The Role of Gender and Relationship in Reforming the Rockefeller Drug Laws

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THE ROLE OF GENDER AND RELATIONSHIP IN REFORMING THE ROCKEFELLER DRUG LAWS

Eda Katharine Tinto*

In recent years, New York's drug sentencing laws—the Rockefeller Drug Laws—have come under attack due to their failure to reduce drug use despite the growing prison population. The political and academic communities now are debating how best to reform these laws. In this Note, Eda Tinto highlights the absence of a much-needed discussion regarding the sentencing of certain women drug offenders. Qualitative studies have demonstrated that an underlying context of many women's drug crimes is their involvement in an intimate relationship with a partner who uses or sells drugs. Tinto argues that these women drug offenders are often less blameworthy than other offenders and that therefore the sentences for their crimes are often unjust. Tinto concludes that the context of an intimate relationship should be acknowledged in sentencing and proposes reforms of the Rockefeller Drug Laws.

INTRODUCTION

In 1973, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller successfully urged the passage of the most punitive drug laws in the country.¹ The "Rockefeller Drug Laws" (the Laws) removed the discretion traditionally afforded to judges in sentencing individual offenders and forced judges to sentence drug offenders to extremely long prison terms.² While the enactment of the Laws signaled the beginning of

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Most of these laws were passed as part of the New York Substance Control Act revisions in 1973. See Tsimbinos, supra note 1, at 618 (citing 1972 N.Y. Laws 878). Among the
the widely supported national “war on drugs,” people on all sides of the debate now agree that the Laws have failed to achieve their stated goals and are in need of reform.3 The most-cited reason for reform is that the Laws have contributed to the enormous increase in the cost of prison operation, yet have failed to reduce significantly the amount of drug use in New York.4 Another critical reason why many advocate for the reform of the Laws is that the “war on drugs,” in the words of one scholar, “has become a war on women.”5 The number of women

provisions was the establishment of mandatory enhanced sentences for all drug offenders. For more on the history and components of the Rockefeller Drug Laws, see infra Part I.A; see also Tsimbinos, supra note 1, at 618.


4 A 1998 MacArthur Foundation and Robert Wood Foundation study on the effectiveness of strict sentencing statutes like the Rockefeller Drug Laws found that they have very little effect on illegal drug use. Jakes & Caher, supra note 3, at A1 (citing study and others regarding effectiveness of treatment over prison); see also Elliot Currie, Crime and Punishment in America 77 (1998) (citing studies as support for claim that “putting ordinary drug offenders behind bars has very little effect on rates of drug-related crime”); Joint Comm., supra note 2, at 7 (reporting 1976 findings that Laws did not decrease drug use; if anything, drug use increased). The cost of total prison expenditures in New York is close to three billion dollars per year; fifteen years ago, the State spent only $840,000 per year. David C. Leven, Curing America’s Addiction to Prisons, 20 Fordham Urb. L.J. 641, 644 (1993) (citing statistics from Correctional Association of New York).

in prison in New York State for drug offenses has skyrocketed as a direct result of the Laws.\(^6\)

Since judges no longer have discretion to tailor sentences to the context of the crime, women offenders, some of whom previously may have received lighter sentences due to particular mitigating aspects of their crimes,\(^7\) now face harsh mandatory sentences. While all defendants, both male and female, face this inflexibility when charged with a drug crime in New York, it is important to highlight that ignoring the individual context of the crime seems particularly harsh for one subgroup of women defendants. Qualitative studies demonstrate that the underlying reason for many women defendants’ drug offenses is their involvement in an intimate relationship in which their partner uses or sells drugs.\(^8\) As a result, the circumstances of a woman’s drug crime are often intertwined, not only with her partner’s drug activities, but also with the daily aspects of her intimate relationship.

Current debates over reform are devoid of any in-depth discussion of how the Laws affect women whose drug crimes took place within the context of an intimate relationship and whether their sentences, which are given without consideration of this context, are justified.\(^9\) Such discussion is a much-needed component of the broader debate about reform of the Laws.\(^10\)

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\(^6\) See infra Part I.B for statistics.

\(^7\) Previous leniency may have been due to characteristics of the particular crimes (e.g., role in the offense), characteristics of the offenders (e.g., family responsibilities), or may have been due to a paternalistic or chivalrous attitude on the part of judges. See infra note 19.

\(^8\) See infra note 45 and accompanying text.

\(^9\) See Chesney-Lind, supra note 5, at 146 (stating that there has been “virtually no public discussion” despite large increases in number of women in prison). Most articles discussing the Rockefeller Drug Laws do not mention the impact on women at all or mention the effect on women only in the “facts” section but not in the “proposal of reform” section. See, e.g., Leven, supra note 4, at 654-57 (discussing prison growth nationwide and proposing reforms that do not mention women offenders); Tsimbinos, supra note 1, at 613 (discussing Laws and suggestions for their reform without using word “woman”).

This is not to suggest that some current proposals would not alleviate the harsh effects of the current Laws; some reforms could have a positive impact on these women offenders as well as benefit others who may be unfairly punished under the Laws. However, current discussions of policy reform lack any explicit discussion of the context of some women's drug crimes—namely, that of an intimate relationship—and fail to acknowledge that recognition of this particular context might help shape more just drug policies and sentences.

This Note contributes to the general discussion of why reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws is needed—and how to proceed with such reform—by focusing on one group of offenders: women in relationship. This Note describes how a woman's intimate relationship is often interconnected with the drug offense she commits and demonstrates how, under the Laws, the failure to consider this underlying context results in a criminal charge and sentence that are likely to be unjust.

Part I reviews the original purposes and motivations of the Laws and presents statistical data on the Laws' effect on women. Part II examines how the existence of an intimate relationship may underlie the criminal acts for which many women are charged under the Laws. This Part also examines how women, specifically those in relationships, fare in obtaining reductions of their sentences under the Laws' provision for material assistance. Part III argues that an understanding of the context of women's drug crimes and their intimate relationships must shape drug policy reform. This Note concludes by offering specific reforms that strive to acknowledge more effectively—and more justly—the complexities of many women's drug crimes.

