.128	–.066	–.058	–.203*	–.204*	–.268**	.168*	.147	–.450***	–.209*	–.209*	.362***	.404***	.366***	.565***	–			
18. Social relationships	–.099	–.005	–.190*	–.119	–.116	–.452***	–.415***	.076	.361***	–.696***	–.336***	–.336***	.326***	.282***	.263**	.334***	.515***	–		
19. Environment	.070	–.005	–.208*	–.090	–.002	–.281***	–.336***	.067	.288***	–.387***	–.321***	–.321***	.408***	.472***	.225**	.407***	.537***	.523***	–	

Note: Partner inside in row 7, partner outside in row 8, and no partner in row 9 were dummy coded as 1. The other two complementary partner statuses were coded as 0. QOL = quality of life. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

**Table 3.** Effects of Partner Status and Gender on Loneliness, Sexual Satisfaction, and Quality of Life

	Outcome variables, b (SE)									
	Loneliness			Sexual satisfaction		QOL				
	Social	Family	Romantic	Sexual	Global QOL	General health	Physical	Psychological	Social relationships	Environment
<b>Control variables</b>										
Age	0.022 (0.019)	–0.015 (0.018)	–0.051* (0.024)	0.007 (0.016)	–0.004 (0.012)	–0.022 (0.013)	–0.004 (0.007)	–0.004 (0.008)	–0.007 (0.012)	0.011 (0.007)
Nationality	0.560 (0.3259)	0.487 (0.297)	0.399 (0.406)	–0.215 (0.259)	–0.247 (0.194)	–0.060 (0.223)	0.318** (0.118)	0.216 (0.130)	–0.111 (0.194)	–0.098 (0.111)
Total time in prison	0.006 (0.005)	0.011** (0.004)	0.014* (0.006)	–0.006 (0.004)	0.000 (0.003)	–0.001 (0.003)	–0.002 (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	–0.005* (0.003)	–0.004** (0.002)
Actual sentence served	0.003 (0.006)	–0.014* (0.006)	0.000 (0.008)	0.000 (0.005)	–0.001 (0.004)	–0.001 (0.004)	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)	0.002 (0.002)
Estimated time to parole	0.005 (0.007)	0.002 (0.006)	0.001 (0.009)	0.000 (0.005)	–0.007 (0.004)	–0.007 (0.005)	–0.005* (0.002)	–0.007** (0.003)	–0.006 (0.004)	0.000 (0.002)
R <sup>2</sup> (control variables model)	.075	.067	.087	.039	.042	.051	.102	.070	.060	.072
<b>Predictor variables</b>										
Gender (0 = female)	–1.531*** (0.306)								1.031*** (0.178)	
Partner status (0 = partner inside)			–4.234*** (0.217)	1.828*** (0.229)	0.708*** (0.200)			0.397** (0.134)		0.395*** (0.115)
Partner status (1 = partner outside)			–3.600*** (0.294)	0.389*** (0.309)	0.072 (0.270)			–0.196 (0.181)		0.068 (0.155)
R <sup>2</sup> (control variables + predictors model)	.221		.778	.362	.132			.160	.250	.152

Note: QOL = quality of life. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

Finally, we analyzed the differences in the outcomes where partner status showed to be significant but gender was not. After accounting for the control variables, least square difference (LSD) post hoc comparisons were used to analyze the differences across the three partner statuses, using estimated marginal means, also called least squares means (see Table 4). Inmates with a partner inside prison showed lower levels of romantic loneliness and higher levels of sexual satisfaction, global quality of life, psychological health, and environmental health than inmates with a partner outside and inmates without a partner. These results are consistent with Hypotheses 3 and 4. In addition, no differences were found between inmates with a partner outside and those without a partner on these outcomes, except for romantic loneliness. Inmates with a partner outside of prison presented lower levels of romantic loneliness than inmates without a partner.<sup>1</sup>

