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## Prison Violence and the Intersectionality of Race/Ethnicity and Gender

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### ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Minority men and women are significantly impacted by mass incarceration. Mass incarceration has also resulted in a growth in prison violence, and previous studies in this area have focused on individuals and not their interconnected statuses. This study specifically considers the role of intersectional criminology and the commitment of prison violence in a large western state on female inmates. Intersectional criminology is a theoretical approach that enables a critical look at the impact of individuals' interconnected statuses in relation to crime. Findings suggest that an intersectional approach provides more definitive statistical results in the assessment of prison violence and show that minority females commit more violent infractions in prison than White women. As such, this study builds upon previous arguments that intersectionality should be more widely used in future research. Implications for the findings are discussed.

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Although incarceration rates in general have decreased since 2009,<sup>1</sup> they are still a recognized problem in the United States (see Carson, 2014).<sup>2</sup> Some scholars go so far as to argue that mass incarceration has emerged as a system of racialized social control disproportionately affecting minorities (Alexander, 2010). It is common knowledge that Black and Latino men are incarcerated at percentages much higher than their representation in the United States population as a whole. In fact, Black men have higher imprisonment rates across all age groups than any other race/ethnicity (Carson, 2014).<sup>3</sup> A recent Bureau of Justice report showed that Blacks were incarcerated at 37% of the entire prison population, compared to 32% for Whites, and 22% for Latinos

(Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). However, when the United States embarked on a policy of mass incarceration, few also considered the unintended consequences that this change would have on minority women (Chesney-Lind, 2002). In fact, Black women are 1.6 to 4.1 times more likely to be incarcerated than White women across all age groups (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015).

Specifically, it appears that Black women are increasingly impacted by mass incarceration. Black women are three times more likely to be incarcerated than White women due in part to the disparate impact of the War on Drugs (see Ocen, 2013; Sabol, Couture, & Harrison, 2007; Sokoloff, 2005). However, little quantitative research has examined potential

race/ethnicity differences in women's imprisonment rates (Heimer, Johnson, Lang, Rengifo, & Stemen, 2012).

Further, incarceration rates overall are increasing faster for women than those for men (see Beck & Harrison, 2001; Guerino, Harrison, & Sabol, 2011; Mears, Cochran, & Bales 2012). Bell and Lindekugel (2015) found no significant difference between males and females committing prison violence as a result of this increase in the female prison population. However, much of the research on prison violence has focused on the single social variables of race/ethnicity and gender rather than the intersectional impact of race/ethnicity and gender on prison violence.

Hierarchical power relations influence the commitment of violence (Hill-Collins, 1998). In other words, definitions of violence depend not only on the specifics of any given situation, but on who has the power to define both group identity and social context. Certainly, this is pertinent to the corrections officer-inmate dynamic. Richie (2012) suggests that Black women in particular are marginalized by the state, slowly criminalized, and blamed for the conditions that frame their violent experiences. Perhaps this ties to violence in prison.

The intersectional approach recognizes that race/ethnicity and gender are dynamic socially constructed power relationships that operate at both a micro and macro level (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Stoetzler, 2016; Weber, 2001; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Research on intersectionality can provide insight into social contexts that reinforce power relations (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Weber, 2001). Intersectional criminology is a theoretical approach that enables a critical look at the impact of individuals' interconnected statuses in relation to the social control of crime or any other crime-related issues (Potter, 2013).

The threat of imprisonment is a major source of social control of crime in the United States and thus is a relevant subject of research on intersectionality and crime (see Alexander, 2010). Also, little research has examined the way intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender simultaneously operates to shape violence (Peterson, Krivo, & Hagan, 2006). This is concerning as Richie (2002) argues that in an era of mass incarceration, the effects of race/ethnicity and gender are magnified through increased social control of minority males and females.