I
THE ROCKEFELLER DRUG LAWS AND THEIR EFFECTS

A. The History of the Rockefeller Drug Laws

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a "get tough on crime" movement was growing throughout the country. In reaction to the

11 For example, proposals that benefit low-level offenders, such as not determining the crime charged solely by the amount of the drug, would often benefit women offenders as well. See infra notes 148-57 and accompanying text for a discussion of some current reform proposals.
12 See infra notes 48-49 (defining "women in relationship").
13 See infra notes 43-44 (discussing criteria of blameworthiness).
14 See infra note 115 (defining material assistance).
publicized increases in drug use nationwide, this movement argued for harsher penalties for drug crimes and less emphasis on rehabilitation and drug treatment.\textsuperscript{16} The push for strict mandatory minimum sentences, although initiated by more conservative politicians, found support among liberal organizations and politicians.\textsuperscript{17} Liberal advocates of sentencing reform believed that removing judges’ discretion would help reduce race- and gender-based disparities in the length of prison terms.\textsuperscript{18} In particular, some feminists advocated for the removal of discretion in order to fight judicial paternalism and chivalry, factors often cited as explaining gender-based sentencing disparities.\textsuperscript{19} While mandatory sentencing schemes eliminated the shorter sentences women previously had received through the exercise of ju-


\textsuperscript{17} See Alexander, supra note 15, at 205 (discussing both liberal and conservative support for mandatory minimum sentences); Mauer, supra note 1, at 47-49 (same).

\textsuperscript{18} Alexander, supra note 15, at 205 (stating that reforms were initiated to fight recognized gender, race, and class discrimination in sentencing). The concern about disparities based on race was grounded in the belief that defendants of color were treated more harshly than white offenders. The concern about gender-based disparities was rooted in the belief that women received more lenient penalties because of their gender. See infra notes 19-20. These concerns about racial and gender disparities in sentencing motivated sentencing reforms throughout the country in the 1970s and supported mandatory sentencing schemes at both the state and federal levels. See Kate Stith & José A. Cabranes, Fear of Judging: Sentencing Guidelines in the Federal Courts 31 (1998) (discussing critique of “illegitimate considerations” influencing judicial discretion as motivation for sentencing reform); Michael Tonry, Sentencing Matters 6-9 (1996) (discussing nationwide sentencing reform as motivated in part by evidence of racial and gender sentencing disparities).

\textsuperscript{19} Mary Coombs, Putting Women First, 93 Mich. L. Rev. 1686, 1688-89 (1995) (reviewing Kathleen Daly, Gender, Crime, and Punishment (1994)) (describing studies that cited unwanted chivalry as explanation for why women receive more lenient sentences than similarly situated men); Myrna S. Raeder, Gender and Sentencing: Single Moms, Battered Women, and Other Sex-Based Anomalies in the Gender-Free World of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, 20 Pepp. L. Rev. 905, 917 (1993) (highlighting focus of sentencing reform on chivalry and paternalism as reasons for gender-based disparity); cf. Chesney-Lind, supra note 5, at 150-51 (stating that chivalry often worked in favor of white women only).
dicial discretion, these feminists supported such schemes because they exemplified "equal treatment" of all people convicted of crimes. In New York, politicians and community organizations, both liberal and conservative, came together to fight for sentencing reform. As a result of this bipartisan support, the state legislature passed the core of the Rockefeller Drug Laws in 1973.

New York thus became the first state to enact mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes. The Laws mandated imprisonment for several categories of drug offenses and increased both the number of such categories and the length of corresponding sentences. For example, an A-1 felony required the mandatory sentence of fifteen to twenty-five years (minimum) to life (maximum), in addition to mandatory parole for the rest of the offender's life. The sentence equaled the possible sanction for murder in the first degree. Under the 1973 law, an A-1 felony was defined as the possession of two ounces of an illegal narcotic or the sale of one ounce of an illegal narcotic. In contrast, prior to 1973, a class A felony required the possession of at least sixteen ounces of a narcotic drug. Equally important, the mandatory sentencing scheme also removed all discretion from the judge to consider mitigating factors, such as the defendant's role in the offense, in determining an appropriate sentence.


22 Families Against Mandatory Minimums, supra note 16. By 1983, forty other states had passed mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses. Id.

23 Tsimbinos, supra note 2, at 615-16.


25 Id. app. at 149 tbl.A-1, app. at 150 tbl.A-2; see also Shechtman, supra note 3, at 2 (highlighting drug sanction under Laws as potentially being same sanction as for murder and almost twice that for rape).

26 Joint Comm., supra note 2, app. at 152-54 tbl.A-4.

27 Quinn & McLaughlin, supra note 1, app. at 735. The sentence was the same for an A-1 felony; however, in addition to requiring a greater amount of drugs, prior to 1973 only certain drugs would merit an A-1 felony charge. See id. Prior to 1973, the sale of one ounce of an illegal substance was considered a class C felony. Joint Comm., supra note 2, app. at 151 tbl.A-3.

28 While the judge could still determine the appropriate sentence within the given range, e.g., between fifteen and twenty-five years, a judge had no discretion to go below the mandatory minimum sentence. See supra text accompanying note 2.
The Laws have remained largely unchanged since 1973, and have had a significant impact both in New York and across the nation. They stand as a guiding example for other mandatory drug sentencing schemes currently in place in other states. They also served as a model for the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, a mandatory-sentencing scheme that is widely recognized as similarly tough and inflexible.

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29 For example, for an A-1 felony, the maximum penalty is still life imprisonment and the minimum is still fifteen years for a first-time offender. N.Y. Penal Law § 70.00 (McKinney 1998 & Supp. 2001). Some key provisions of the current versions of the Laws include N.Y. Penal Law § 70.00 (McKinney 1998 & Supp. 2001) (providing maximum and minimum sentences for felony classes A to E); N.Y. Penal Law § 60.05 (McKinney 1998) (providing for authorized disposition of sentences); N.Y. Penal Law § 65.00 (McKinney 1998) (providing for sentences of probation); N.Y. Penal Law § 220 (McKinney 1998 & Supp. 2001) (providing general regulations regarding controlled substances and various levels of criminal sale and possession offenses); N.Y. Crim. Proc. Law § 410.91 (McKinney Supp. 2001) (providing for parole supervision).

In 1977, the Marijuana Reform Act created separate laws that dealt exclusively with marijuana offenses. Tsimbinos, supra note 1, at 624 (citing Marijuana Reform Act, N.Y. Penal Law § 221 (McKinney 1998)). In 1979, the Legislature passed a series of amendments which, in part, increased some of the minimum amounts needed for certain drug felonies. For example, the amount needed for an A-1 felony for an unlawful sale was increased from one ounce to two ounces. Id. at 625. In 1992, new legislation permitted the option of treatment in certain circumstances for a first-time felon convicted of a class C, D, or E drug felony. Leven, supra note 4, at 648. In 1995, the Legislature overruled a previous New York Court of Appeals case, People v. Ryan, 626 N.E.2d 51 (N.Y. 1993), and removed the prosecutors' burden of proving knowledge of the weight of the drug involved in the offense. Tsimbinos, supra note 1, at 626. In the same year, the Legislature passed the New York Sentencing Reform Act, which changed some of the sentencing requirements for both predicate felons and first-time offenders. For a description of the 1995 New York Sentencing Reform Act, see Bonnie R. Cohen, New York State Sentencing Reform Act of 1995, N.Y. L.J., June 30, 1995, at 1. For a chart of current felony sentencing in New York (including drug offenses), see Bonnie R. Cohen, New York State Felony Sentencing Chart, N.Y. L.J., Mar. 11, 1996, at 1; see also Human Rights Watch, Who Goes to Prison for Drug Offenses?: A Rebuttal to the New York State District Attorneys Association, at http://www.hrw.org/hrw/campaigns/drugs/ny-drugs.htm (last visited Mar. 28, 2001).

