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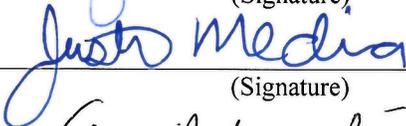
Inmate Misconduct and Prison Visitations:  
An Examination of Gendered Infractions in Relation to Types of Visitors

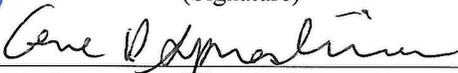
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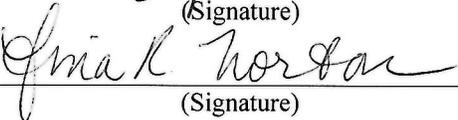
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An Examination of Gendered Infractions in Relation to Types of Visitors

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## Inmate Misconduct and Prison Visitations:

## An Examination of Gendered Infractions in Relation to Types of Visitors

## Abstract

Research suggests that prison visitation can potentially ease offenders' transitions into prison, reduce prison misconduct, maintain social bonds and decrease the likelihood of recidivism after release (Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969). However, a limited amount of literature exists exploring the relationship between types of visitors and prison misconduct and whether gender differences exist (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to develop further insight into the experiences of men and women in prison and whether contact with family and friends in the form of prison visits influences their behavior while incarcerated. The current study examines visitation and prison misconduct data from two female and two male prisons of comparable sizes and security levels within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. A correlation analysis was conducted which demonstrates that prison visitation can have a beneficial impact on female inmates in relation to a lowered amount of total misconduct, while appearing to have no effect on males. Such results reinforce past literature and consequently could be of significance to correctional policymakers by drawing attention to the need for increased access to prison visitation to maintain social ties, while also demonstrating a need for gender-specific programming.

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## Inmate Misconduct and Prison Visitations:

### An Examination of Gendered Infractions in Relation to Types of Visitors

#### **Introduction**

The steady increase in the prison population in the United States has contributed to a growing interest among researchers in exploring how inmates adapt to life in prison. In the late 1970s, a dramatic increase in the state and federal prison population occurred and consistently rose approximately 6% annually, causing the United States to become recognized as the leading nation in incarceration rates (Blumstein, 2011). The management of such prison populations presents policymakers and institutions with a continued barrier to efficiency, in regards to the functioning and ability to produce a correctional environment that discourages recidivism. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015), a total of 1,561,500 prisoners were incarcerated within state and federal correctional facilities as of December 31, 2014 (Carol, 2015). Furthermore, increases in female prison populations have surmounted surges in the incarceration rates of males (West, 2010). By obtaining a greater understanding of how inmates' transition into prison and the underlying mechanisms for their behaviors, researchers suggest that policymakers might be able to implement measures that create a climate that promotes rehabilitation and encourages desistance from criminal tendencies. Within such research endeavors, the role of visitation on an inmate's behavior during and after incarceration has emerged as a major factor in reducing recidivism (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Blevins, Listwan, Cullen & Jonson, 2010; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969). Despite this increased focus on the relationship between visitation and recidivism, limited scholarly endeavors have devoted attention to the impact of visitation on the behaviors taking place within the prison institution and whether gender differences exist.

Existing literature on prison visitation has shown that visits to those incarcerated can potentially reduce the likelihood of disciplinary infractions during incarceration, as well as the probability of recidivism after release (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012). Research suggests that contact with visitors might lessen strains endured by prisoners, which may be rooted in the maintenance of positive social bonds in the community while incarcerated (Agnew, 1992; Blevins et al., 2010). Such deductive reasoning provides supporting evidence for the importance of maintaining positive attachments between inmates and the outside world in order to reduce strains experienced in prison. Some literature does exist supporting prison visitation's impact on inmate's behaviors while incarcerated. However, a larger portion of the literature has examined the role of visits from the outside community and its influence on successful reintegration into the community after release, with particular focus on the influence of visits by children on incarcerated mothers' behavior (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Celinska & Sung, 2014). As a result, limited amounts of information have been garnered in regards to the relationship between visitation and prison misconduct, especially in terms of gender comparisons and whether there is a differential impact of visits based on visitor types (Celinska & Sung, 2014).

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to provide further examination into whether the type of contact, whether that be with a child, a friend, a spouse, or other outside community member, has an impact on prison misconduct and whether the effect differs for male and female inmates. A deeper understanding of the relationship between prison misconduct and prison visitation would provide policymakers with the information needed to implement changes within the prison system that could ease inmates' transition to prison, reduce the likelihood of prison misconduct, and potentially diminish the chances of recidivism after release through the maintenance of social bonds during periods of incarceration (Blevins et al., 2010; Celinska &

Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Pierce, 2015). In addition, an examination of whether gender differences exist could demonstrate an increased need for gender-specific programming to increase pro-social behavior among inmates.

### **Theoretical Basis for Prison Visitation**

Support for prison visitation appears to be deeply rooted within criminological theory, particularly Travis Hirschi's social control theory, as well as Robert Agnew's general strain theory. Researchers have reasoned that the benefit of visitation can be understood by the foundations of such theories (Blevins et al., 2010). Consequently, studies assessing the relationship between prison misconduct, recidivism, social bonds, and visitation programs are informed by these prolific theoretical insights.

Travis Hirschi formulated social control theory in 1969 with the intent to explain why most individuals do not engage in criminal behavior. In doing so, Hirschi detailed a theoretical framework that suggested one's social bonds, including attachment, belief, involvement, and commitment, converge to decrease the likelihood of an individual adopting a criminal rhetoric and lifestyle. Hirschi argued that attachment, the most important social bond, to family, peers, and school was essential for encouraging the internalization of law-abiding values and norms (Hirschi, 1969). Researchers investigating prison visitations have utilized such logic to explain how entrance into prison can sever social ties and bonds that encourage individuals to resist engaging in criminal behaviors. Bales and Mears (2008) found that inmates that are able and willing to maintain social bonds are more likely to successfully reintegrate and enter back into society than those that failed to preserve and sustain positive social bonds and attachments while incarcerated. Other studies suggest that upholding social bonds encourages rule-abiding behaviors within the prison environment and promotes successful reintegration into the

community following release (Blevins et al., 2010; Cochran, 2012; Hirschi, 1969; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969).

Scholars also suggest that entering prison is accompanied by a host of stressors, such that misconduct within this foreign environment potentially results from an inability to cope with such strains (Blevins et al., 2010). According to Robert Agnew's general strain theory, varying levels of strain result from the loss of a positive stimuli, the introduction of a negative stimuli, or obstacles to achieving valued goals (Agnew, 1992). Blevins et al. (2010) utilized Agnew's ideas about strain and applied it to the prison environment, formulating a model to explain prison inmate behavior. They reason that if an inmate is prevented or denied visitation privileges, feels abandonment or isolated from their outside friends and family members, and also experiences potential victimizations and stress related factors associated with the prisoner lifestyle, resentment and anger could result if the inmate has inadequate coping skills and a lack of social support (Blevins et al., 2010). Consequently, Agnew argues that if an inmate lacks conventional coping skills and continues to experience chronic strains, the individual may be more likely to engage in criminal activities (Agnew, 2009), resulting in instances of rule violations while incarcerated.

The theoretical frameworks set out by Agnew and Hirschi ultimately serve as foundations for subsequent research investigating the importance of social bonds and the ability to potentially aid with the coping of strains. Therefore, research devoted to understanding inmates' behaviors in prison in regards to prison visitation is rooted in these theories, allowing researchers to ground explorations and encountered findings in criminological theory.

## Literature Review

### Background on Prison Visitation and Misconduct

Previous research on prison visitation has found prison visits have a positive impact on inmates (Blevins et al., 2010; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Most analyses focus on recidivism outcomes and examine the relationship quantitatively using individual level characteristics. However, studies have begun to explore this relationship qualitatively through surveys and interviews with inmates in an attempt to further understand the implications of visits on inmates (Celinska & Sung, 2014). While the literature continues to build, overarching themes within the research suggest that visitation appears to be an effective method in easing one's adjustment to incarceration, reducing rule violations, as well as potentially lessening the likelihood of recidivism after release (Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969). Although literature has found positive implications of prison visitation in regards to desistance from criminal activity post-release, deficits exist in regards to how visitation may potentially impact inmates' behavior while incarcerated (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Consequently, numerous authors regard such growing literature to be essential for policymakers, particularly from a managerial point of view within the prison system, in order to maintain structural order and cohesion, while increasing the likelihood of desistance from future criminal activities (Lembo, 1969).