Ocen (2013) specifically argues that independent analysis of mass incarceration focusing on race/ethnicity and gender separately is insufficient to capture the impact of incarceration. Instead, intersectionality is necessary to understand that Black men are not the only ones targeted by mass

incarceration – other minority men and women are as well. This research specifically considers the role of intersectional criminology in evaluating the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender in committing prison violence. First, previous research on the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender as well as race/ethnicity and gender independently on prison violence is considered. Next, an intersectionality model of prison violence is assessed. The study provides data that conclude that the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender is more important in promoting an understanding of prison violence than a simple consideration of race/ethnicity and gender as separate social characteristics.

## Literature Review

### Intersectionality of Race/Ethnicity and Gender<sup>4</sup>

Some recent research considers the impact of mass incarceration on the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender. Alexander (2010) goes so far as to suggest that prison in the United States has become a well-disguised system of racial social control – especially for Black men. Specifically, Tonry (2004) argues that governments make decisions about types of punishment to use that are unrelated to actual crime rates. This argument has been made in the United States in reference to the War on Drugs with its mandatory sentencing laws, which actually began at a time when illegal drug use was decreasing (Alexander, 2010; Beckett & Sasson, 2004). More importantly, the majority of individuals incarcerated under mandatory sentencing laws resulting from the War on Drugs are Black males (Alexander, 2010).

Mass incarceration also disproportionately affects minority women (Joseph, 2006; Ocen, 2013). As a result partially of the War on Drugs, Black women are incarcerated at rates three times higher than those for White women (Ocen, 2013; Sabol et al., 2007). Heimer and colleagues (2012) argue that understanding female imprisonment rates requires attention to race/ethnicity. Black women are already victimized by their double status as Black and women; mass incarceration just adds to this victimization (Christian & Thomas, 2009; Richie, 2002; Travis, 2006; Young, 1986). Richie (2012) argues that the current criminal justice system is clearly not set up to serve the needs of impoverished Black women (through lack of programming) and can further contribute to their criminalization and violence.

Although literature has looked at the relationship between race/ethnicity and prison violence, much of this work has been limited to simply White and Black male inmates (Berg & DeLisi, 2006). The intersection of an individual's race/ethnicity with prison violence

is a progressively important area of research in an era of increased movement of inmates between prison and communities (Berg & DeLisi, 2006). Specifically, intersectionality is particularly relevant to research on mass incarceration as involvement with prison creates another status of disadvantage that interacts with race/ethnicity and gender (Christian & Thomas, 2009). For example, a prison record disqualifies many individuals from obtaining housing and employment upon release. This is a greater problem for Blacks than Whites (see Pager, 2007). Yet, despite this situation, little research has examined the way such intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender manifests itself and, specifically, how it shapes experiences of violence (DeCoster & Heimer, 2006).

The focus on intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender as begun by Black feminists is the precursor to today's consideration of multiracial feminism (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Multiracial feminism argues that a power hierarchy exists in which people are socially situated in this hierarchy through interlocking systems of race/ethnicity and gender (Hill-Collins, 2000). A key element to this concept is that social relations are based on race/ethnicity and gender as interactive terms and not just additive (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2004; Daly, 1993). Specifically, the social location of Black women as outsiders provides a basis for theorizing that race/ethnicity and gender act simultaneously (Brewer, 1993; Meyers 2004).

The intersectional approach recognizes that race/ethnicity and gender are dynamic socially constructed power relationships that operate at both a micro and macro level (Andersen & Hill-Collins, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Stoetzler, 2016; Weber, 2001; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Research on intersectionality can provide insight into social contexts that reinforce power relations (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Weber, 2001). Potter (2013) suggests that intersectional criminology has developed from the above into a theoretical approach that "should prove to be a significant contribution of critical criminology and a necessary evolution in criminological theory generally" (p. 306). Intersectional criminology necessitates a critical reflection on the impact of interconnected identities of individuals in relation to their experience with the social control of crime (Potter, 2013).