30 See supra note 22.

31 See Raeder, supra note 19, at 929 (noting increased sentences and proportion of sentence served in prison under Guidelines); cf. Stith & Cabranes, supra note 18, at 145-48 (discussing need for more choices for federal judges in sentencing offenders). The Federal Sentencing Guidelines were written by the U.S. Sentencing Commission, a commission formed by the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984. Tonry, supra note 18, at 11.

In many instances, New York sentences are harsher than the Federal Sentencing Guidelines. Huling, supra note 10, at 16 (stating that switch to prosecution under New York state law could trigger harsher penalties than are available under federal law); Shechtman, supra note 3, at 2 (comparing New York versus federal sentences and noting lesser sentences under federal law). A full examination of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines is beyond the scope of this Note, but for an excellent critique of the federal scheme, including an examination of its impact on women, see generally Raeder, supra note 19; Myrna S. Raeder, Gender Issues in the Federal Sentencing Guidelines and Mandatory Minimum Sentences, Crim. Just., Fall 1993, at 20.
B. Effects of the Rockefeller Drug Laws

In the past twenty-eight years, the Rockefeller Drug Laws have had a significant impact on New York's prison population. The prison population today is over 70,000. As of March 2000, 5%, or 3,508, of these prisoners are women. Prior to the enactment of the Laws in 1973, there were approximately 12,500 prisoners in New York state prisons. At that time, there were 400 women prisoners, approximately 3.2% of the prison population.

While the number of women prisoners today may not seem significant compared to the prison population as a whole, it is startling to examine the increase in the rate of incarceration, and the fact that the large part of this increase is due to incarceration for drug offenses. In New York, 156% more women received prison sentences in 1995 as compared to 1986; men experienced only a 49% increase during this time. Of this increase in women prisoners, 91% was due to the imposition of prison sentences for drug offenses. From 1986 to 1995,

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32 Statistics are not available to evaluate trends over the complete time period from the passage of the Rockefeller Drug Laws in 1973 until today. Studies that gathered statistics over portions of this time period will be presented in this Part. In general, upon examination of the various statistics, one finds that the dynamics that the particular statistics demonstrate (e.g., growth of incarceration rate) remain constant since 1973. Cf. Alfred Blumstein & Allen J. Beck, Population Growth in U.S. Prisons, in Prisons 17, 19 fig.1 (Michael Tonry & Joan Petersilla eds., 1999) (showing steady increase in incarceration rates for state and federal prisoners from mid-1970s to 1997).


34 Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., supra note 5.

35 Women in Prison Project, Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., Mandatory Injustice: Case Histories of Women Convicted Under New York's Rockefeller Drug Laws, at ii (Apr. 1999) (on file with the New York University Law Review) [hereinafter Mandatory Injustice]. This significant rise in the prison population is mainly attributable to the severe sanctioning of drug offenses, rather than a result of a significant rise in other types of crime (e.g., violent crime). In 1980, only 11% of people sent to New York state prison were drug offenders; in 1999, 44.5% of people sentenced that year were drug offenders. Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., Basic Prison & Jail Fact Sheet (Feb. 2001) (on file with the New York University Law Review).

36 Mandatory Injustice, supra note 35, at ii.

37 Marc Mauer et al., The Sentencing Project, Gender and Justice: Women, Drugs, and Sentencing Policy 9 (1999). The increase for women may be due in part to the presence of more women who are repeat drug offenders and thus trigger the repeat offender portions of the drug laws. Id. at 9-10; see also N.Y. Penal Law, § 70.05 (McKinney 1998) (Second Felony Offender Law). Overall, the majority of drug offenders do not end up in prison. Mauer et al., supra, at 11. Offenders are often encouraged to plea-bargain in order to avoid the harsh sentences of imprisonment mandated in the more serious felonies. Id. Then, if the woman commits a second drug offense (having received no drug treatment in the interim), she is sentenced as a repeat felony offender, and receives a higher sentence, due to her first guilty plea to a low-level felony. Id.

38 Mauer et al., supra note 37, at 3. The high increase in the rate of women sentenced to prison is a consequence of both an increase in the number of arrests and an increase in the likelihood of being sentenced to prison once arrested for a drug offense. See id. at 8.
there was a 487% increase in incarceration commitments for female drug offenders; for male drug offenders, this rise was 203%. Although an increase in the women's prison population was expected to some extent after the passage of the Laws, the rise has been so dramatic that it has caused even the Laws' supporters to question whether such an increase was merited.40

The large increase in the rate of women's imprisonment invites the question whether it is sound policy to mandate imprisonment for certain drug crimes. More importantly, however, it also leads one to ask whether the increase in women's imprisonment in particular is correlated with the blameworthiness of women drug offenders and what we believe is the appropriate punishment for their individual crimes. If the crimes that women drug offenders commit are exactly the same as those of male drug offenders, there is no justifiable reason why we should be particularly concerned with the greater increase in the rate of women's imprisonment.41 However, acceptance of the large increase in women's incarceration is premised on the assumptions that the drug crimes women and men commit are the same, that their characteristics as offenders are the same, and that therefore men

Although there are more men in prison than women, women in prison are more likely than the men to be there because of a drug offense. Id. at 11. Overall, approximately thirty-three percent (over 22,000) of prisoners in New York are drug offenders. Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., Mandatory Sentencing Laws and Drug Offenders in New York State 1 (Mar. 1999) (on file with the New York University Law Review); Human Rights Watch, supra note 29. In 1997, thirty-two percent of male prisoners in New York state prisons were incarcerated for drug offenses. Mauer et al., supra note 37, at 10. This figure was over sixty percent for women. Id.; Johnson, supra note 16, at 44 & n.273 (citing data from New York State Department of Correctional Services).

39 Mauer et al., supra note 37, at 9.

40 Cf. id. (stating that “[w]hile one would expect the number of women’s drug convictions to have risen along with the increase in arrests over this ten-year period, in fact women’s drug convictions rose at a substantially faster rate”); see also supra note 3 (discussing general opposition to Laws).