Due to the increased interest in the potential relationship between prison visitation and misconduct as a method to encourage prosocial behaviors following incarceration, research has attempted to further explore how often misconduct is engaged in within the prison institution, what types of inmates are most likely to commit disciplinary infractions, and the associated risk factors related to prison misconduct (Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003; Celinska & Sung;

2014; Cunningham & Sorenson, 2007; Deng, 2004; Goetting & Howsen, 1986; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Poole & Regoli, 1983). Such research motivations are rooted in prison policy, particularly from a managerial standpoint. More specifically, prison misconduct could harm the internal structure and order of the prison system through interfering with the operational goals of the institution. Such goals include providing services to the larger masses dependent upon inmates serving their appropriate functions as intended in programs, such as handling equipment properly, without engaging in rule violations. Therefore, if the prison is not able to enforce the rules and maintain cohesion among the prison population, the view of the prison as an effective and efficient correctional institution might deteriorate. Thus, the literature has demonstrated that the functional ability of the prison institution to maintain its order and integrity is contingent upon its effectiveness in controlling the prison population. In order to do so, the literature finds a deeper understanding of correlates to prison misconduct as an essential component to prevent rule violations (Goetting & Howsen, 1986).

Research endeavors exploring correlates of prison misconduct have produced common findings as to what type of conditions are likely to elicit prison misconduct and what type of inmates have the greatest likelihood of engaging in rule violations. Some research has suggested that situational factors within the prison environment, including staff and other compositional effects, are indicative of certain types of misconduct within the establishment (Bottoms, 1999; Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003). Shifting to a greater focus on individual-level characteristics associated with prison misconduct, other literature has collectively indicated that young, unemployed, previously incarcerated, black males are more likely to commit prison misconduct (Camp et al., 2003; Cao et al., 1997; Cunningham & Sorenson, 2007; Deng, 2004; Goetting & Howsen, 1986; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). In addition, research has suggested that male

inmates, in general, tend to commit more rule violations while incarcerated than their female counterparts (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Craddock, 1996).

Limited research has explored gender and racial differences in relation to prison visitation and misconduct, however potential explanations have been offered as to why such similarities have emerged in the literature regarding the consistent typology of inmates engaging in rule violations. Poole and Regoli (1983) posited that the black inmate population might fall subject to harsher oversight by prison officials, subsequently facilitating the detection of disciplinary infractions among this population. In addition, Goetting & Howsen (1986) suggest that results might be reflective of criminogenic tendencies being imported into the prison institution or potentially could be the consequence of the black male population's manner in which they deal with the deprivations incurred in the prison environment. In contrast to the aforementioned findings regarding the tendencies of males and females to engage in misconduct at different rates, other literature has suggested that males and females tend to engage in approximately equal numbers of rule violations, however the leniency in which such violations are dealt with may differ depending on the inmate's gender (Poole & Regoli, 1983). Poole & Regoli (1983) found that female inmates tend to be dealt with in a more discretionary manner by prison officials, whereas males are more likely to receive formal sanctions.

Due to the heightened interest in prison misconduct and its associated factors, scholarly endeavors have developed a solid research base investigating the role of prison visitation, with a particular focus on its impact on recidivism (Bales & Mears, 2008). An overwhelming amount of literature has regarded prison visitation to be essential in providing social support to inmates while incarcerated, as well as post-release, resulting in heightened psychological well-being (Listwan et al., 2010; Taylor, 2016). Research has found that incarceration has the potential to

break ties with family and outside contacts during incarceration (Holt & Miller, 1972). However, when ties to such sources of positive support are maintained through visitation, literature has documented the potential to reduce violent transgression within the institution (Ellis, Grasmick, & Gilman, 1974), the abatement of prison discomfort, producing reductions in animosity felt post-incarceration (Hochstetler, DeLisi, & Pratt, 2010), the reduced likelihood of re-offense (Bales & Mears, 2008; Taylor, 2016), and even increased parole success (Holt & Miller, 1972).

Literature has aimed to provide potential insight into why the maintenance of social ties have produced beneficial post-incarceration outcomes. One explanation that has been offered suggests that the association with close social contacts post-release provides an offender with testimonials of his or her non-criminality and prosocial character. Such testimonials are reinforced to the offender through constant reminders of the releasee's trustworthiness and the continued support offered by loved ones (Meisenhelder, 1982). Furthering this idea, Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, and Naples (2004) posited that the acceptance of the releasee as a non-criminal civilian by close family ties could increase the internalization of a non-criminal identity post-incarceration. Consequently, such research has garnered continued support for increased access to visiting privileges, while also attempting to better understand what types of visitors inmates tend to receive and whether the variation in visitor types is associated with differential impacts on inmate behavior. Research has found that male and female inmates tend to receive approximately the same percentage of visits from children (Benning & Lahm, 2016). In addition, the literature has determined that males typically have been found to receive spousal visits (Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969), whereas females tend to receive visits from parents and significant others (Mancini et al., 2016). However, the actual impact of such prison visits has been debated, based on the sex of the inmate (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006).

In accordance with the increased developments within the field regarding the impact of prison visitation, visiting programs within prisons have evolved, such that the introduction of virtual visitation has become a new development within prison institutions. It has been recognized as a more cost efficient and easier mode of communication. However, literature is lacking in regards to the effectiveness of virtual visitation due to its relatively recent implementation in a select number of facilities (Boudin, Stutz, & Littman, 2013). The utilization of visitation via the internet or intranet has been implemented in a select number of facilities with varying models of usage. Some institutions employ virtual visitation as a supplemental privilege afforded to inmates, while other facilities use virtual visitation as a restrictive measure utilized in lieu of in-person visitation (Boudin et al., 2013). However, as more locations begin adopting the use of this technological practice, Boudin et al. (2013) highlighted points of concern that must be considered prior to implementation, including the location of such visits for both the inmate and the visitor, if virtual visitation will be a supplement to in-person visitation or if the technological advancement will replace prior visitation practices entirely, and ultimately the rules that will accompany such visits. Such points of concern are essential to consider due to the associated benefits with prison visitation that takes place face-to-face, including the abatement of prison discomfort (Hochstetler, DeLisi, & Pratt, 2010) and providing increased social support to inmates (Listwan et al., 2010; Taylor, 2016). Consequently, research recommends further assessment into the effectiveness of relying solely on virtual visitation in order to avoid the potential of eliminating the positive implications associated with in person prison visits (Boudin et al., 2013).

Despite the aforementioned technological advancements, barriers remain to prison visitation policies, particularly in regards to traveling distances, as well as financial expenses,

that accompany prison visits that those visiting must endure (Boudin et al., 2013). In addition, visitation continues to be recognized, from an institutional policy viewpoint, as privilege, not a guaranteed right. As a result, some prison policies include visitation ceilings to limit the number of visits or hours an individual can be visited. Restrictions and limits can be used as sanctions for disciplinary infractions both temporarily or permanently in certain facilities, while it can serve as an incentive for good behavior as well (Boudin et al., 2013). Consequently, research has recommended continued exploration into prison visitation policies and its impact on inmate behavior as a means to inform prison policies. In addition, literature suggests that visitation procedures and opportunities should be made more accessible to visiting parties due to the potential benefits of such contacts to those incarcerated (Bales & Mears, 2008; Boudin et al., 2013; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Ellis et al., 1974; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Taylor, 2016).

### **Male Misconduct and Visitation**

The existing literature is heavily saturated with male samples due to the availability and makeup of prison populations, thus providing vital implications for the relationships between male misconduct and visitation (Celinska & Sung, 2014). Overall, findings have concluded that some of the main factors that have been found to predict the likelihood of disciplinary infractions among male inmates include a prior history of sexual victimization or abuse, or the diagnosis of a psychiatric disorder (Celinska & Sung, 2014). Other factors that have been found to predict the likelihood of male inmate misconduct include one's age, criminal history, race, and drug use (Jiang & Winfree, 2006). However, research has continued to acknowledge a need for further exploration into whether visitation potentially reduces or increases male disciplinary infractions.