### *Partner Status and Suggestions to Improve Inmates' Current Romantic Lives*

We asked all the inmates about suggestions to improve their current romantic lives. For the group of inmates with a partner inside the prison, the most frequent suggestions were sharing activities with the partner apart from time in conjugal visitation rooms (46.7%), having a higher frequency of conjugal visits (40%), and having longer conjugal visits (23.3%). In the case of the inmates with a partner outside, being geographically closer to the partner (33.3%), having a higher frequency of conjugal visits (19%), longer conjugal visits (19%), access to furloughs, and advancement of the parole (19%) were the suggestions mostly proposed. Finally, the inmates without a partner asked for more time and shared activities with inmates of the other sex (27.1%) and to be allowed to have access to conjugal visits with potentially available opposite-sex inmates (i.e., inmates who are not married, not involved in a common-law marriage, or not able to demonstrate they are cohabiters—under these three circumstances, prison inmates are allowed to have conjugal visits in Spain; 15.3%). In summary, the inmates with a partner inside or outside basically asked for more contact with the partner, whereas the inmates without a partner asked for more possibilities to find one.

**Table 4. Partner Status Differences in Romantic Loneliness, Sexual Satisfaction, and Quality of Life Measures**

	Outcome variables									
	Romantic loneliness		Sexual satisfaction		Global quality of life		Psychological health		Environment	
	M (SE)	LSD	M (SE)	LSD	M (SE)	LSD	M (SE)	LSD	M (SE)	LSD
Partner status										
Partner inside	2.24 (0.150)	<i>i &lt; o</i> (p = .033)	3.28 (0.158)	<i>i &gt; o</i> (p = .000)	3.06 (0.138)	<i>i &gt; o</i> (p = .021)	3.62 (0.093)	<i>i &gt; o</i> (p = .001)	2.48 (0.079)	<i>i &gt; o</i> (p = .038)
Partner outside	2.88 (0.251)	<i>i &lt; n</i> (p = .000)	1.84 (0.265)	<i>i &gt; n</i> (p = .000)	2.43 (0.231)	<i>i &gt; n</i> (p = .001)	3.03 (0.155)	<i>i &gt; n</i> (p = .004)	2.15 (0.133)	<i>i &gt; n</i> (p = .001)
No partner	6.48 (0.151)	<i>o &lt; n</i> (p = .000)	1.45 (0.159)		2.36 (0.139)		3.23 (0.093)		2.08 (0.080)	

Note: LSD = least square difference; *i* = partner inside; *o* = partner outside; *n* = no partner. Post hoc comparisons used estimated marginal means, also called least squares mean.

## **Discussion**

At the beginning of this article, we wondered if it was logical, especially if we want the stay in prison to be helpful for inmates' rehabilitation, to deprive them of sexual and romantic relationships. We have focused on well-being outcomes during incarceration in this study. Although these relationships not involving prison inmates are usually helpful for individuals' well-being, it was not clear that this would be also found in prison inmates because the

conditions of these relationships are different. In general, the results of our study point to a lower level of romantic loneliness, a higher degree of sexual satisfaction, and a higher quality of life in the inmates with a partner inside the same prison. Thus, we may state that romantic relationships with a partner inside the same prison have beneficial effects on inmates' well-being during incarceration in our sample. In addition, a better well-being state, including a higher psychological health, may be helpful to approach the resocialization process of these inmates.

#### *Male and Female Inmates' Differing Odds of Forming a Romantic Relationship*

As it has been found in previous studies (Carcedo, 2005; Carcedo et al., 2008), because the population of women inside the prison is much smaller than the men's, we found that a higher percentage of the inmates with a partner inside the same prison were women, whereas the majority of inmates without a partner were men. Therefore, our first hypothesis is supported. In addition, it is very difficult to identify female inmates with a partner outside and men with a partner inside or outside.

In a noteworthy analysis of sex ratios, Secord (1983) argued that some group-level consequences may follow from imbalanced ratios. In groups with more men than women, women are likely to be highly valued, there is likely to be an emphasis on romantic love in the formation of relationships, and especially women feel a greater sense of power. Observations of the inmate population suggest that similar dynamics occur in the prison and would be worth systematically investigating.