The increase in the number of women in prison for drug offenses makes startlingly clear the disproportionate number of low-income women of color who are sentenced for drug crimes in New York. In 2000, 91% of women in New York prisons for a drug offense were women of color; 55% were African American and 36% were Latina. Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., supra note 5. White, non-Latina women comprised only approximately 9% of female drug offenders, compared to 17% of the general female prison population. Id. This significant increase in the percentage of African American women in prison in New York is echoed nationwide: “Between 1986 and 1991, the number of African American women in [all] state prisons for drug offenses increased by 828%.” Keith Watters, Law Without Justice, Nat'l B. Ass'n Mag., Mar.-Apr. 1996, at 1, 1. The majority of women in prison can be classified as “low income.” In New York prisons, 92% of women report incomes under $10,000 prior to incarceration. Mandatory Injustice, supra note 35, at ii.

41 A concern for women's imprisonment in particular is not mutually exclusive of the general concern for whether imprisonment is an appropriate punishment for certain drug crimes that both male and female offenders commit (e.g., minor possession crimes).
and women should be treated the same by drug sentencing policies. The following Part argues that, as a matter of equity and fairness, these assumptions should be questioned. In today's society, there are legitimate differences in men's and women's drug crimes that should be examined and taken into account in sentencing.

II

CRIMINAL ACTS AND THE CONTEXT OF A RELATIONSHIP

In determining whether a certain prison sentence is merited, it is important first to examine the context of the offense. Only then is it possible to ask whether this context alters the blameworthiness of the offender, whether the current given sentence is a just punishment, and whether this context should be taken into account in sentencing.

42 Cf. Coombs, supra note 19, at 1689 (agreeing with Kathleen Daly's argument that sometimes alleged gender-based “disparities” in sentencing reflect actual differences in crimes committed); Kathleen Daly, Gender and Sentencing: What We Know and Don't Know From Empirical Research, 8 Fed. Sentencing Rep. 163, 165 (1995) [hereinafter Daly, Sentencing] (stating that difference in sentences for men and women can be explained in part by assumption that “some features of men's and women's crimes and circumstances may differ, which could be acknowledged in sentencing”).

Certain characteristics of the offender, such as race and class, should never be considered when assessing blameworthiness. See Tonry, supra note 18, at 54 (“Every sentencing commission has included reduction or elimination of racial and gender discrimination in sentencing among its goals . . . .”); Alexander, supra note 15, at 200 (stating that sentencing guidelines, mandatory minimum sentences, and repeat felon laws were enacted to provide harsh, uniform, and fair punishment regardless of race or class). To the extent that such biases are at work in the criminal justice system, these same factors influence the rates of men’s imprisonment as well as women’s. Men of color, like women of color, are disproportionately represented in New York prisons. Approximately ninety-four percent of the drug offenders in New York state prisons are African American or Latino. Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., Drop the Rock: Repeal the Rockefeller Drug Laws (Feb. 2001) (on file with the New York University Law Review). In New York, an African American male between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine is twenty-three times more likely to be in prison than a white male of the same age. Leven, supra note 4, at 645. Thirty-three percent of jail inmates in 1991 did not have jobs before entering jail and thirty-two percent of those who did work had annual incomes of less than $5000. The Sentencing Project, Facts About Prisons and Prisoners, at http://www.sentencingproject.org/brief/brief.htm (Mar. 1999).

Additionally, male offenders may share with women offenders a history of victimization. Kathleen Daly, Gender, Crime and Punishment 83-86 (1994) [hereinafter Daly, Gender]. While it seems as if more women than men have a history of extreme victimization, this may be due in part to the reliance on self-reporting of victimization. Id. Men, due to the ideals of “masculinity,” may be less likely to admit to previous victimization. Id. at 85. Additionally, common sites of male victimization, such as school and juvenile hall, may not be incorporated into studies that focus on victimization solely in the home. Id.

43 This Note borrows the definition of “blameworthiness” from Kathleen Daly. “Blameworthiness” refers to linking the offender’s personal characteristics and history to the offense. Daly, Sentencing, supra note 42, at 168 n.18. This definition recognizes “how a defendant’s social history imposes meaning on a crime.” Id. Thus, if the context of the crime affects our notion of an offender's blameworthiness, then this context should be taken into account in determining an appropriate sentence.
As this Part describes, the context of women's drug crimes is often unique in that the commission of the crime is intertwined with the woman's intimate relationship with a boyfriend or husband. This Part highlights how this context, currently unrecognized by the Laws, sheds light on the types of crimes for which women are convicted under the Laws and the appropriateness of the resulting sentences.

A. The Context of a Relationship

Many women become involved in drug activities as a result of being in a specific type of relationship; that is, being the girlfriend, wife, or live-in partner of a man involved in drug activity. For many

44 Blameworthiness, along with the harm and consequences of the crime, is a traditional criterion that judges evaluate in determining an appropriate sentence. Daly, Gender, supra note 42, at 37 (discussing views on blameworthiness and how judges assess it); see also Coombs, supra note 19, at 1698 (agreeing that judges apply, or say that they apply, notions of harm, blameworthiness, and consequences).

45 See Kathleen Daly, Women's Pathways to Felony Court: Feminist Theories of Law-breaking and Problems of Representation, 2 S. Cal. Rev. L. & Women's Stud. 11, 14 (1992) ("A woman may continue lawbreaking as a result of relationships with men who may also be involved in crime"); Ilene H. Nagel & Barry L. Johnson, The Role of Gender in a Structured Sentencing System: Equal Treatment, Policy Choices, and the Sentencing of Female Offenders Under the United States Sentencing Guidelines, 85 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 181, 214 (1994) (stating that many female drug offenders are involved in drug conspiracies due to their relationships with male codefendants); Raeder, supra note 31, at 21 ("A number of sentenced women, particularly in drug conspiracy cases, are the wives or girlfriends of male defendants who are the fathers of their children.").

This Note makes no claims regarding the actual numbers of women who become involved in drug activities because of an intimate relationship. However, regardless of whether this is the "main" reason that underlies women's drug crimes, it is a significant enough aspect to warrant analysis. The factor arises frequently in studies of drug crimes. See, e.g., Daly, Gender, supra note 42, at 48 (studying felony women offenders in New Haven, Connecticut, and identifying category of "[d]rug-connected" women as women who "used or sold drugs in their relationships with boyfriends or family members"); Human Rights Watch, Official Data Reveal Most New York Drug Offenders are Nonviolent, at http://www.hrw.org/hrw/press/1999/jan/ny-drug0107.htm (Jan. 7, 1999) (reporting that their research suggests that people incarcerated for drug offenses in New York include "drug dealers' girlfriends and wives").