### Race/Ethnicity

Race/ethnicity independently is a correlate of prison violence and is a strong predictor of violence. However, most of this research only considers the male prison population, with racial minority males tending to be more violent than White male inmates (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Steiner and Wooldredge

(2009) studied state-operated prisons and showed that those with higher proportions of Black male inmates had higher levels of assaults. However, they concluded that heterogeneity in the composition of the inmate population contributed to this inmate violence. Harer and Steffensmeier (1996) evaluated violent misconduct in federal male prisons from several geographic areas in the 1980s. They determined race to be a significant predictor, as Black male inmates were twice more likely to commit violent infractions than White male inmates.

DeLisi (2003) divided race/ethnicity into White, Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian American males and showed that Latino males were the most likely to engage in violent infractions. In fact, being a Latino male was the strongest predictor of committing violent infractions in their study. Native American males were the second most likely to be involved in violent infractions, while Black male involvement was not significantly different than White male involvement in prison violence. Yet, in Rhode Island, Rocheleau (2011) discovered that Latino male inmates were the *least* likely to engage in prison violence. No reasons for these differences in violence by race/ethnicity were given. Finally, using a sample of both males and female divided into White or non-White, DeLisi (2003) established that non-Whites were more likely to engage in serious violent misconduct than Whites.

However, several studies have established no significant relationship between race/ethnicity and committing prison violence (see Baskin, Sommers, & Steadman, 1991; Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003; Finn, 1995; Wright, 1989). Although it appears from previous research that there is a relationship between race/ethnicity and prison violence, there is variation in terms of how much race/ethnicity is involved with prison violence and the reasons for such variation. Steiner and Wooldredge (2009) argue that parallels between disadvantaged minority communities and prison environments are very relevant for understanding inmate violence in particular. This could particularly be the case with an overrepresentation of minorities in prison today.

### Gender

Literature results are mixed when studying women and their ties to both general misconduct and violence. Some research suggests that gender differences in general misconduct exist (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cunningham, Sorensen, Vigen, & Woods, 2011; Drury & DeLisi, 2010; Harer & Langan, 2001). However, other studies have found no difference between gender and general misconduct including prison violence (Bell & Lindekugel, 2015; Camp et al., 2003; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2014).

As serious violence is much less common in women's prisons, it has often not been examined (Craddock, 1996; Wulf-Ludden, 2013). Studies that have looked at gender and prison violence find that men are more violent in prison than women (see Austin, 2003; Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Bottoms, 1999; Goetting & Howsen, 1983; Sargent, 1984; Sorensen & Cunningham, 2010; Wulf-Ludden, 2013). More recent research focusing specifically on female homicide, aggravated assault, hostage taking, and rioting suggests such acts of violence are very rare for women in prison (Harer & Langan, 2001). Further, past violent criminal history has also been tied to violence in prison among an all-women sample (Thomson, Towl, & Centifanti, 2016). Some scholars suggest that female inmates' relationships in prison are becoming more volatile than previously thought (Greer, 2000). This interpersonal relationship volatility could lead to an increase in prison violence among women.

Recent research also suggests that prison staff may exert their authority disparately on incarcerated men and women. Ocen (2013) argues that this differential treatment is not only enforced by gender, but by race/ethnicity as well. Thus, disparate treatment of prison inmates could impact violent infractions by gender independently, but also through the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender. In other words, prison staff may not only treat men and women differently, they may treat White women differently to Black women and so forth. Such literature would suggest that more research on gender and violence in prison is necessary.

### Hypotheses

The main hypothesis of this research is that the use of intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender will provide greater statistical insight into who is committing prison violence rather than a simple consideration of these social characteristics independently. A secondary hypothesis is that minority women will be disproportionately involved in committing violent prison infractions.

## Methodology

### Data and Cases

The data are provided by the Department of Corrections of a large western state. They look at all inmates incarcerated between 2009 and 2011. The breakdown includes 6,674 females (17.3%) and 31,842 males (82.7%). Data were collected by the Department of Corrections on demographic information such as race/ethnicity, gender, age,

education, type of offense, sentence length, and repeat incarceration.<sup>5</sup>

### Independent Measures

**Intersections of race/ethnicity and gender.** Testing intersectionality quantitatively can be done through a unitary additive approach or a multiplicative approach. Both are acceptable methods to explore intersectionality with most researchers using the unitary approach (Dubrow, 2008). As such, the unitary approach is chosen here with the following intersections created: Asian/Pacific Islander females, Black females, Latina females, Native American females, other females, and White females. White female is the reference category.