#### *Partner Status, Loneliness, and Sexual Satisfaction*

Our second hypothesis stated that partner status will be more closely related to romantic loneliness than to family or social loneliness. A larger percentage of the variance in romantic loneliness, in comparison with those in family and social loneliness, was explained by partner status. Pearson correlations also showed high association between partner status and romantic loneliness. Although these correlations are high, romantic loneliness and partner status cannot be considered as the same concepts but that maybe these concepts are very closely associated in the case of prison inmates. Loneliness has been defined as the discrepancy between desired and achieved levels of social contact (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Regarding romantic loneliness, this cognitive evaluation only considers actual or possible romantic partners. Both people with and without a partner may feel romantic loneliness because of the discrepancy between the desired and achieved contact from a romantic partner. This high correlation shows that the fact of not having a partner is very strongly related with higher levels of romantic loneliness whereas the fact of having a partner (both inside and outside) is very strongly associated with lower levels of romantic loneliness. This correlation might be even stronger in this sample because of the emotional deprivation and stressful circumstances that are involved in being incarcerated. Under these circumstances, the desire for having a romantic partner may be higher, increasing the discrepancy between the achieved and desired contact, and consequently promoting feelings of loneliness.

With respect to our third hypothesis, the inmates with a partner inside showed lower levels of romantic loneliness and higher levels of sexual satisfaction than the inmates with a partner

outside the prison and those without a partner. These results confirm our hypothesis. In addition, the inmates with a partner outside the prison had lower levels of romantic loneliness than the inmates without a partner.

These findings regarding romantic loneliness are consistent with studies coming from prison (Carcedo, 2005) and nonprison research (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006; DiTommaso & Spinner, 1993; Dykstra & De Jong Gierveld, 2004; Green et al., 2001; Stack, 1998; Sum et al., 2008; Van Baarsen et al., 2001), Weiss' s typology (1973, 1998), and BINT (Lopez, 1997, 2008). All of these studies and theories have shown or pointed out the relationship between having a partner and reporting lower levels of loneliness. However, contrary to Carcedo' s (2005) findings, inmates with a partner inside also had lower levels of romantic loneliness than inmates with a partner outside. The larger sample size and the presence of different control variables in this current investigation lead us to conclude that this difference exists. Although having a partner, no matter where the location of this person is, appears as an asset to feel less romantic loneliness, having this person inside the prison is a more positive factor. Therefore, the proximity of the partner might be playing an important role.

The higher levels of sexual satisfaction found in the group of inmates with a partner inside compared with the groups of inmates with a partner outside and without a partner replicate the findings of Carcedo's earlier prison study (2005) and are partially consistent with studies not involving prison inmates that have found higher levels of sexual satisfaction among those with a partner compared with those without a partner (Ojanlatva et al., 2003; Pedersen & Blekesaune, 2003). Based on these latter studies, not finding any difference in sexual satisfaction between inmates with a partner outside and those with no partner at all can be seen as somewhat surprising. Notwithstanding, Carcedo's previous study (2005) and this current one showed that the percentage of inmates who have not had a sexual relationship in the past 6 months is the highest in the group of inmates without a partner (95.6%-89.8%, respectively), followed very closely by the inmates with a partner outside (81.3%-66.7%), and showing a big difference compared to inmates with a partner inside (21.1%-13.3%). Also prison inmates' frequency of sexual relationships has been found to be the best predictor of their sexual satisfaction in prison samples (Carcedo, 2005). This may explain the absence of differences in sexual satisfaction between the inmates with a partner outside and those without a partner.

Finally, when gender and partner status were analyzed together, no interaction effects were found for these outcomes, and partner status explained more variance in romantic loneliness and sexual satisfaction, whereas gender explained more variance in social loneliness. These results are consistent with but add to and refine Carcedo's (2005) previous findings that used less complex analytic procedures. In comparison with this previous study, in the current one, partner status and gender were analyzed together following the procedure proposed by Appelbaum and Cramer (1974), Cramer and Appelbaum (1980), and Maxwell and Delaney (1990) to deal with nonorthogonal designs. Besides, a series of control variables were included in the analysis to ensure that the differences in partner status were due to themselves and not to other intervening variables.