This is not to say that intimate relationships are the only reason why women become involved in drug crime. Another reason is financial crisis and the need for fast money. See Huling, supra note 10, at 59 (citing research in Great Britain demonstrating that most drug couriers, many of whom are female, tend to be drawn into job due to one-time opportunity to relieve economic pressures); see also Lisa Maher, Reconstructing the Female Criminal: Women and Crack Cocaine, 2 S. Cal. Rev. L. & Women's Stud. 131, 151 (1992) (highlighting economics and gender as central influences in lives of women who are street-level crack smokers).

For a general overview of women in prison and attempts to understand why women commit crimes, see generally Clarice Feinman, Women in the Criminal Justice System 19-87 (3d ed. 1994); Daly, Gender, supra note 42; Tracy Thornburg & Diane Trunk, A Collage of Voices: A Dialogue With Women in Prison, 2 S. Cal. Rev. L. & Women's Stud. 155 (1992).
women, the stories of their drug crime center on the fact that they are intimately connected with men involved in drug crime.\textsuperscript{46} The woman’s drug crime is often in support of her partner’s larger drug activities.\textsuperscript{47}

In analyzing the blameworthiness of some women drug offenders, it thus becomes important to evaluate their drug crimes as crimes committed, not simply by women, but by “women in relationship.”\textsuperscript{48} The term “women in relationship” has a significantly different meaning than the standard phrasings, “women in a relationship with . . .” or “women in relationships.” The latter phrases imply that the relationship is something separate from the woman and disconnected from her actions and choices as an individual, while the former emphasizes the relationship itself as influencing and shaping the personal choices a woman makes. The relationship, and the choice to be in a relationship, comprise a part of the woman’s person.\textsuperscript{49}

A focus on the intimate relationship as an influence on women’s decisions gives value to the act of caring for another person and views this motivation as one that may reduce criminal blameworthiness.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} See, e.g., Feinman, supra note 45, at 29 (presenting ex-offender’s viewpoint that many women become involved in criminal activities because of their relationships with men); Mandatory Injustice, supra note 35 (presenting stories of several women drug offenders who were connected to male drug offenders); see also supra text accompanying note 45. The media empathetically has publicized this aspect of several women drug offenders’ stories. The story of Kemba Smith, a woman who became involved with drugs through her boyfriend, was well publicized in general and black-focused media. See infra note 85 (detailing Kemba Smith’s case). Nicole Richardson’s case is similar and also has received a great deal of media attention. See infra notes 91-92 and accompanying text (detailing Nicole Richardson’s case). Some judges in drug cases have argued for leniency based on the fact that the female defendant is involved with a boyfriend who is engaged in drug activities. See, e.g., People v. Bundy, 654 N.Y.S.2d 108, 114 (App. Div. 1997) (Ellerin, J., dissenting) (stating that “the evidence supported no inference other than that, rather than being a drug dealer herself, defendant was dating a drug dealer”); People v. Donovan, 454 N.Y.S.2d 118, 120 (App. Div. 1982) (Mollen, J., dissenting) (stating that defendant was dating Mr. Kjellgren, person who originally was being investigated for drug activity and who served as primary witness against defendant at trial).

\textsuperscript{47} For examples of such cases, see infra text accompanying notes 73-80, 86-92, 99-107.

\textsuperscript{48} This Note uses the phrase “women in relationship” to signify women who are in intimate relationships with men involved in drug activity. Thus, although not stated explicitly in each instance, this phrase includes a woman who is married to, has a child with, lives with, or simply dates a man involved in drug activity. While this Note focuses on heterosexual relationships due to the similar focus of the available research, the context of a relationship in a drug crime should be considered in same-sex relationships as well.

\textsuperscript{49} Cf. Robin West, Caring For Justice 5 (1997) (contrasting notion of self from postmodern legal theory with notion of selfhood that “asserts either the moral importance of the self’s connections with others, or the seriousness of the harms those connections sometimes occasion”).

\textsuperscript{50} This viewpoint is rooted in what is often termed “an ethic of care.” An ethic of care is a vision of morality in which “moral judgment is oriented toward issues of responsibility and care” rather than a morality that emphasizes justice through individual rights. Carol

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While it is true that the woman chooses to be in a particular relationship, a focus on the context of the intimate relationship recognizes the choice to maintain and support a relationship as one that has positive value.\textsuperscript{51} Such a focus also recognizes the possible harms and negative influences that are part of relationships as well.\textsuperscript{52} Allowing the context of an intimate relationship to affect assessments of blameworthiness reflects an understanding of both the positive and negative influences that a relationship has on individual choice. It gives value to the desire to maintain intimate relationships and at the same time does not punish women further for potential harms already suffered through "damaging relations of connection."\textsuperscript{53}

Examining the context of an intimate relationship helps explain the woman's decision to commit a drug crime.\textsuperscript{54} A woman may decide

\textsuperscript{51} For example, if judges recognized, and valued, a woman's decision to maintain a relationship (with a boyfriend who is a drug dealer), a woman's presence in her boyfriend's home would not be viewed as a crime (as it is now due to the theory of constructive possession, see infra Part II.B.1) and instead would be viewed as a positive act to maintain a relationship important to the woman. Mary Coombs argues that some women defendants are disadvantaged by judicial assumptions that men are negative forces in women's lives. For some women, connections to a husband, boyfriend, or other men provide a positive force in the woman's life and may support her ability to be law abiding. Coombs, supra note 19, at 1709.

\textsuperscript{52} Stephen Schulhofer critiques an "ethic of care" approach in part because in certain contexts it can be dangerous to women to put emphasis on the continuity of relationships. Stephen J. Schulhofer, The Feminist Challenge in Criminal Law, 143 U. Pa. L. Rev. 2151, 2160 (1995). However, Robin West argues that adopting an "ethic of care" into our legal system does not mean that the dangers to women in some relationships will be ignored. Indeed, she suggests the opposite. West argues that the exclusion of women's voices from legal and political history has resulted in the failure to recognize "either the moral centrality or the potential for harm that are inherent in our connected, relational lives." West, supra note 49, at 7, 10 (arguing for legal and political theory to recognize both that "our connections to others are... central to our moral sense and potentially harmful in ways ill-heeded by the modern state"). Thus, to emphasize relations and connections to others does not ignore the possible dangers; rather, it brings the potential benefits and harms to the forefront of political and legal theory discussion.

\textsuperscript{53} See Raeder, supra note 19, at 912, 977-78 (stating that fact that women offenders often get into criminal trouble due to their associations with men should be more thoroughly examined and noting that many drug cases identify women by their relationships with men).