### Dependent Measures

The dependent measure is dichotomous comparing those who have never committed a violent infraction against those who have, regardless of how many times during the 2009 to 2011-time period. Using official report data, the infractions that the state identify as violent are listed in Appendix A.<sup>6</sup> A consideration prior to conducting analysis was whether to make the dependent measure dichotomous or categorical (i.e., taking into account how many violent infractions were committed instead of prevalence). In other words, the question considered was whether a dichotomous versus a categorical dependent measure would influence the research results.

Both a dichotomous and categorical dependent measure were created and a formal test was conducted for the equality of maximum-likelihood regression coefficients between the dichotomous and categorical populations using the following statistical test (see Brame et al., 1998; Paternoster et al., 1998):

$$Z = \frac{b_1 - b_2}{\sqrt{SEb_1^2 + SEb_2^2}}$$

Where  $b_1$  and  $b_2$  are the regression coefficients for the model variables and  $SEb_1$  and  $SEb_2$  the standard deviations for those same variables. The non-significant  $z$  scores obtained indicated that there was no significant difference between the regression analysis using a dichotomous or a categorical dependent measure. As a result, bearing in mind that the focus of the research was not directed at correlates of prison violence but on which theoretical model would give the most definitive description of the commitment of prison violence, the dichotomous dependent measure of yes or no was chosen for the analysis.

## Control Variables

**Age.** Control variables include demographics of age and education as well as offense type, sentence length, and repeat incarceration as all have been tied to prison violence. Age is perhaps one of the strongest correlates of prison misconduct including prison violence (see Bench & Allen, 2003; Cooper & Werner, 1990; Cunningham & Sorensen, 2006, 2007; Cunningham, Sorensen, & Reidy, 2005; Wooldredge, 1991). Specifically, those who are younger are more likely to be violent in prison (see Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007).

**Gang membership.** Although gang membership is less common among females (see Lauderdale & Burman, 2009), gangs are tied to violence in prison (see Gaes, Wallace, & Gillman, 2001; Gaes, Wallace, Gillman, Klein-Saffran, & Suppa, 2002; Worrall & Morris, 2012). As a result, a dummy variable for gang membership is included. Gang membership in this western state was determined by voluntary admission from the inmate or assessment by a corrections officer.

**Education.** Education has consistently, but not uniformly, been shown to predict prison misconduct and violence. In a sample from the State of Washington (along with New York and Vermont), Wooldredge, Griffin, and Pratt (2001) found education to be a predictor of prison misconduct. Less education has also been found to be a strong predictor of violent misconduct in studies conducted in Arizona, Florida, and Missouri (see Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Cunningham & Sorensen, 2006; Cunningham, Sorensen, & Reidy, 2005; DeLisi, Berg, & Hochstetler, 2004; Harer & Langan, 2001; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012)<sup>7</sup>.

**Offense type.** All offenses for which the inmate is currently incarcerated are classified into one of three categories: violent offense, property offense, or drug offense. Thus, the research takes into account a most recent control for a criminal history of violence (see Sorensen & Davis, 2011). Prior incarceration for any type of offense is controlled with repeat incarceration.

**Sentence length.** Previous research on prison general misconduct and violence specifically has suggested that the length of a prison sentence can exert an influence, with prison violence more likely to occur during the early part of incarceration and/or among those with shorter sentences (see Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Camp et al., 2003; Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Wooldredge et al., 2001). Taking the above research into account and the frequency distribution of sentences imposed, sentence length is classified into four categories: less than one year, one to just less than two years, two to just less than three years, and more than three years.<sup>8</sup>

**Repeat incarceration.** Inmates with repeat incarceration have also been shown to display increased general misconduct and/or specifically violence within prison (see Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Cunningham, Sorensen, & Reidy, 2005; Hardyman, Austin, & Tulloch, 2002; Kuanliang & Sorensen, 2008; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2008). To control for this possibility, a “yes” or “no” dummy variable is included to indicate an individual’s first admission to prison or a readmission<sup>9</sup>.