In an attempt to understand the potential relationship between visitation and disciplinary infractions among male inmates, research has focused on the frequency of visitations from children and spouses. Research indicates that males are more likely to be visited by married spouses, thus facilitating greater social support from this type of contact and increasing the motivation to maintain visiting privileges for the purpose of preserving conjugal relations with spouses, although a large number of prisons have eliminated the use of such conjugal programs (Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969). However, the literature suggests that male inmates have been found to rely less on familial social support in comparison to their female inmate counterparts, particularly in regards to children (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Despite males' tendency to not weigh familial contact as high as females, a recent study conducted by Celinska and Sung (2014) demonstrated that contact with family and other outside community members for male inmates reduced the likelihood of prison misconduct. Such findings reinforced the benefits of prison visitation suggested in previous literature, with potential benefits attributed to the social support delivered to inmates during the visit (Blevins et al., 2010; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Research also suggests that the amount of phone calls made appear to have a greater impact on male inmates, such that those that make more phone calls to contacts in the outside community have lesser rule violations within the prison (Celinska & Sung, 2014).

Contrary to the literature which supports the idea that prison visitation lessens the number of disciplinary infractions among male inmates (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012), other researchers have found that outside contacts might actually increase the amount of rule violations for male inmates or have no significant effect at all (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Lembo, 1969). Research conducted by Lembo (1969) suggests that no statistically significant correlation exists

between prison visitation and prison misconduct among male inmates. Benning and Lahm (2016) found that incarcerated male parents who receive visits from their children have higher rates of rules violations in comparison to male inmates that do not receive visits from their children, potentially due to visits eliciting feelings of pain and trauma among inmates.

Personal accounts from incarcerated fathers acquired by Pierce (2015) revealed that male inmates perceived incarceration as a downfall to the quality of relationships they once had with their family, while exposing that the reasons for lack of visitation was primarily due to inadequate visitation facilities, distance from families, and the costs associated with visitations. Incarcerated males often deemed their visits as lacking in quality, potentially due to the aforementioned reasons (Pierce, 2015). Thus, the impact of visitations on male inmates' social ties and behaviors while in the prison appears to be a complex issue that scholars often find to be significant. However, researchers acknowledge the necessity of further scholarly examination in order to alleviate the contradictory results in the literature and to better examine the role of prison visitation on males' prison experiences, in comparison to female inmates.

### **Female Misconduct and Visitation**

Increases in the incarceration rate of females has propelled efforts to understand the female prison experience and to alleviate females' concerns and stressful experiences to aid in facilitating a successful transition back into society following release (Mancini, Baker, Sainju, Golden, Bedard, Gertz, 2016). The literature suggests that females place a higher value on familial relationships than their male counterparts and consequently need higher levels of social support in the adjustment to incarceration (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Therefore, literature has recently begun to further examine the role of visitation in the lives of incarcerated females and its impact on prison misconduct.

The relationship between mother and child has generated particular interest among scholars in order to examine the impact of visits by children, or the lack thereof, on the behavior of incarcerated mothers (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Casey-Acevedo, Bakken, & Karle, 2002; Celinska & Sung, 2014). Intriguingly, studies analyzing the relationship between visits by children and subsequent female prison misconduct have found that women that are visited by their children tend to report higher instances of rule violations and prison misconduct (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Casey-Acevedo et al., 2002). Benning and Lahm (2016) report that when children visited, incarcerated mothers were 35% more likely to be written up for prison misconduct in comparison to incarcerated mothers who did not have visits (Benning & Lahm, 2016). It is suggested that mothers might perceive visits from their children as too painful and as reminders of substantial life occurrences that incarceration is interfering with, thus facilitating feelings of guilt, depression, as well as aggression (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Casey-Acevedo et al., 2002).

In contrast to research documenting the adverse effects of prison visits on inmates, past literature has also provided insight into the beneficial implications of prison visits on the female inmate population (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Mancini et al., 2016). Research has demonstrated that females tend to place more emphasis on maintaining social ties (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Mancini et al. (2016) found that letters written to female inmates by children and spouses led to diminished amounts of concern and stress experienced while in prison. Therefore, this form of communication with their family provided female inmates with an increased level of support. They also found overall that visits to incarcerated women lessened their concerns, including those about reentry into the community (Mancini et al., 2016). Furthermore, research findings indicate that prison visitation can reduce

the likelihood of female inmates engaging in rule violations (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012), juxtaposed with an increased likelihood found in the aforementioned literature (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Casey-Acevedo et al., 2002). Celinska and Sung (2014) found that female inmates have lower rates of rule violations than males and that the number of visits from family members and friends in the last month reduced the likelihood of breaking prison rules by 6% (Celinska & Sung, 2014). Reflective of the aforementioned research, the dialogue surrounding the role of prison visitation on female prison misconduct has produced mixed findings, thus creating a continued need for further scholarly exploration in this area.

Despite the inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between female inmates' visitations and prison misconduct, the existing literature recognizes that females place a significant emphasis on social bonds (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Mancini et al. (2016) reinforce the need for continued exploration within this realm of scholarly endeavor by demonstrating that female inmates depend on prison visitation as a source of social support to cope with prison concerns and stress. Therefore, further research is essential in understanding the competing findings of studies investigating the impact of prison visitation on female offenders.

### **Limitations of Prior Research**

A large amount of literature has focused on the role of prison visitation and its impact on recidivism (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Blevins, Listwan, Cullen & Jonson, 2010; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969), however research exploring the role of visitation on inmates' behaviors within the prison establishment is much more limited. Furthermore, studies that have examined the role of visitation on prison misconduct suffer from limitations that restricts their application.

Past research has focused primarily on visits by children or the broad classifications of visits made by family and friends (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Casey-Acevedo et al., 2002; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Pierce, 2015). As a result, the impact of varying visitor types on prison misconduct has not been examined in the literature. In addition, some research has been limited in its analyses regarding the different types of misconduct engaged in at varying severity levels (Benning & Lahm, 2016). Research studies often tend to focus on either males or females, not both, which limits understandings on whether there is a differential impact of visitation by gender. Scholarly explorations into the relationship between prison visitation and misconduct with a focus on gender comparisons tend to be infrequent (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). As a response to the past literature, the current study is structured in a manner to alleviate some of the issues within past research, while also filling in existing gaps in the discourse about the role of prison visitation.

The current research examines the various types of visits received by inmates in order to provide more insight into the potential differential impacts of visits on disciplinary infractions. Therefore, the current research's significance lies in the data collected, based on the utilization of visitation logs to determine visitor counts and types, along with misconduct record reports compiled by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to document female and male disciplinary infraction counts, as well as types of misconduct. Consequently, due to the limited amount of research devoted to understanding gender differences in relation to visitation and prison misconduct, the current research aims to assess whether differences exist between prison misconduct and visitation based on an inmate's gender and visitor types. As a result, the current research hopes to inform prison policy on how to better acclimate prisoners to the institutional

setting and encourage desistance from further criminal activity both inside and outside of the prison establishment.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The current study examines whether a relationship exists between prison visits and disciplinary infractions. More specifically, the current research aims to explore whether the type of visitor is a variable that could potentially play a role in the hypothesized correlation between prison visitations and misconduct. Ultimately, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding into whether prison misconduct and visitations are gender-specific in nature. Consequently, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Is there a correlation between the number of prison visits and the number of disciplinary infractions among inmates?
- 2) Does the relationship with the visitor influence an inmate's level of disciplinary infractions?
- 3) Is the potential relationship between prison visits and disciplinary infractions gender-specific?

As an outgrowth of the aforementioned research questions, the current study tests the following hypotheses:

H1) A greater number of visits while incarcerated is correlated with a lower number of disciplinary infractions among inmates.

H1a) A greater number of visits is more likely to be correlated with a lower number of disciplinary infractions for females in comparison to males.

H2) A greater number of visits by immediate family members is correlated with a lower number of disciplinary infractions in comparison to visits from other contacts.

H2a) Female inmates have lower numbers of disciplinary infractions than male inmates when visited by immediate family in comparison to other contacts.