Although beyond the scope of this Note, it is also important to question the structure of the drug economy and the effect it has on the role of women in drug crime. Lisa Maher suggests that the construction of work in the street-level drug economy is highly "raced" and "gendered," thus keeping women in subordinated roles. Lisa Maher, Sexed Work: Gender, Race, and Resistance in a Brooklyn Drug Market 107 (1997). According to Maher, it would be a mistake to conclude that a woman forms or maintains a relationship

Gilligan, In a Different Voice 98-99 (1982). Who demonstrates an ethic of care versus an ethic of justice is not exclusively mapped onto gender lines. However, research suggests that women's judgments are often linked with issues of care and maintaining relationships. Id. at 69.
to support her boyfriend's drug activities because she places the benefits of maintaining the relationship over the risks she associates with providing such help. The benefits of staying in the relationship may include the positive aspects of an intimate relationship, such as comfort and companionship. However, the calculated benefits also may include the risks of leaving. Many women may choose to become involved in drug activities because the option to leave the relationship is not a realistic one. Overwhelmingly, these relationships involve substance addiction and/or domestic violence.\textsuperscript{55} The need to continue a drug habit\textsuperscript{56} or the fear of physical violence are very real reasons why a girlfriend would choose not to leave her boyfriend and would choose instead to commit a drug crime.\textsuperscript{57} Furthermore, if the boyfriend or husband is the father of her child, a woman may prefer to keep the family together rather than abandon the relationship.\textsuperscript{58} She might agree to commit a drug crime or receive the benefits of tainted money rather than endanger her child. Many women in relationship have limited financial or familial support and therefore do not have the realistic option of leaving the relationship in order to end any involvement in the drug activity.\textsuperscript{59} More generally, research on female criminality suggests that for women offenders the line between being

\textsuperscript{55} Over seventy percent of women in New York state prisons report having had a substance abuse problem prior to entering prison. Women in Prison Project, Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., Women Prisoners and Substance Abuse (Mar. 2000) (on file with the New York University Law Review). In addition, eighty-five percent of women in New York state prisons report that they have been physically abused at some point in their lives. Mandatory Injustice, supra note 35, at ii; see also Daly, supra note 45, at 48 (finding in her study that incarcerated women are often victimized as adults by violent men); Thornburg & Trunk, supra note 45, at 163-64 (stating that most women prisoners in their study had been abused by husbands, fathers, and other family members).

\textsuperscript{56} While male drug offenders may also have problems with substance abuse, given the gendered structure of the drug economy, men are rarely dependent on women for their drug supply. See Maher, supra note 54, at 107 (stating that high-level positions in drug economy and those that generate income are male-dominated). Therefore, men are rarely dependent on the relationship to continue the drug habit.

\textsuperscript{57} See infra Part II.B for examples of the types of drug crimes that women in relationship commit.

\textsuperscript{58} See Raeder, supra note 31, at 21 (arguing that many women "cannot remain crime free unless they are willing to break up their families"). Seventy-five percent of women in prison in New York are mothers. Corr. Ass'n of N.Y., supra note 5.

\textsuperscript{59} Raeder, supra note 31, at 60 (stating that dependent nature of women's relationships with men involved in drug activities includes limited economic and family alternatives, thus rendering it difficult for women to remove themselves from criminal activity).
a victim and being an offender is often blurred. Women offenders are often victims of crime at the same time that they choose to commit a crime. Links between abuse and criminality exist in the lives of many women offenders and complicate an understanding of why women commit crime. The reasons why women commit drug crimes become even further complicated when there is an intersection of victimization and criminality within a woman's intimate relationship.

The search to understand the underlying reasons why women in relationship may commit drug crimes is not intended to excuse women's actions. The above reasons are presented not to suggest that women should escape punishment for criminal acts or that women cannot make their own choices, but rather to highlight the complexities involved in women's decisions to commit drug crimes, and, ultimately, to argue that these complexities should affect their criminal sentences. For many women, recognition of the context of the intimate relationship is simply an acknowledgement that before the woman commits the offense, she herself is a victim of a prior crime. In addition, it acknowledges the fact that discrimination based on gender, race, and class also may restrict her choices. Recognizing that there are societal influences on a woman's choice to commit a crime does not take away her "free will." Instead, it is an acknowledgement that, in many instances, her will is not completely free.

60 Daly, supra note 45, at 47-48; see also Thornburg & Trunk, supra note 45, at 164 (stating their findings that women offenders are better characterized as victims themselves).
61 See Coombs, supra note 19, at 1706 n.73 (citing studies that made connection between abuse and women's crime).
62 For example, domestic violence or physical abuse. See supra note 55 (presenting statistics on rates of previous abuse of women offenders).
63 To recognize the constraints on women's will is to "contextualize their agency within the terms of the . . . structures of patriarchy, racism and capitalism." Lisa Maher & Richard Curtis, Women on the Edge of Crime, in Criminology at the Crossroads 110, 129 (Kathleen Daly & Lisa Maher eds., 1998).

This argument regarding the limits of women drug offenders' free will can be extended to include most offenders, as most have had some restrictions on their choices earlier in life (e.g., poverty, child abuse, racial discrimination). The argument relating to women offenders is a subset of the broader argument and is used to evaluate the blameworthiness of drug offenders who are women in relationship by highlighting their unique characteristics as well as their shared characteristics with other offenders.
Focusing on certain constraints of relationships and gender on individuals' choices may or may not affect an understanding of men's choices in similar situations. While many studies have mentioned women's connections with men as an underlying causal factor of their criminal offenses, the converse may not hold true for the men in these relationships. At least one study has found that male offenders generally are not connected to girlfriends or family members in selling or using drugs. The context of the drug crimes of women in relationship, therefore, may be different than that of crimes that the men in the same relationships commit. Therefore, in sentencing, judges should be free to acknowledge this significant and legitimate difference in the underlying context of men's and women's drug crimes.

B. Criminal Acts Under the Rockefeller Drug Laws

Currently under the Rockefeller Drug Laws, the underlying intimate relationship is not a factor that is taken into account in the charging decision or the ultimate sentencing of the woman defendant. The Laws forbid judges from considering any circumstances of the offender or the crime. The primary types of criminal acts for which

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65 Daly, Gender, supra note 42, at 78. Daly finds in her study of felony offenders in New Haven, Connecticut that male drug offenders are less likely to work in concert with others, whereas female drug offenders work more often with a spouse or intimate partner. Id. at 154; see also Maher, supra note 54, at 106-07 (discussing gendered nature of drug economy and men's monopolization of income-generating positions). But cf. Maher, supra note 54, at 35 (discussing study in Brooklyn, New York, of female street drug users which found that women street drug users had personal support networks which were women-centered).