## Analytic Strategy

Initial descriptive and bivariate analyses were conducted before regressions were run. This initial analysis considered percentage of offending as well as relative odds. Binomial logistic regression (as the dependent measure is dichotomous) was then used to consider the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender on violent infractions in prison<sup>10</sup>. Further, before conducting analyses, a variation inflation factor (VIF) test was employed on all variables to check for multicollinearity. No VIF above 4 was found (the standard cut off level), indicating that multicollinearity was not a problem in this study.

## Analysis

### Descriptive and Bivariate Analysis

The vast majority of violent offenses committed were inmate-on-inmate (see Appendix B). Table 1 presents an initial descriptive and bivariate analysis of intersections of race/ethnicity and gender with violent infractions in prison. The results obtained show that the majority of females do not commit violent infractions within prison. Intersectionality indicates that Latina female (5.00) inmates had the highest relative odds of committing a violent infraction followed by Black females (3.00), Native American and Other females (2.33), and Asian/Pacific Islander females (1.67).

Looking at the effect of the control variables it is seen that those who are younger, are gang members, have no high school degree, and who are incarcerated for a violent offense commit more violent infractions while in prison. The effect of sentence length is somewhat inconsistent with those having a two to three-year sentence showing the most violent infractions. Also, as expected, repeat incarceration increases the chance of committing violent infractions.

**Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Intersectionality of Race/Ethnicity and Gender Frequency of Violence infractions in Prison (N=6,674)**

	No Violent Infraction (%)	Violent Infraction (%)	Total (N)	Relative Odds <sup>11</sup>
<b>Intersections</b>				
Asian/Pacific Islander female	94.8	5.2	174	1.67
Black female	91.7	8.3	737	3.00
Latina female	87.2	12.8	187	5.00
Native American female	93.2	6.8	293	2.33
Other female	93.2	6.8	132	2.33
White female <sup>a</sup>	96.8	3.2	5,151	1.00
<b>Control Variables</b>				
<b>Age</b>				
18-29 <sup>a</sup>	95.8	4.2	1,432	1.00
30-49	95	5	3,705	1.25
50+	97.4	2.6	1,133	0.83
<b>Gang Member</b>				
Gang Member - Yes <sup>a</sup>	66.7	33.3	9	1.00
Gang Member - No	95.8	4.2	6,665	0.08
<b>Education</b>				
No High School Degree	87.4	12.6	215	3.50
High School Degree <sup>a</sup>	96	4	6,459	1.00
<b>Sentence Type</b>				
Violent Offense <sup>a</sup>	94.6	5.4	1,281	1.00
Property Offense	96.2	3.8	2,610	0.67
Drug Offense	97.1	2.9	3,105	0.50
<b>Sentence Length</b>				
Less than One Year <sup>a</sup>	96.1	3.9	5,399	1.00
One to Less than Two Years	94.1	5.9	1,389	1.50
Two to Less than Three Years	88	12	242	3.50
More than Three Years	95	5	119	1.25
<b>Repeat Incarceration</b>				
Repeat Incarceration - Yes <sup>a</sup>	84	16	714	1.00
Repeat Incarceration - No	97.1	2.9	5,960	0.16

<sup>a</sup> Relative odds reference category

**Multivariate Analysis**

The results of multivariate analysis are presented in Table 2. Committing violent infractions by gender is shown to be highly dependent on intersectionality with race/ethnicity. Black females (OR=2.21,  $p<.001$ ), Latina females (OR=2.01,  $p<.01$ ), and Native American females (OR=1.99,  $p<.01$ ) are more likely

to commit a violent infraction in prison than White females.