### **Data and Methods**

The current study utilizes a quantitative analysis to determine if a correlation exists between prison visitation and subsequent prison misconduct using data from two female prisons and two male prisons in Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the study is to determine whether the hypothesized correlation is gender-specific. The study analyzes variables in a dataset obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for a one year time period between January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015.<sup>2</sup>

### **Overview of Pennsylvania Department of Corrections**

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections oversees a variety of facilities within the state of Pennsylvania, including 26 state correctional facilities, one motivational boot camp, 14 community correction centers, and one training academy. Each state correctional facility under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections varies in population size and security level. As of December 2015, there was a population of 48,923 individuals under the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections custody (Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Monthly Population Report, 2015). Within the calendar year of 2015, there were 20,639 inmate

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<sup>1</sup> The four prisons include SCI Muncy, SCI Cambridge Springs, SCI Smithfield and SCI Mercer.

<sup>2</sup> Approval for the study was granted by the Lycoming College Institutional Review Board on May 7, 2016. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections approved the study on August 15, 2016.

admissions documented by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA Department of Corrections Calendar Year Admissions, 2015).

### **Data**

The data compiled for the study comes from all inmates from four Pennsylvania prisons incarcerated during a one-year time period between January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. The two female prisons used in the study are the only ones in operation within the state of Pennsylvania. The two male prisons, as a result, were selected to match the security level and population size of the female prisons, respectively. The current study determined that the time period of one year would produce a manageable sample of inmates for analysis, while also providing a long enough time span to track any changes in visitation and misconduct that might occur. The raw data set was filtered such that any inmate who was away from the facility for 15 days or more was removed from the sample. Absences from the facility are monitored by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections through documentation of move dates, with potential reasons for such absences ranging from hospital visits, classification, in addition to many other reasons. This sampling criteria aimed to remove inmates that were absent from the facility for the time period of 15 days or more due to the potential impact such absence could have on the results of the analysis, particularly in regards to the number of visits and disciplinary infractions (see Appendix). Using this sampling frame, a dataset of 2,757 inmates was compiled. In order to make the sample more manageable, the dataset was further condensed by randomly selecting 40% of inmates from each prison using the select cases data function in SPSS, creating a final dataset of 1,078 inmates consisting of 611 male inmates (56.7%) and 467 female inmates (43.3%).

## Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for the current study is disciplinary infractions. The study utilizes the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' policy on inmate discipline in order to identify what types of offenses to include in the operationalization of prison misconduct, as well as the category level (A, B, or C). Prison misconduct, as outlined in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Inmate Handbook, refers to any breaking of a Department or facility rule. If a violation of a rule occurs by an inmate, a written report is issued to notify inmates of the charges being brought against them, the particular rule violation that was broken, as well as detailed facts about the charge (Wetzel, 2017).

The Inmate Handbook provides an overview of the types of rule violations that would constitute a misconduct, ranging from Class I Charges (A), some of which can solely be resolved through formal measures<sup>3</sup> to Class II Charges (B, C), which can be resolved through informal measures<sup>4</sup>. Informal resolutions entail a meeting with the Unit Manager and at least one other Unit Management Team member, taking place within the seven days following the charge of the

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<sup>3</sup> "Formal sanctions within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections are outlined as follows: placement in the Restricted Housing Unit (RHU) for a period not to exceed 90 days per misconduct charge; assignment to cell restriction for a period not to exceed 30 days per misconduct charge; loss of privileges for a prescribed period. Privileges lost must be specifically identified and shall, where possible, be related to the misconduct violation. Privileges include television, radio and/or tablet and kiosk access, telephone, and commissary for up to 180 days, visiting suspension or restriction for up to 60 days, yard, and block out; may be, and most likely shall be, removed from his/her job assignment; assessment of costs as a result of your behavior; reprimand, warning, counseling; final disposition of confiscated contraband; revocation of outside program codes; limitation of commissary privileges to ten dollars a week for up to one year following a finding of guilt for a misconduct involving gambling; and/or youthful offenders (under the age of 18) and inmates who are seriously mentally ill (SMI) will serve DC assignments while being housed on Diversionary Treatment Units (DTUs)" (Wetzel, 2017, pp. 40).

<sup>4</sup> "Informal sanctions within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections are outlined as follows: No action; reprimand and/or warning; referral to Hearing Examiner for a formal misconduct hearing; up to 14 days cell restriction; up to 14 days loss of specific privileges (e.g., telephone, tablet/kiosk access, yard, day room, etc.); 14 days loss of commissary; loss of job for work-related misconducts; assignment of additional work duties for which you will not be paid, for up to 14 days; and/or payment for damaged/destroyed state property for which one can agree to pay. If an inmate does not agree, the matter will be forwarded for a formal hearing; and/or inmates carried on the active MH/ID Roster may be assigned to the Residential Treatment Unit (RTU) or other appropriate treatment/program after consultation with the PRC" (Wetzel, 2017, pp. 39).

misconduct. In regards to the formal resolution proceedings, a hearing occurs within a time frame of no less than 24 hours and no more than 7 days from which the misconduct was served. The hearing is conducted by a Hearing Examiner and during the formal hearing, guilt or innocence is determined. A guilty verdict may result in formal sanctions. However, if found not guilty, formal writings of the resolution are distributed to the inmate and any documentation of the misconduct is removed from an inmate's record (Wetzel, 2017).

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' policy on inmate discipline, category A constitutes the most severe misconducts, which can range from charges of assault, murder, rape, and escape to charges of inappropriate language, gambling, and tattooing. Category B includes charges ranging from refusing to obey an order and possession of contraband to lying to an employee. Category C charges include violations ranging from horseplay and smoking where prohibited to unexcused absences from work or programs and taking unauthorized food from the dining room or kitchen (Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 2015).

The current study measures misconduct in three different ways. The first measure is whether an inmate had any misconduct (yes or no). The second measure is the cumulative number of times a person was charged with a rule violation, regardless of the outcome or resolution, within the time period of January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. Lastly, for each charge of misconduct, the corresponding category level (A, B, or C) is utilized. As shown in Table I, descriptive statistics indicate that the maximum number of misconducts within the sample was 38, while the minimum was zero. Approximately a quarter of the sample within the one-year time period committed a misconduct ( $n=276$ , 25.6%). The percentage of male and

females who engaged in misconduct was not significantly different, with 26.84% ( $n=164$ ) of males engaging in misconduct and 23.98% ( $n=112$ ) of females engaging in misconduct. In addition, there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in regards to the number of category level misconducts committed (A, B, C) (see Table I).

### **Independent Variable**

Prison visits are the main independent variable used in the current study. Visitation rules and procedures are outlined within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Inmate Visiting Privileges Procedures Manual, as well as in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Inmate Handbook. Each facility determines the specific hours for visitation, which occurs no less than once per week. However, each facility adheres to the same visiting policy, which entails that inmates place visitor names on his or her designated visiting list<sup>5</sup>, along with proper identification information<sup>6</sup>, which prison personnel then must approve during an inmate's initial classification period. Each visitor must provide proper identification and be registered accordingly with the facility and on the inmate's approved visiting list prior to visiting an inmate (Hardesty & Sturges, 2013; Wetzel, 2017). Minor children must be accompanied by a legal parent/guardian, county youth/children services agency staff, or an adult approved by the parent/guardian to accompany the child during the visit (Hardesty & Sturges, 2013; Wetzel, 2017).

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<sup>5</sup> The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections allows for each inmate's visiting list to contain up to 40 names (excluding Religious/Spiritual Advisors and Attorneys/Magistrates/Paralegals).