66 There may be other features of the context of men's and women's crimes that differ. A study conducted by Kathleen Daly suggests that women offenders report higher rates of abuse, less extensive criminal histories, and more child-care responsibilities. Daly, Gender, supra note 42, at 84-85. However, questions to male offenders on these subjects may be asked less often and men may be less willing to share such information. Id. at 85.

67 See Daly, Sentencing, supra note 42, at 165 (arguing that some differences in men's and women's crimes should be acknowledged in sentencing); supra text accompanying note 42.

68 This is a general problem that, in practice, hurts many offenders and not just women in relationship. See infra Part III.A. However, it is still important to examine how women in relationship are particularly disadvantaged when the context of their crime is ignored in determining their crime and sentence.

Under the Laws, there is one opportunity for judges to take the context of the woman's crime into consideration. Depending on the mitigating aspects of the crime, women in relationship, along with all offenders, may be eligible for the "rare case exception." This exception is a limited opportunity for judges not to apply the mandatory sentence and to exercise their judicial discretion in prescribing a reduced sentence. In People v. Broadie, 332 N.E.2d 338 (N.Y. 1975), the New York Court of Appeals held that the laws surrounding the imposition of the A-1 drug felony sentence were not unconstitutional on their face. Id. at 341. The court, however, ended its opinion by stating that "[t]his is not to say that in some rare case on its particular facts it may not be found that the statutes have
women in relationship are convicted under the Laws can be categorized as follows: (1) actions, or inactions, that become crimes based on "constructive possession;"69 (2) actions that support criminal activity; and (3) low-level criminal acts.70 This section will examine these three categories of convictions, highlighting the significant effects that an intimate relationship may have on the woman’s criminal behavior. Such analysis provides a greater context for understanding these women’s criminal actions and evaluating the appropriateness of particular sentences for their crimes.

1. Crimes Based on "Constructive Possession"

The first category of acts under the Laws are crimes that require no affirmative action on the part of the offender. Instead, the offender is presumed to have committed a criminal offense because of her physical position in the circumstances of the crime. Although the offender may not actually have possessed a certain quantity of drugs, the criminal act of another person’s possession may be imputed onto her through the legal theory of "constructive possession."71 Once the offender is presumed to have committed a criminal act, the underlying circumstances are not taken into account, and the seriousness of the offense is based solely on the amount of drugs involved.72

The case of Leah Bundy illustrates how inaction can satisfy the theory of constructive possession.73 Leah Bundy was dating a drug dealer.74 Although she was aware of his illegal activities, she denied

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69 See infra note 71.

70 These categories are ordered according to the level of criminal action required by the offender for conviction. The first category requires no action on the part of the offender; action is attributed to the offender through a legal doctrine and the physical circumstances of the offense. The last category requires a criminal act conducted by the offender herself. These categories are not based on what level of drug crime the woman is charged with under the Laws (e.g., A-1 felony, B, or C). Because the Laws base the level of crime on the amount of drugs involved, see infra note 97, a crime which is in the first category may be charged as a more "serious" crime and, as a result, have a longer prison sentence than a crime in the third category. See infra note 95 (detailing percentage of women sentenced for more serious drug offenses).

71 N.Y. Penal Law § 220.25(2) (McKinney 2000) (detailing statutory presumption of constructive possession).

72 See infra note 97.


74 Mandatory Injustice, supra note 35, at 7.
any involvement in her boyfriend's drug crimes. The night of her arrest, the police mistakenly entered the apartment of Ms. Bundy's boyfriend while responding to a call about a shooting in another apartment. Hearing the police arrive at the apartment, the boyfriend's brother, who was in the room with Ms. Bundy, threw the boyfriend's crack vials out of the window. The police on the street witnessed this action and subsequently searched the apartment, finding two handguns and various drugs. Ms. Bundy was arrested and charged with criminal possession of a controlled substance. The court stated that there was sufficient evidence to find that Ms. Bundy "constructively possessed all the contraband in the apartment." At age twenty-one, Ms. Bundy was sentenced to fifteen years to life.

Leah Bundy's case demonstrates how women may serve long prison sentences based on acts they personally did not commit.

75 Id.
76 Id.
77 Id.; Bundy, 654 N.Y.S.2d at 109.
78 Bundy, 654 N.Y.S.2d at 109.
79 Id. at 111.
80 Id. at 109. Christopher Clemente, the brother of Ms. Bundy's boyfriend, was sentenced to fifteen years to life for criminal possession of a controlled substance in the first degree along with a consecutive term of one to three years for weapon possession. People v. Clemente, 609 N.Y.S.2d 8, 9 (App. Div. 1994). It appears from the court's opinion that Mr. Clemente may have had previous involvement in drug activities. See id. at 8 (permitting prosecutor to impeach character witnesses by asking whether they heard about defendant's prior acts of drug possession). Mr. Clemente was offered a plea bargain of a one- to three-year sentence, but he refused. Mandatory Injustice, supra note 35, at 7. Because of his refusal, Ms. Bundy was not offered the same plea bargain. Id. Ms. Bundy was granted clemency in December 2000 by Governor Pataki. She had been in prison since 1991. John Caher, Clemency Granted to Rockefeller Drug Inmates, N.Y. U., Dec. 26, 2000, at 1.
81 Several other cases illustrate the use of the constructive possession theory. In People v. Ortiz, 564 N.Y.S.2d 427 (App. Div. 1991), Sol Ortiz was convicted of several drug felonies and misdemeanors and was sentenced to concurrent prison terms of seven to fourteen years. Id. at 428. Although Ms. Ortiz's boyfriend claimed that all the drugs and paraphernalia belonged to him, the court found that there was sufficient evidence to infer Ms. Ortiz's knowledge and control of the drugs. Id.

In People v. Prather, 672 N.Y.S.2d 562 (App. Div. 1998), the court found the evidence sufficient to establish defendant Brenda Prather's constructive possession of cocaine. Id. at 564. The cocaine was in a safe in her and her husband's home. Id. At trial, the prosecution impeached the defendant's husband when he testified that Ms. Prather was unaware of his drug-related activities. Id. Ms. Prather was found guilty of criminal possession and of aiding and abetting her husband's drug sales. Id.; see also infra Part II.B.2 (outlining facts relating to aiding her husband's drug sales). The appellate court held that her consecutive sentences resulting in an aggregate sentence of forty years to life were "unduly harsh and severe" and mandated that her sentences run concurrently instead. Prather, 672 N.Y.S.2d at 564.