In general, our results confirm that having a heterosexual partner inside the same prison promotes a better psychological state among inmates in terms of romantic loneliness and sexual satisfaction, being consistent with Weiss's typology and BINT.

### *Partner Status and Quality of Life*

With respect to the effect of partner status on quality of life, our fourth hypothesis is partially confirmed. Because of nonorthogonality, we did not analyze the differences across the different partner status in social relationships. Besides, no partner status effects were found in general and physical health and in social relationships. However, we found that inmates with a partner inside showed a higher global quality of life, psychological health, and environment domain. Contrary to some earlier research (Lindquist, 2000; Lindquist & Lindquist, 1997), no differences were found between inmates without a partner and those with a partner outside.

The significant difference between those with a partner inside the prison and the other two groups can be interpreted in light of Biggam and Power's (1997) research. They found that lower actual practical and emotional support from a girlfriend was related to inmates' having poorer mental health. The prisoners with a partner inside usually receive more practical and emotional support from that partner than the inmates with a partner outside, and obviously than the inmates without a partner. Hence, the highest quality of life is for the group with a partner inside the prison.

Given that the situation of having a partner in the general population is much more akin to the situation of the inmates with a partner inside than outside, we would suggest that these results are also congruent with studies showing that having a partner is related with better psychological well-being and quality of life (Bennett, 2005; Yen et al., 2007) and also with such conceptual frameworks as SDT, Weiss's typology, and BINT.

But this still leaves the issue of why those with no partner and those with a partner outside do not differ as they did in Lindquist's work. One possibility, of course, is the small size of the group with external partners, which would lead to low power in testing for differences. Another way this might be explained and reconciled with Lindquist's results is in terms of the differences in how the detrimental forces noted by Lindquist and the beneficial forces of social support mix in different settings. In the Topas Penitentiary setting, the beneficial force of emotional and practical support from external partners may be sufficient to partially offset the stressful forces (noted by Lindquist) that these inmates experience in trying to maintain partner relationships. In other prisons, the mix of forces may be such that the benefits of external support do not offset the stresses of trying to maintain such relations. Also, in this mix we should consider the discrepancy between the support received and the support desired because Biggam and Power (1997) found that higher discrepancies were associated with poorer mental health. Thus, rather than focusing on marital status per se, future studies might profitably focus more on current practical and emotional support, the discrepancy between achieved and desired support, and how these forces combine with the various challenges that inmates with external partners must face.

Interestingly but not consistent with previous findings (Stack, 1998), no differences were found for the physical health domain and general health, probably because this effect can be better



observed in a long-term partnership (Loving, Heffner, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006). In our sample, 70% of this group does not exceed 2 years of relationship.

As was the case in the analyses of the loneliness and sexual satisfaction data, no interactions between gender and partner status were found in any of the quality-of-life measures. The prison population is often single or divorced (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lindquist, 2000; Marsh, 1983) and, if not, it is often deprived from regular contact with a partner (Carcedo, 2005; Fuller, 1993). For this reason, we think that the fact of having versus not having a partner inside the prison is more important than gender to better explain more romantic and well-being aspects, such as romantic loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life.