<sup>6</sup> According to the Pennsylvania Department of Correction Handbook (2017), an inmate must provide a visitor's name, address, date of birth, and relationship. If an inmate fails to do so, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections will not be able to approve the visitor.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections provides clear rules and restrictions on visiting privileges, distributed to inmates within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Inmate Handbook. Visits occur within the general population visiting room for a period of one hour during the scheduled visiting hours designated at each facility.<sup>7</sup> The number of visitors that are able to visit an inmate at one time may be limited due to the amount of available space within the visiting room and facility. As a result, if visiting areas are at full capacity and more visits are scheduled to occur, the prison tends to follow a “first in/first out” policy when an hour has been reached. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections also recognizes certain visitors that are prohibited from visiting current inmates, including any former inmate of any correctional system, any individual currently under parole or probation supervision, a current or former Department employee, a volunteer at the Department, a current or former contract employee, any victim of the inmate, as well as any individual that has an active Protection from Abuse Order against the inmate (Wetzel, 2017). In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections possesses the right to limit, suspend, restrict or ban visiting privileges<sup>8</sup> if an inmate or visitor violates visitation rules or if information arises suggesting a visit presents a threat to the security and safety of the facility (Wetzel, 2017).

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<sup>7</sup> The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections can permit visits of longer duration, contingent upon custody level of the inmate as well as available space.

<sup>8</sup> “Visiting privileges might be restricted for the following reasons: to maintain the security or orderly running of the visiting room and/or the facility as a result of behavior or the behavior of visitors, as a disciplinary sanction suspending or restricting visiting privileges for a violation of the visiting room rules and regulations, if an inmate is found guilty of a misconduct for dealing, using (including by urinalysis or refusal to submit to urinalysis) or possessing illegal, non-prescribed drugs, controlled substances, and/or drug paraphernalia, an inmate can be prohibited from having contact visits (1st offense – 90 days 2nd offense – 180 days 3rd offense – Indefinitely), and visiting privileges may be restricted as a result of changes in housing or custody level made as a result of unrelated infractions. In addition, any visitor who attempts to or brings drugs to the Department facility will be permanently banned from visiting all Department facilities and the matter shall be referred to the Pennsylvania State Police for prosecution” (Wetzel, 2017, pp. 46).

The number of prison visits compiled by Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Visitor Logs, including the type of visitor, operationalized in the current study as either immediate family or other, is documented for each visit during the time period of January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. As a result, the current study measures visitation in three ways, including any visits (yes or no), the overall number of visits, and lastly the number of visits from specific types of visitors (immediate family or other). Immediate family members refer to parents, children, spouses, and siblings. Other incorporates other family, friend, spiritual/religious advisor, attorney/magistrate/paralegal, and any other relationship.

As shown in Table I, descriptive statistics indicate that the maximum number of visits in the sample was 184 while the minimum amount was no visits throughout the one-year time period. A little less than half of the sample population received at least one visit ( $n=494$ , 45.64%). However, there was no statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of whether they received a visit during the time period studied ( $n=291$ , 47.63% vs.  $n=201$ , 42.04%, respectively). There is a statistically significant difference between males and females regarding the overall number of visits received with the time period of one year. More specifically, males in the sample received an average of 9.33 visits ( $SD=20.26$ ), whereas females in the sample received an average of 4.05 visits ( $SD=8.98$ ) ( $t = 3.211$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table I). In addition, male inmates received an average of 3.95 ( $SD=8.98$ ) visits from immediate family members, whereas females received an average of 4.05 ( $SD=8.98$ ) visits from immediate family. In regards to visits by other visitor types (other family, friend, spiritual/religious advisor, attorney/magistrate/paralegal, other relationship), on average, males received 5.39 visits ( $SD=13.31$ ) during the time period, in comparison to females, who received 2.06 visits ( $SD=4.80$ ). This difference is statistically significant at the  $p<.001$  level (see Table I).

## Demographic Variables

Demographic variables include race (black or not), sex (male or female), age, marital status (married or not), grade level completed (high school or not), offense type (violent, property, drug, sexual, other), children (yes or no), and sentence length (months).

The total sample ( $n=1,078$ ) is comprised of 611 males (56.7%) and 467 females (43.3%). Overall, the racial composition of the sample consists of 41.9% ( $n=452$ ) black and 58.1% ( $n=626$ ) not black. According to the chi-square analyses performed, significant differences exist between males and females within the current study in regards to the race ( $\chi^2=16.704, p<.001$ ) (see Table I). The mean age of the overall sample is 40.10 years of age (Range=19-84). There are no significant differences between males and females in regards to age; the mean age for the male sample is 39.74 ( $SD=12.27$ ), while the mean age for the female sample is 40.56 ( $SD=12.52$ ).

Descriptive statistics also indicate that a large proportion of the overall sample is not married ( $n=916, 84.9%$ ). Furthermore, 64.8% ( $n=699$ ) of the overall sample has attained a high school diploma (see Table I). Lastly, there are no significant differences between males and females in regards to having children with 397 (65.7%) male inmates having children and 331 (72.9%) female inmates having children (see Table I). Descriptive statistics indicate that 519 (48.1%) inmates committed a violent offense, 113 (10.5%) committed a property offense, 172 (16.0%) a drug offense, 170 (15.8%) a sexual offense, and lastly 102 (9.5%) committed other offenses. Chi-square analyses demonstrate significant differences exist between the male and female samples regarding violent offense types ( $\chi^2=17.663, p<.001$ ) in addition to sexual offense types ( $\chi^2=36.139, p<.001$ ) (see Table I). Lastly, descriptive statistics show that the

average time served in prison is 77.00 months ( $SD=82.01$ ). However, there is no significant difference in terms of time served between males and females (see Table I).

**Table I: Descriptive Statistics for Overall Sample and Males and Females**

Variables	Overall Sample (N=1,078)			Males (n=611)			Females (n=467)			$\chi^2$ or <i>t</i> values
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Range	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Range	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Range	$\chi^2$ or <i>t</i>
Demographic Variables										
<i>Age</i>	40.10	12.38	19-84	39.74	12.27	20-80	40.56	12.52	19-84	-1.080
<i>Black</i>	0.42	0.49	–	0.47	0.50	–	0.35	0.48	–	16.704***
<i>Married</i>	0.15	0.36	–	0.15	0.36	–	0.15	0.36	–	0.007
<i>Children</i>	0.69	0.46	–	0.66	0.48	–	0.73	0.44	–	6.224
<i>High School Graduate</i>	0.65	0.48	–	0.64	0.48	–	0.67	0.47	–	0.856
<i>Violent Offenses</i>	0.48	0.50	–	0.43	0.49	–	0.55	0.50	–	17.663***
<i>Property Offenses</i>	0.10	0.31	–	0.90	0.29	–	0.12	0.33	–	3.296
<i>Drug Offenses</i>	0.16	0.37	–	0.17	0.37	–	0.15	0.36	–	0.574
<i>Sexual Offenses</i>	0.16	0.36	–	0.22	0.41	–	0.08	0.27	–	36.139***
<i>Other Offenses</i>	0.95	0.29	–	0.10	0.30	–	0.09	0.28	–	0.448
<i>Time Served (in mos.)</i>	77.00	82.01	12-441	72.95	70.01	12-391	82.47	95.63	12-441	-1.788
Visitation										
<i>Any Visits</i>	0.46	0.50	–	0.48	0.50	–	.43	0.50	–	2.244
<i>Overall Number</i>	7.94	17.41	0-184	9.33	20.26	0-184	6.11	12.54	0-77	3.211**
<i>Immediate Family</i>	3.99	8.98	0-75	3.95	8.98	0-75	4.05	8.98	0-66	-0.191
<i>Other</i>	3.95	10.63	0-114	5.39	13.31	0-114	2.06	4.80	0-38	5.716***
Misconduct										
<i>Any Misconduct</i>	0.26	0.44	–	0.27	0.44	–	0.24	0.43	–	1.135
<i>Overall Number</i>	1.48	4.02	0-38	1.37	3.64	0-38	1.62	4.46	0-32	-0.992
<i>A</i>	2.96	3.92	1-27	2.51	3.71	1-27	3.55	4.12	1-20	-1.767
<i>B</i>	4.13	3.65	1-23	3.75	3.54	1-23	4.70	3.77	1-15	-1.942
<i>C</i>	1.27	0.70	1-4	1.17	0.60	1-4	1.40	0.82	1-4	-1.121

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

## Data Analysis

The current study relies upon the use of bivariate correlations in an attempt to assess whether a relationship exists between prison visitation and misconduct among the overall sample and whether gender differences exist within this hypothesized relationship. A correlation is a form of analysis that describes the relationship between two variables, providing insight into the strength and direction of the interrelationship (Pallant, 2006). Due to the skewed nature of the current sample, the non-parametric statistics of a Spearman Rank Order Correlation is relied upon. Non-parametric techniques do not contain the same assumptions about the shape of the population being normally distributed as do parametric techniques (Pallant, 2006). Therefore, the Spearman Rank Order Correlation chosen for the current study demonstrates the strength and direction of the relationship for the continuous variables of prison visits and prison misconduct.