A consideration of the logistic regression analysis of the control variables shows that younger inmates and those with lower education level are more likely to commit violent offenses. Further, those convicted of property and drug offenses were less likely to commit violent infractions in prison. The effect of

**Table 2: Logistic Regression of the Intersectionality of Race/Ethnicity and Gender on Frequency of Violent Infractions in Prison (Standard Errors in Parentheses;  $N=6,674$ )**

	<i>B</i>	Odds
<b>Intersections<sup>a</sup></b>		
Asian/Pacific Islander female	<b>0.53(0.37)</b>	<b>1.69</b>
Black female	<b>0.79***(0.17)</b>	<b>2.21</b>
Latina female	<b>0.70**(0.26)</b>	<b>2.01</b>
Native American female	<b>0.69**(0.26)</b>	<b>1.99</b>
Other female	<b>0.73(0.39)</b>	<b>2.07</b>
<b>Control Variable</b>		
Age <sup>b</sup>	<b>-0.39***(0.11)</b>	<b>0.68</b>
Gang Membership <sup>c</sup>	<b>f</b>	<b>f</b>
High School Degree <sup>d</sup>	<b>0.93***(0.24)</b>	<b>2.54</b>
<b>Offense Type</b>		
Violent Offense	<b>0.06(0.17)</b>	<b>1.06</b>
Property Offense	<b>-0.36*(0.14)</b>	<b>0.70</b>
Drug Offense	<b>-0.57***(0.16)</b>	<b>0.57</b>
<b>Sentence Length</b>		
Less than Year	<b>0.20(0.23)</b>	<b>1.22</b>
One to Less than Two	<b>0.47*(0.21)</b>	<b>1.61</b>
Two to Less Three Years	<b>0.79**(0.27)</b>	<b>2.20</b>
More Three Years	<b>-0.08(0.47)</b>	<b>0.92</b>
<b>Repeat Incarceration<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>1.70***(0.15)</b>	<b>5.46</b>

<sup>a</sup> White Female Reference Category

<sup>b</sup> Age 18-29 Reference Category

<sup>c</sup> Gang Member Reference Category

<sup>d</sup> High School Degree Reference Category

<sup>e</sup> No Repeat Incarceration Reference Category

<sup>f</sup> Sample size too small

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

sentence length was once again somewhat inconsistent, with those serving a one to two and two to three-year sentence committing the most violence within prison. Also, as expected, repeat incarceration increased the odds of committing a violent infraction. Unfortunately, the number of women having gang membership was too small to do multivariate analysis.

## Discussion

This research adds to the body of knowledge, as a consideration of intersectionality shows that female minorities commit more violent infractions than White females. Further, research has not often considered women and serious prison violence (Craddock, 1996; Wulf-Ludden, 2013). Intersectionality was shown to be more descriptive and statistically significant by the  $p$  values obtained in the multivariate model. The results obtained also proved both hypotheses, namely that the use of intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender provided greater statistical insight into

committing prison violence rather than a simple consideration of these social characteristics by themselves. The secondary hypothesis that minority women would be shown to be disproportionately involved in committing violent prison infractions was also proved.

Some previous studies have researched intersectionality with small populations and found that intersectionality is significant. For example, research on inmate assault has found that inmate perpetrators are more likely to be Black males (see Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996; Sorensen, Cunningham, Vigen, & Woods, 2011). Other studies indicate that a large White to Black prison ratio is correlated with greater prison violence among Black males (see Gaes & McGuire, 1985; Lahm, 2009; McCorkle et al., 1995). However, previous research has not made any comparison with the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and women, which this study does.

It is also widely accepted that intersections create oppression in that individuals are treated differently by

both race/ethnicity and gender (Zinn & Dill, 1996). Socially constructed distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate violence are based in intersectional race and gender power relations (Hill-Collins, 1998). DeCoster and Heimer (2006) suggest that oppressed groups may construct a response emphasizing violence as a method to counter discrimination. If prison is seen as another form of oppression, perhaps this can be used to explain why minority women engage in more prison violence than White women. Ocen (2013) argues that prisons use sensory deprivation to police race/ethnicity and gender and those Black women who are “disruptive” are disproportionately placed in solitary confinement. This can also lead to further violence within prison or self-harm. If prison is seen as another form of oppression, it would follow again from previous research that minority women might construct responses which emphasize violence (see DeCoster & Heimer, 2006).