Bringing together all the results obtained in relation to romantic loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life, we conclude that the fact of having a heterosexual partner inside the same prison is beneficial for prison inmates' well-being during incarceration, answering to the main question we have tried to address with this work. Considering Lindquist's explanations (2000), this fact may be explained by the proximity and frequent contact between the partners. These aspects help inmates meet their emotional and sexual needs instead of being painfully reminded of what they left behind, as may occur for the inmates with a partner outside. In our study, no differences were found between the inmates with a partner outside and without a partner, except for romantic loneliness. This result might be showing that having a partner is not as crucial for inmates' well-being as it is to be involved in a romantic relationship under circumstances that facilitate more frequent contact and, consequently, better resolution of their needs. For this reason, the best well-being state was seen among inmates with a partner inside the same prison. Future research is needed to check if these relationships may positively affect the postprison success of this group. Some of these couples got married in prison or continue their relationship after being released from prison. Some studies, based on social control theory, have clearly found lower criminality rates in married males (Capaldi, Kim, & Owen, 2008; Sampson & Laub, 2005). From our vantage point and experience with these inmates, even if these relationships end up terminating they might have future positive effects if they are built on relational ethics, including that each partner knows the other's expectations about the relationship (e.g., what they think about continuing the relationship after being released from prison). Having a positive and sincere relationship, independently of its duration, might be helpful in the sense of the general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), because this theory states that strain emerges from negative relationships with others.

### *Limitations*

Like virtually all research, this study has some limitations. The prison where this study has been conducted may be representative of the Spanish prisons that house men and women in the same facility and allow them to start romantic relationships with fellow inmates. However, although most of the prisons house men and women in Spain, not all of them permit this type of relationships. In addition, the sample was only partially random because of the difficulties in selecting a completely random sample within this type of population. Although this is relatively common in the criminal justice field, the generalization of these findings should be limited to this concrete sample if we want to be statistically precise. Nonetheless, these results likely are generalizable, with appropriate caveats, beyond this particular sample, although we have no

guarantees. Future replications will either confirm or highlight limitations in the generality of conclusions drawn; thus future work using stronger experimental designs in this area is definitely needed. Interestingly, these findings are consistent with important and interesting interpersonal theories such as SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), BINT (López, 1997, 2008), and the typology of social and emotional loneliness (Weiss, 1973, 1998).

Despite the difficulties of finding a sex-balanced number of participants within the different partner statuses because of the uniqueness of this population, this limitation was solved using the model comparisons framework articulated by Appelbaum and Cramer (1974), Cramer and Appelbaum (1980), and Maxwell and Delaney (1990) to deal with nonorthogonality. Still, future research is needed to check if similar results are found in more orthogonal designs.

Another limitation of this study is that it is correlational, so causation is difficult to infer. Having a partner inside the same prison proved to be associated with experiencing less romantic loneliness, having greater sexual satisfaction, and enjoying a better quality of life. But did having a romantic relationship cause these beneficial outcomes? One always has to consider the possibility of selection factors in such findings, namely, that partner status differences are due to the inmates who form romantic relationships being different from those who do not. If this is a difference due simply to who does and does not form relationships, then inmates with a partner inside and those with a partner outside should be similar in the outcomes, but they are not. This would provide some ammunition for claiming that prison relations per se foster positive outcomes. But such evidence does not totally rule out a selection argument because it could be that the individuals in the two partner groups differ.

### *Implications*

The positive results obtained are of paramount scientific importance because no previous study had so extensively and rigorously evaluated the fact of having heterosexual partners inside prison. Furthermore, the present results are important for their practical implications. One of the first implications is that housing men and women in the same prison and allowing inmates to have heterosexual romantic relationships inside the prison is likely to be helpful for improving the inmates' level of romantic loneliness, sexual satisfaction, and quality of life (global, psychological health, and environment). These results could play an important role in the prevention of inmate suicide. Very recently, higher loneliness has been related with suicide indicators (Brown & Day, 2008). Besides, the fact of having a successful partner relationship inside the same prison might be also used as a possible predictor of behavior improvement in prison and adjustment to postrelease life outside the prison. In relation to behavior during incarceration, our observations of some cases inside the prison point in that direction. We found a few cases of inmates' bad behavior that changed for better after starting a romantic relationship inside the prison. The argument that having romantic relationships while serving a sentence fosters postrelease adjustment is consistent with Sampson and Laub's study (2005), based on social control theory, which found that outside the prison, the same men commit less crimes when married than when not. More research is needed in this area.