In order to test the first hypothesis, the current study utilized SPSS to perform a Spearman Rank Order correlation to test whether there was a relationship between the overall number of visits and the overall number of disciplinary infractions, as well as whether there were differences by gender. A Spearman Rank Order correlation was also conducted to test whether there was a relationship between the number of all immediate family visits and number of disciplinary infractions, as well as whether there was a difference by gender.

## Results

### Relationship between Visits and Misconduct

Findings demonstrate that no significant correlations exist between the overall number of visits and the total number of misconducts for the overall sample, as indicated in Table II. A rho value of -0.028 was reported for the overall sample and, despite the lack of significance, the value was negative, which confirms the hypothesized direction of the relationship (see Table II). In regards to the male sample, a Spearman rho value of 0.062 was reported for the relationship between visits and misconduct, demonstrating a lack of significance (see Table II). Despite a lack of significant correlations for the overall sample and for the male inmate population, a significant correlation was found in regards to female inmates. More specifically, a Spearman rho value of -0.159 was reported, which is significant at the .01 level. Thus, results suggest that the number of visits a female inmate receives is significantly correlated to a reduced number of disciplinary infractions (see Table II).

### Correlational Findings Between Visitor Types and Misconduct

Spearman Rank Order correlations were then conducted in order to assess whether the number of visits from certain visitor types (immediate family or other) would impact the hypothesized relationship between prison visitation and misconduct for the overall sample. There was no significant relationship between visits from immediate family and total number of misconduct violations ( $r = -0.044$ ) or between visits from other visitors ( $r = -0.013$ ). When disaggregating the binary variable of visitor type into its individual parts, as indicated in Table III, further correlations were explored. Visits by parents ( $r = -0.05$ ), siblings ( $r = -0.02$ ), children ( $r = -0.03$ ), and spouses ( $r = -0.02$ ) all showed no significant relationship between the number of

visits received and total number of misconduct violations for the overall sample. Furthermore, visits by other family members ( $r = -0.05$ ), friends ( $r = -0.02$ ), other relationships ( $r = 0.02$ ), attorney/magistrates/paralegals ( $r = -0.04$ ), and spiritual/religious advisors ( $r = -0.03$ ) were also not statistically significant as indicated in Table II.

The Spearman rho values from the performed analyses exploring visitor types and total misconduct in regards to gender comparisons are reported in Table II. Findings indicate that visits from immediate family ( $r = 0.05$ ) and other ( $r = 0.05$ ) did not appear to be significantly correlated to prison misconduct for the male sample. However, for the female sample, results indicate a significant negative correlation ( $p < 0.01$ ) between visits by immediate family members ( $r = -0.017$ ) and number of misconduct violations and visits by others ( $r = -0.012$ ) and number of misconduct violations. Such findings demonstrate that increased visits from the aforementioned visitor types is significantly correlated with reduced overall misconduct for the female sample (see Table II).

When further examining potential correlations between the variables encompassed within the visitor types of immediate family (parents, siblings, children or spouse) and other (other family, friend, other relationship, attorney/magistrate/paralegal or spiritual/religious advisor), findings indicate that significant correlations exist for each aforementioned type of immediate family member, except for spousal visits ( $r = -0.08$ ), in regards to the female sample (see Table II). More specifically, visits by parents ( $r = -0.17, p < .01$ ), siblings ( $r = -0.15, p < .01$ ), and children ( $r = -0.16, p < .01$ ) produced significant correlations, indicating that an increased number of visits from these visitor types is significantly associated with reduced total misconduct (see Table III). In addition, results indicate that within the variable type of other, visits by other family ( $r = -0.15, p < .01$ ) and friends ( $r = -0.13, p < .01$ ) produced significant correlations in

relation to overall misconduct for the female sample, whereas visits from other relationships ( $r = -0.08$ ), attorney/magistrate/paralegals ( $r = -0.05$ ), and spiritual/religious advisors ( $r = -0.05$ ) did not (see Table II).

In comparison to the results generated from the Spearman Rank Order correlations for the female sample, results generated for the male sample did not indicate any significant correlations in regards to visitor types within immediate family and other (see Table II). More specifically, visits by parents ( $r = 0.03$ ), siblings ( $r = 0.06$ ), children ( $r = 0.07$ ), spouses ( $r = 0.01$ ), other family ( $r = 0.03$ ), friends ( $r = 0.04$ ), other relationships ( $r = 0.08$ ), attorney/magistrate/paralegals ( $r = -0.04$ ), and spiritual/religious advisors ( $r = -0.03$ ) were not significantly correlated to overall counts of misconduct for the male sample (see Table II). However, interestingly, the only visitor types that showed an associated reduction in total misconduct for the male sample, although not statistically significant, were visits from the attorney/magistrate/paralegal and spiritual/religious advisor (see Table II).

**Table II: Correlations between Overall Number of Visits and Misconduct Violations**

Visitation	Number of Misconduct Violations		
	Overall Sample	Males	Females
Number of Visits	-0.028	0.062	-0.159**
Immediate Family	-0.04	0.05	-0.17**
<i>Parent</i>	-0.05	0.03	-0.14**
<i>Sibling</i>	-0.02	0.06	-0.15**
<i>Children</i>	-0.03	0.07	-0.16**
<i>Spouse</i>	-0.02	0.01	-0.08
Other	-0.01	0.05	-0.12**
<i>Other Family</i>	-0.05	0.03	-0.15**
<i>Friend</i>	-0.02	0.04	-0.13**
<i>Other Relationship</i>	-0.02	0.08	-0.08
<i>Attorney/Magistrate/Paralegal</i>	-0.04	-0.04	-0.05
<i>Spiritual/Religious Advisor</i>	-0.03	-0.03	-0.05

\*\*  $p < .01$

## Discussion

The current study provides further insight into the larger discourse surrounding the potential importance of prison visitation for inmates in relation to lowering levels of institutional prison misconduct. The study aimed to assess whether increases in the overall number of visits is associated with lower overall numbers of misconduct violations, whether the type of visitor plays a role in this relationship, and whether gender differences exist. In doing so, findings provide support of the beneficial implications of maintaining social bonds within the prison environment through visitation, particularly for females, and consequently provide important gender-specific policy implications for the prison institution.

More specifically, the results overwhelmingly indicate that a greater number of total visits is significantly correlated with a reduced number of total misconduct violations among female inmates ( $r = -0.159$ ). Findings demonstrate that variations exist in the type of visits and total misconduct violations among the female population, with all visitor types being significantly correlated with reduced prison misconduct, except for visits by spouses, other relationships, attorney/magistrate/paralegals, and spiritual/religious advisors. The lack of significance regarding visits from spouses could potentially be a product of the sample makeup, such that only a small portion of the sample was married. In lieu of this curious findings, the overall results reinforce past literature suggesting that the ability to maintain social ties with loved ones outside of the prison environment aid in female inmate adjustment to the prison environment, thus resulting in a diminished likelihood of engaging in rule violations (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012).

The type of visitor did not appear to have the same effect on misconduct for males, with the only visitor types correlated with reductions in the amount of overall misconduct being

attorney/magistrate/paralegal and spiritual/religious advisor, however such correlations were not significant. Such reductions from these particular visitor types could potentially be attributed to prison policies, due to the reason that these types of visits are typically not restricted (Boudin et al., 2013). In addition, the current study speculates that visits from attorneys/magistrates/paralegals and spiritual/religious advisors might not face the same types of financial or travel barriers that other visitors might experience, thus facilitating easier access to the prison establishment. Furthermore, such reductions could potentially be reflective of motivated offenders that seek out such visits, perhaps to reduce prison sentences, and as a result engage in less misconduct. Another potential reason for the negatively correlated misconduct for males with these visitor types could be rooted in Agnew's general strain theory, reinforcing the idea that such visitors might serve as a coping mechanism for male inmates in dealing with the stressors associated with the prison environment (Agnew, 1992). These results are consistent with prior literature in regards to male inmate misconduct, demonstrating that visitation may have no effect or actually increase the number of disciplinary infractions committed by this gender (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Lembo, 1969).

