

Discussant Comments
“Coming Home from Prison: Family Matters”
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Dr. Woldoff outlined interesting aspects of Dr. Hairston's work and introduced her research (with Heather Washington) on the effects of incarceration on father involvement.¹ Dr. Woldoff divided her talking points into the following timely issues:

- 1) Pre-prison aspects of inmates lives that are exacerbated in prison and interfere with relationships and parenting;
- 2) The importance of acknowledging the role of culture in inmates' adjustment to family life outside of prison;
- 3) The neighborhood consequences of large numbers of inmates returning to small numbers of communities and how this affects reentry;
- 4) The lack of knowledge that families have about the prison visits, a fact that is in contrast to the popular images of inmates and their families exploiting the system;
- 5) The similarities between inmate families and the families of addicts as both types of families try to learn to trust, bond, and live with a family member who has been on the margins of society.

The research by Woldoff and Washington focuses on the relative importance of incarceration in father involvement. The study shows the following:

- ❑ Non-whites are less engaged with their children on average, as are fathers who have been booked or incarcerated for a crime.
- ❑ The negative effect of incarceration on father engagement is worse for African Americans than for whites and Latinos;
- ❑ The effect of being booked is worse for African Americans than whites.

These findings have implications for efforts to reintegrate fathers after spells of incarceration. Dr. Woldoff also examined related issues (with coauthor Michael Cina) in a 2007 paper published in the journal *Fathering*.²

¹ Woldoff, R. and Washington, H. 2008. “Arrested Contact: The Criminal Justice System, Race, and Father Engagement.” *The Prison Journal*. 88(2): 179-206.

² Woldoff, R. and Cina, M. 2007. “Regular Work, Underground Jobs, and Hustling: An Examination of Paternal work and Father Involvement.” *Fathering*. 5(3): 153-173.