Several studies of poor, minority girls suggest that abuse in the home is tied to criminal offending (see DeCoster & Heimer, 2006; Richie, 2012). Jones (2010) describes something similar with what she calls “situations survival strategies” where balancing the behaviors expected of good Black girls and behavioral expectations of the street can lead to aggressive (or violent) response. In extension, perhaps this history of violence contributes to such acts in prison for minority women. For example, a study on female homicide found that race and gender disadvantage differentially influenced homicide offending for White and Black women (Parker & Hefner, 2015).

Further, this would contribute to the importation theory of prison violence where an inmate’s adaptation to prison life is shaped by their pre-prison experiences and socialization. According to the importation model, inmates bring with them to prison their violent pasts and draw on their experiences in an environment where toughness and physical exploitation are important survival skills (Giallombardo, 1966; Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Lahm, 2008; Poole & Regoli, 1980; Schrag, 1961; Wheeler, 1961).

The above findings are supportive of the fact that prison differentially impacts minority women compared to White women. Ocen (2013) suggests that the prison actually disciplines and polices gender and racial identities: “Black women are seen as defying normative gender identities...and are thus disproportionately subjected to various forms of harassment and violence within the prison” (p. 478). This research suggests that a deliberation of prison violence is enhanced through the use of intersectionality. A recognition of this differential impact by the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender on prison violence could better inform those

working in the prison system. For example, perhaps prison administrators can incorporate such information into staff training as corrections officers are the ones who officially give the violent infraction to the inmate.

Finally, Potter (2013) suggests that intersectional criminology should prove to be a significant contribution to the area of critical criminology and a necessary evolution in criminological theory. This study supports the hypothesis that an intersectional approach to prison violence provides greater insight into how prison violence manifests itself behind bars than simply considering race/ethnicity and gender independently. In particular, the use of an intersectionality approach encourages us to think about how intersecting identities contribute to multiple forms of oppression rather than just as social variables.

### Limitations and Future Research

Bearing in mind that the focus of the research was not directed at correlates of prison violence but on which theoretical model would give the most definitive description of the commitment of prison violence, the dichotomous dependent measure of yes or no was chosen for the analysis. As a result, the seriousness of offenses was not considered. Although Sorensen and colleagues (2011) found a difference in seriousness of assault on prison staff by race/ethnicity and gender, this research shows difference in violent offenses by race/ethnicity and gender, not seriousness. It is also acknowledged that the potential impact of gangs to prison violence is not able to be examined here at the multivariate level because the number of women identified and self-identified as gang members is so low. However, gang violence does not appear to impact women’s prisons to the extent that it does men’s and could not be used as an explanation for why minority women engage in prison violence more than White women (see Lauderdale & Burman, 2009). Future qualitative studies should examine women’s identification as gang members while incarcerated and this potential impact on violence (see Scott & Ruddell, 2011).

In addition, this study does not definitively determine the reasons why there are differences in prison violence by intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender. Certainly, the fact that the prison violence is based on official report and as such subject to possible differential enforcement by corrections officers could have an impact. In fact, a recent study by Olson (2016) found that Black inmates reported higher rates of placement in solitary confinement than White inmates. However, it is argued that potential bias in official reporting would be least for prison violence as violent crimes are less ambiguous to

corrections officers, leaving less room for discretion in response. Previous research supports this statement finding that race/ethnicity and gender may influence correctional officer filing of minor misconduct, but not major misconduct (see Freeman, 2003).

This research also does not make any causal claims between race/ethnicity and gender with prison violence, simply that a correlation does exist where minority women commit more acts of prison violence than White women. Future research should qualitatively consider the impact of gangs on prison violence among women. It should also continue to expand the use of intersectional criminology as a tool in evaluating other areas of prison life. This should include research on the reasons for differences in offending detected using an intersectionality approach in the study of race/ethnicity and gender with prison violence.