Benning and Lahm (2016) found that visits from children in particular resulted in an increased amount of misconduct among male inmates, potentially due to such contacts being too painful and stress-inducing for inmates. In addition, past literature has demonstrated that male inmates have viewed prison visits with loved ones as lacking in quality following the inmate's entrance into confinement due to the barriers prison presents to maintaining social bonds (Pierce, 2015). Therefore, the current study concludes that visitation may not have been significantly correlated with a reduced number of misconduct violations for males due to this gender not viewing such visits as meaningful. In addition, the current results could be attributed to male

inmates' engaging in misconduct out of hostility and resentment towards the prison establishment due to the view that the prison is the reason for the dissolution of valued outside relationships. Therefore, prior literature suggests that visiting conditions should be improved in order to enhance interactions between male inmates and their visitors, thus preserving the quality and maintenance of such prosocial relationships (Pierce, 2015).

Despite the lack of significant correlations between visitation and misconduct for male inmates, the current findings demonstrate that males tend to be visited more than females. However, visits appear to be more impactful for females in relation to reduced prison misconduct. Such findings support past literature that suggests that females tend to place greater value on social bonds and the maintenance of familial contact while in prison (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Consequently, such reductions in overall misconduct engaged in by female inmates could be the result of them acting accordingly to prison rules in an attempt to not risk their visiting privileges. Furthermore, the significant correlation between increased visitation and misconduct among the female sample could be attributed to the theoretical roots of Hirschi's social bond theory (1969) and Agnew's general strain theory (1992), such that contacts serve to reinforce prosocial behaviors and attachments, while also serving as a coping mechanism to deal with the stress encountered in prison. As a result, the study provides support for the utilization of prison visitation as a means to acclimate inmates to incarceration, while promoting prosocial bonds and behaviors while incarcerated. In addition, the study contributes additional support for the potential policy implication of gender-specific programming within prison.

## **Limitations**

Previous research examining the relationships between prison misconduct and visitation, particularly in regards to gender-specific factors, is limited. Although the current study contributes to the existing literature by placing gender at the epicenter of inquiry, the current research is subject to several limitations. The main limitation within the current study lies in its methodological design through its reliance on correlational analyses. The design of the current study does not allow for a causal relationship to be established between the independent variable, prison visitation, and dependent variable, prison misconduct. Consequently, the current study is unable to prove that prison visits directly affect inmates' behavior in the form of misconduct. Due to the reliance on a correlational design, the current study cannot evaluate which variable precedes the other or if a change in one variable is the sole reason for a change in the latter variable. Therefore, the current study recommends that prison officials and other policymakers consider such findings and their implications with caution.

The prisons selected for the study were restricted due to the reason that Pennsylvania only operates two state correctional facilities devoted solely to females. Therefore, the selection of the male prisons was limited in that they needed to be comparable in security level and population size to the female prisons. However, although the prisons were selected to meet this stipulation, the actual comparability between facilities is unknown. Therefore, the study might not capture variables specific to different facilities, thus limiting the reliability and generalizability of results to other prisons within the state of Pennsylvania. For example, the staff-inmate relationships might be very different in various prisons, in addition to the racial makeup, the prison culture and climate, as well the geographic location of prisons which could

impact findings if such variables factor into or mediate the relationship between prison visitation and misconduct.

The research is also limited in regards to the size of the dataset. Due to the fact that the analyses needed to be manageable for the given time restraints of the study, the sample size was drastically reduced, producing a potentially skewed dataset. In addition, the smaller sample size influenced what types of analysis could be performed. The current study solely examines the counts of disciplinary infractions and visits for the period of one year, instead of rates of disciplinary infractions and visitations, due to the small number of inmates that actually committed misconducts during the one-year time period. Therefore, the current study fails to account for the element of time between a visit and a misconduct and is unable to provide a more focused analysis of the relationship between prison misconduct and visitations. Furthermore, the current study solely looked at a time period of a year, which fails to examine the interrelationship between visitation and misconduct over an extended period of time. In addition, an examination of whether prison visits deteriorate over time was not captured within the study and as a result was not able to be considered within the relationship of prison visitation and misconduct. The current research also failed to consider where an offender was in his or her sentence regarding completion in its lack of controlling for sentence length. Therefore, findings are not able to determine the long-term effects of prison visitation on inmate behaviors within the institution.

The current study also relied upon visitation logs and misconduct records compiled by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Although these data sources provide essential information needed to assess the potential relationship between prison misconduct and visitations, the validity and reliability of the data could limit the overall findings of the study. Due to the potential for inconsistent documentation of disciplinary infractions based on prison

officials' discretion or informal resolutions of misconducts, the actual counts of misconducts might be limited in nature. In addition, the data was limited in that inmates' visitor lists were not made available for the purpose of this research. As a result, the current research was unable to determine whether those inmates that received few visits during the time period of the study was due to a limited number of names on the visiting list or if the individuals on the inmate's visiting list were just unable to visit. In addition, the current study also fails to account for the hometown locations of inmates, and other variables that could potentially mediate the gender-specific relationships between the proposed hypotheses. The consideration of factors like traveling distance and financial costs might aid in understanding barriers to prison visitation in addition to explaining why males appear to be visited more by the visitor type other in comparison to females in the current sample. Consequently, the research study is limited overall due to its methodological constraints, as well as its inability to account for certain factors that might impact the relationship between visitation and misconduct.

### **Future Research**

Despite these limitations, the current research provides insight into new directions of study that could aid in understanding the impact of prison visitation on inmates' behaviors while incarcerated. Future scholarly endeavors would benefit by exploring the potential relationship between prison misconduct and visitation using a longitudinal design with a focus on rates, rather than overall numbers. This would allow for studies to remedy the limited nature of correlational designs by determining if a causal relationship exists between prison visitation and prison misconduct, while isolating for other potential variables that might influence the suggested relationship. In addition, through the implementation of a longitudinal design, the long-term effects of prison visitation could potentially be exposed and aid in determining

inmates that are likely to recidivate. Such evidence of a causal relationship could provide far reaching implications for prison policy by enabling prison institutions to further allocate funding towards prison visitation programs or to develop strategies to enhance visiting experiences due to the previously noted disenchantment with the manner in which visitation is carried out (Pierce, 2015).

Scholarly explorations into the relationship between prison visitation and misconduct could also benefit by conducting a study that determines whether inmates who are visited in prison are those that entered into prison with strong social bonds. The knowledge of the presence of bonds upon entering into prison could aid in exploring whether those individuals had a decreased likelihood of engaging in prison misconduct from the start. Such a research endeavor could potentially explore whether prison visitation has any effect at all on inmates or whether the presence of bonds and a strong support network upon entering prison is more impactful on prison misconduct. Furthermore, future studies could examine the discretionary practices of charging an inmate with a misconduct, with a particular focus on drug misconduct due to its accompanied sanction of losing visitation privileges. Such explorations could gain further insight by utilizing triangulation as a methodological approach in order to supplement quantitative reports as well as consider the role of gender in the discretionary practices of charging inmates with misconduct.

In addition, with the relatively new emergence of virtual visitations in prison, future scholarship could potentially provide valuable insight into prison visitation through examining whether this new form of communication would produce similar reductions in misconduct as a face to face prison visit, while continuing to consider the role of gender. Due to the relatively new emergence of this form of technological advancement, research devoted to exploring the effectiveness of such contact would be incremental in potentially alleviating some of the barriers

to visitation, particularly in regards to financial obstacles and travel barriers to visitation (Boudin et al., 2013). Furthermore, future research could benefit from implementing qualitative measures in exploring how the involved parties in virtual visitation perceive this new initiative and its effectiveness.