Second, as long as the circumstances of inmates' relationships with a partner outside get more like heterosexual romantic relationships inside in terms of accessibility and frequency of face-to-

face contact, these relationships could also play a positive role in the inmates' well-being and their rehabilitation and resocialization processes (Motiuk, 1995; Schafer, 1994) as well as their behavior at prison. We think that their behavior might be better in prison as other studies have stated for married male inmates (Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Inmates who keep in touch with their family (as with the partner), are easier to approach in prison because their behavior improves (Borgman, 1985; Fishman, 1988), are less likely to accept the behavioral norms and patterns of more experienced delinquents at prison (Bayse, Allgood, & Van Wyk, 1991), and have a lower probability of accepting prison subculture norms (Gordon & McConnell, 1999). To keep in touch with the partner outside, visits to prison (Fuller, 1993; Schafer, 1994), letters (Carcedo, 2005), home furloughs, and telephone contacts can be very useful (Fishman, 1988). Recently, partner relationship stability before imprisonment has been found to be a protective factor against persistence in male criminal behavior (Capaldi et al., 2008; Sampson & Laub, 2005). Additional research is needed to explain more clearly the relationship between the fact of having a partner outside the prison and the inmate's quality of life, postrelease rehabilitation, and prison behavior. Looking at the inmates' suggestions, for both inmates with a partner outside and inside, more frequent and accessible interaction is recommended—not only sexual but also personal contact. Topas Penitentiary allows inmates, irrespective of whether they are married, to access conjugal visitation rooms if the couple demonstrates that they have a stable romantic relationship of at least 6 months. A valid proof that two inmates are involved in a romantic relationship inside the same prison can be exemplified by a love letter sent through the prison mail dating 6 months ago. The inmates without a partner frequently gave suggestions pertaining to the possibilities of finding a partner. Our data support the value of doing this by showing the better state of the inmates with a partner, especially those with a partner inside. In fact, those without a partner would benefit from having a partner to help alleviate their romantic loneliness, reducing sexual dissatisfaction, and improving quality of life.

As inmates form sexual unions it is important, of course, for prison policies to foster inmates' using safe sex practices. From the 54 women and 6 men with a partner inside, one man reported getting a partner pregnant during incarceration, no men reported having HIV, getting STDs during imprisonment, having any kind of sexual contact that they did not want, or having suffered verbal or physical violence by a partner in the last 6 months. In the case of women, 4 women reported having HIV and 2 of them did not use condoms in all of their sexual relationships. No women affirmed having had STDs or any unwanted pregnancy during their time in prison, 1 reported having had sexual contact that she did not want, and 5 reported having suffered verbal violence from a partner. Even though these risks are present, we should not forget the generally positive effects of having a partner inside the same prison. Therefore, from our point of view, the way of intervening against these risks is preventing them without prohibiting romantic relationship inside the prison.

In sum, the findings of this work highlighted the positive correlates of heterosexual romantic relationships inside the prison. Our study also showed that when the circumstances are favorable, prison inmates can also meet their interpersonal and sexual needs, and have higher levels of quality of life. That is especially the situation of inmates with a partner inside the prison. This also could be applied to the inmates who have a partner outside the prison, if the circumstances of their relationship might be more like the ones with a partner inside. Although romantic relationships can occasionally polarize behavior in a negative direction (e.g., in fostering a

deviant style), relationship stability is also a protective factor (Capaldi et al., 2008). From our relational perspective, we believe romantic relationships are mostly positive for human beings, as we have seen in this study. If romantic relationships inside the prison have generally positive effects for inmates' well-being, should we still sex-segregate prisons, or should we allow and, even further, help inmates to have satisfying romantic relationships during imprisonment? In the case that we still decide to keep inmates away from this kind of relationships, maybe we should ask ourselves a different question: Is prison incarceration a time for punishment or a time for helping? We already know which of these two aspects works better in order to rehabilitate or resocialize prison inmates, although it is a difficult task. Are we ready to take the risk?

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The author(s) declared no conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

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## **Note**

1. Essentially the same pattern of results were obtained using Multivariate Analyses of Covariance (MANCOVAs) prior to the univariate analyses. Since the univariate analyses are the key for interpretation of results, they are the focus of the results section.

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