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### About the Author

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**APPENDIX A. OPERATIONALIZATION OF DEPENDENT MEASURE<sup>11</sup>**

<b>Violent Infraction Description</b>
<b>Homicide</b>
<b>Aggravated Assault/Inmate</b>
<b>Fighting</b>
<b>Threatening</b>
<b>Aggravated Assault/Visitor</b>
<b>Holding Hostage</b>
<b>Disease Transfer<sup>12</sup></b>
<b>Cause Inmate Injury</b>
<b>Aggravated Assault/Staff</b>
<b>Sexual Assault Staff</b>
<b>Attempted Sexual Assault/Staff</b>
<b>Abusive Sexual Contact/Staff</b>
<b>Assault/Inmate</b>
<b>Assault/Offender</b>
<b>Sexual Assault/Offender</b>
<b>Attempted Sexual Assault/Offender</b>
<b>Abusive Sexual Contact/Offender</b>
<b>Rioting</b>
<b>Inciting Riot</b>
<b>Strong Arming/Intimidation</b>
<b>Cause Staff Injury</b>
<b>Assault/Non Hospital</b>
<b>Assault/Staff</b>
<b>Assault/Visitor</b>
<b>Refuse w/ Staff Injury</b>
<b>Resist Order w/ Staff Injury</b>
<b>Injure a Visitor</b>
<b>Assault/Hospital</b>
<b>Assault</b>
<b>Holding Hostage</b>
<b>Refuse Medical Order/Injury</b>

**APPENDIX B. VIOLENT INFRACTIONS COMMITTED**

<b>Violent Infraction Description</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Fighting</b>	130	30.5%
<b>Strong Arming/Intimidation</b>	109	25.6%
<b>Threatening</b>	107	25.1%
<b>Assault/Offender</b>	65	15.3%
<b>Assault/Staff</b>	13	3.1%
<b>Aggravated Assault/Staff</b>	1	0.2%
<b>Refuse Medical Order/Injury</b>	1	0.2%

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Although much research considers correlates of prison violence, that is not the aim of this paper. The argument of this paper is that any discussion of correlates of prison violence should take an intersectionality approach as it is a significantly stronger theoretical and statistical fit than considering such demographic indicators independently.
  - <sup>2</sup> It is acknowledged that higher incarceration rates among Black males is not entirely a result of mass incarceration. Instead, higher incarceration rates are also a result of greater criminal violence among Black males, particularly in homicide offending (see Chilton & Chambliss, 2015).
  - <sup>3</sup> Intersectionality scholarship can include other indicators, such as SES and sexuality. However, only the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender are studied in this research.
  - <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>5</sup> The state level has become the standard unit of analysis for prison research as most inmates are housed in state institutions (Heimer et al., 2012).
  - <sup>6</sup> Violence against self (i.e., self-harm) was very small and as such excluded from this study. Also, it is understood that official report data may influence the findings. This is discussed in the limitations section.
  - <sup>7</sup> Specifically, Cunningham et al. (2005) found that more than 12 years' education was associated with lower prison violence and Cunningham & Sorensen (2006) found that 9 years' education was associated with lower prison violence.
  - <sup>8</sup> The control of 3 or more years as a grouping may obscure intersectionality effects of lengthy sentences. However, based on frequency this grouping was chosen as very few lengthy sentences were included in the study.
  - <sup>9</sup> As the focus is violence committed while incarcerated, no other type of sentence (i.e., probation and community corrections) are considered in the repeat incarceration variable.
  - <sup>10</sup> Missing data were extremely small and random. As a result, list wise deletion of missing values was used in the statistical analysis.
  - <sup>11</sup> Relative odds were calculated by #1 dividing the percentage of violent infractions of a group by the percentage of non-violent infractions (not shown in Table 1) and #2 taking the odds of a reference group calculated in #1 and dividing the odds of other groups to that reference.
  - <sup>12</sup> Disease transfer refers to any method of transfer of diseases such as Hepatitis C and HIV (e.g., sexual assault and throwing urines or feces).