### **Policy Implications**

The current research provides important policy implications for the prison institution. Due to the increased interest in methods to promote desistance from criminal activity within the prison environment in order to maintain control and order, and in turn efficiency, the findings from the current study have demonstrated that it might be beneficial for the prison establishment to prioritize visitation as a means to foster such prosocial behaviors. Such initiatives could serve to not only reduce recidivism as other studies have suggested (Bales & Mears, 2008; Holt & Miller, 1972; Listwan et al., 2010; Taylor, 2016), but to also serve as a mechanism to reduce the amount of disciplinary infractions within the prison establishment. Due to the relatively few studies that have examined the role of gender in relation to prison visitation and misconduct (Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006), the current study also offers gender-specific recommendations for the prison setting, in order to enhance and individualize one's adjustment to prison.

The current study demonstrates that prison visitation can have a beneficial impact on female inmates in relation to a lowered amount of total misconduct. As a result, this finding provides support for gender-specific programming, which builds upon prior literature demonstrating the importance of the maintenance of social bonds within prison, particularly for females (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Consequently, the current study makes several recommendations to institutional policy, including that prison facilities make

visitation procedures more transparent (Boudin et al., 2013), implement gender-specific programming to ease the transition into prison life for inmates particularly for females, and lastly, transition the rhetoric surrounding prison visitation from one of a privilege to one of a guaranteed right due to the associated benefits with visitation (Boudin et al., 2013).

Findings reinforce past literature advocating for the need for gender-specific literature and its essential role in informing prison policy and programming (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969). Researchers collectively deem gender as a pertinent variable when attempting to understand prison misconduct and provide noteworthy policy implications in regards to the management of prisons (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969). The current study contributes to this body of literature in its findings that reveal prison visitation appears to be more impactful for female inmate populations despite the finding that males tend to receive a greater overall number of visitors. Therefore, the current study, in line with past scholarly suggestions, recommends that prisons and correctional staff encourage visitations through further facilitation of connections to the outside community through easing availability and access to visits and making visitation environments more welcoming, particularly for female inmates (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012). This study speculates that such recommendations have not been implemented due to the financial costs associated with prison visitation in addition to the time and personnel needed to institute prison visitation.

In addition, the current study echoes the recommendations made by Lembo (1969), particularly in regards to encouraging prisons to veer away from viewing visitations as a privilege and instead allow for such programs to be rights of prisoners and improve the

conditions of these programs in any way possible to aid in inmates' adjustment to incarceration. Literature overwhelmingly suggests that prison administrations need to consider the recommendations of those incarcerated who overwhelmingly voice the need for better suited environments that promote the value of contacts with family and friends (Pierce, 2015). In accordance with past research, the current study recommends that by enhancing the visitation experience for inmates, particularly for male inmates, the potential for increased adherence to prison rules might also result, especially given that males desire better quality visits (Pierce, 2015) and females place such a high value on maintaining social bonds (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006).

As a result, the current study recommends that the prison institution note the beneficial influence of prison visits on female inmate behavior and consider the impact that gender specific programming could have on the prison environment, including the advancement of prosocial behaviors. Attempting to understand why prison visits might have a beneficial impact on females could allow for policymakers to structure prison visits in a way to enhance the prison experience for females and ease one's transition into incarceration. In addition, further exploration into why visitation might not be impactful for males could aid in constructing policies better suited to this gender or rectify the aspects of visitation that are curtailing the quality of visits for males. Such enhanced and gender-specific programming within a prison facility could potentially alleviate strains endured by prisoners during incarceration (Mancini et al., 2016), enable such inmates to maintain positive social bonds (Pierce, 2015), reduce the likelihood of engaging in prison misconduct (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012), and ultimately reduce the likelihood of recidivating after release (Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969).

## Conclusion

The current study contributes to the existing literature by examining gender-specific factors when analyzing the relationship between prison misconduct and types of visitation. A limited number of studies have compared male and female inmates in regards to prison misconduct and visitation (Celinska & Sung, 2014). As a result, the current research provides insight into the beneficial implications of utilizing prison visitation as a mean to better acclimate inmates to the prison establishment while encouraging prosocial behaviors. Such research, exploring the relationship between visitation and misconduct, is imperative to understanding how to ease the transition of offenders into prison as well as back into the community following release. Prison misconduct poses barriers to efficiency and the maintenance of order for the prison institution, particularly in regards to the functional ability of the prison to encourage rule adherence and desistance from criminal activity. As a result, the current research attempts to further inform the literature on the beneficial impacts that visitation can have on reducing misconduct. Such insight could aid in the development of prison programs that suit the needs of inmates, based on their gender.

The current findings indicate that although female inmates tend to receive fewer visits than their male counterparts, prison visits appear to be more impactful for this gender. This finding supports past literature suggesting females tend to place a higher value on the maintenance of social bonds (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Jiang & Winfree, 2006). In addition, the results of the current study reinforce past literature showing that prison visitation might not have an effect on male inmates and their level of misconduct (Benning & Lahm, 2016; Lembo, 1969). As a result, the current study encourages further explorations into why prison visitation may be more impactful for female inmates, despite the finding that males tend to be visited more often.

Furthermore, a deeper understanding into why prison visitation might not be meaningful to male inmates could inform policymakers on how to better structure prison visitation programs or explore alternatives to such visitation policies.

The aforementioned findings provide important policy implications for prison officials and policymakers in regards to promoting prosocial behaviors through the form of prison visitation to enhance the cohesiveness, order, and control within the prison. By gaining a better understanding into the differential experiences of male and female inmates, a prison is better equipped to structure programming in a way that best suits its population. As the current study shows, visits appear to be of value in relation to reductions in total misconduct for female inmates. Consequently, prison policy should aim to understand what aspects of visitation are most impactful for females and strengthen these aspects, while increasing access to visitation for this population of inmates, potentially through virtual visitation. Although visitation appeared to not have any impact on male misconduct within the results, the current study encourages exploration into why this may be. Such considerations could allow for prisons to gain a deeper understanding into how to improve prison visitation for male inmates, particularly due to the past documentation of male inmates' desire to have meaningful relationships with loved ones (Pierce, 2015). As a result, the current research reinforces recommendations made by Pierce (2015), which advocate for improved visitation conditions, child-friendly visiting areas, and improved correctional staff attitudes towards visitation, in an attempt to foster quality familial relationships and rule adherence within the prison establishment.

Lastly, the current study recommends that prison facilities move away from viewing prison visitation as a privilege and instead adopt a policy in which visitation is recognized as a right afforded to inmates (Lembo, 1969). Due to the beneficial aspects associated with

misconduct, prior literature overwhelmingly suggests that visitation procedures and opportunities should be made more accessible to visiting parties (Bales & Mears, 2008; Boudin et al., 2013; Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012; Ellis et al., 1974; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Taylor, 2016). As a result, the current study argues against utilizing restrictions on visitation as sanctions for prison misconduct. Furthermore, the current study encourages prison establishments to consider the use of gender-specific programming in order to ease inmates' transition to prison and better suit the needs of its population. The current research acknowledges that through structuring policies specifically for a particular gender, the prison institution could potentially enhance the safety within the prison through reducing the amount of rule violations (Celinska & Sung, 2014; Cochran, 2012), while also facilitating the maintenance of social bonds within the prison establishment (Mancini et al., 2016; Pierce, 2015) to encourage desistance from criminal activity following release (Cochran, 2012; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Lembo, 1969).

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## Appendix

Sampling Criteria Counts for Days Away from Facility  
 Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (January 1, 2015-December 31, 2015)

**Appendix A: Minimum days at facility = 349 (15 or less days away from facility)**

Facility	Count
Cambridge Springs	541
Mercer	801
Muncy	644
Smithfield	771

**Appendix B: Minimum days at facility = 334 (30 or less days away from facility)**

Facility	Count
Cambridge Springs	571
Mercer	863
Muncy	697
Smithfield	827

**Appendix C: Minimum days at facility = 354 (10 or less days away from facility)**

Facility	Count
Cambridge Springs	517
Mercer	770
Muncy	627
Smithfield	743

**Appendix D: Minimum days at facility = 359 (5 or less days away from facility)**

Facility	Count
Cambridge Springs	496
Mercer	712
Muncy	600
Smithfield	719

**Appendix E: Minimum days at facility = 364 (No days away from facility)**

Facility	Count
Cambridge Springs	478
Mercer	675
Muncy	564
Smithfield	700