In People v. Gardner, 559 N.Y.S.2d 63 (App. Div. 1990), Sandra Gardner was arrested while with her boyfriend in another person's apartment. Id. at 64. Ms. Gardner and her boyfriend were allegedly at the apartment to deal drugs. Id. Ms. Gardner was arrested after the police, though finding nothing on her person, found drugs in a duffel bag and a
Women in relationship are at high risk of being charged with crimes based on constructive possession because they are often present with their boyfriend in his, or their, home. Though aimed at drug activities, in such cases, the Laws punish the woman's mere presence around drugs. Given that a relationship often explains the woman's presence, the Laws, in effect, punish the woman's decision to be in the relationship. As the dissenting judge stated in Leah Bundy's case, "the evidence supported no inference other than that, rather than being a drug dealer herself, defendant was dating a drug dealer. While this may be an inadvisable personal choice, it is not, by itself, evidence of participation in a crime." By ignoring the context of an intimate relationship, the Laws effectively criminalize the very status of being a woman in relationship.

2. Actions that Support Criminal Activity

The second type of acts for which women are commonly imprisoned under the Rockefeller Drug Laws are those that, although not criminal in and of themselves, "become" criminal because they support ongoing criminal activity. Such actions include accompaniment to a drug sale, answering the telephone in an apartment that is the site of a drug sale, opening the door to such an apartment, or using money that is the product of previous drug activity. These actions are likely shaving kit close to where she was sitting. The court remanded her case for a new trial because the trial court failed to convey to the jury that the constructive possession presumption was a permissible presumption, but not one that the jury was required to apply. The evidence that supported the government's case in Bundy also can be explained as evidence of the existence of an intimate relationship. Evidence upon which the Court of Appeals affirmed Ms. Bundy's conviction included her photograph in the apartment, which "suggested a connection to this obvious drug factory," and the fact that she was allowed in the apartment, because "a reasonable jury could conclude that only trusted members of the operation would be permitted to enter." Bundy, 686 N.E.2d at 496. These two pieces of evidence easily are viewed as evidence of being the girlfriend of the apartment's occupant rather than being a member of the drug conspiracy.

See Raeder, supra note 31, at 60 (arguing that "[b]ecause of the ways in which women have been socialized to further their relationships with men, a woman's mere presence in the home is easily seen as tantamount to membership in a conspiracy"); see also Maher, supra note 45, at 150-51 (stating that labeling low-level crimes women commit as "volitional lawbreaking" criminalizes what, in reality, are these women's survival strategies).
to be extremely common for women in relationship, given that many women live with their boyfriends or have children with men involved in drug activity.

The stories of Brenda Prather and Nicole Richardson demonstrate how such acts, in the context of an intimate relationship that involves drug activities, can lead to harsh sentences. Brenda Prather was found guilty of criminal possession and criminal sale of a controlled substance. Ms. Prather argued that she simply handed her husband a piece of tinfoil, believing it was for cooking. When she went to hand her husband the foil, she saw another man in their home holding what she guessed to be a block of cocaine. The court found sufficient evidence to establish that Ms. Prather "intentionally aided

panying him. Id. at 308-09. Ms. Vanderpool appealed on the legality of the search warrant but her sentence was affirmed by the court. Id. at 309-10.

Debbie Davis was arrested and convicted of criminal possession following a search of her apartment that she shared with her boyfriend, Thomas Ruffo. People v. Davis, 537 N.Y.S.2d 93, 94 (App. Div. 1989). Ms. Davis was convicted upon a plea of guilty and appealed the legality of the search warrant. Id. The search warrant was obtained on the basis of a tip which stated that Mr. Ruffo was a supplier of drugs and likely had drugs at the apartment where he lived. Id. at 94. The tip did not mention that Ms. Davis was involved in the sale of drugs. Id. When Mr. Ruffo was arrested on drug charges, he told the police his address where he lived with his girlfriend, Ms. Davis. Id. This statement then led to her arrest. Id.

Cynthia Vitanza and her husband were indicted for the criminal sale of a controlled substance. People v. Vitanza, 563 N.Y.S.2d 558 (App. Div. 1990). Ms. Vitanza alleged she was innocently at their home, the scene of the sale, and that she lacked intent for the completion of the sale. Id. at 560. The court, however, found her actions of handing the buyer a plastic bag to hold the cocaine as evidence that she provided "the medium for packaging it." Id. Thus, in the court's view, she aided and abetted the criminal sale. Id.

Kemba Smith, sentenced under the Federal Guidelines, is another well-publicized example of how an intimate relationship provides a greater understanding regarding a woman's commission of low-level support acts. While a college student, Ms. Smith became the girlfriend of a high-level drug dealer who proceeded to physically and emotionally abuse her. Reginald Stuart, Justice Denied: Kemba's Nightmare Continues as Movement to Reverse Mandatory Minimums Grows, Emerge, May 31, 1998, at 41, 41. Ms. Smith's charges focused on her helping her boyfriend run a drug ring. Id. At the age of twenty-six, she was convicted as part of a drug conspiracy, receiving a sentence of twenty-four-and-a-half years in prison with no parole. Id. Ms. Smith received such a sentence despite prosecutors' statements that she did not use or sell drugs or benefit from her boyfriend's drug operation. Id. Ms. Smith was pardoned by President Clinton in December 2000. Deb Riechmann, Clinton Grants Pardons to 59 People, Associated Press, Dec. 23, 2000, available at 2000 WL 30836209.

86 People v. Prather, 672 N.Y.S.2d 562, 564 (App. Div. 1998); see also supra note 81 for facts related to the possession charge.

87 See Alan Feuer, Proposal to Ease Drug Laws Means Hope to Some in Jail, N.Y. Times, Jan. 19, 2001, at B3 (reporting Ms. Prather's statements that she was barbecuing when her husband requested foil, and that he also cooked often).

88 See id. (reporting Ms. Prather's statement that she knew her husband was dealing drugs but that she was not involved and did not approve).
her husband with his sales of cocaine," and sentenced her to twenty years to life.90

Another woman, Nicole Richardson, was eighteen years old when she told a government informant on the telephone where to find her boyfriend so that the informant and he could complete a sale of LSD.91 For this telephone call, she was convicted of conspiracy to distribute LSD and received a sentence of ten years in prison.92

Upon examining these types of support actions, it becomes clear that for women in relationship with drug dealers, their criminal acts and their relationships are intimately connected. For Ms. Prather, handing her husband tinfoil from their kitchen was an act that also was done during noncriminal activity in their daily life. Ignoring the context of the relationship disregards the possibility that her intent in providing tinfoil was to maintain the daily routine of their relationship, rather than to assist in drug activities. Nonetheless, the Laws do not distinguish between support acts of the relationship and support acts for drug activities, and thus implicitly equate the two. For many women, and perhaps for Ms. Richardson, the reasons why they decide to facilitate their boyfriends’ drug activities are the same reasons why they stay in an unhealthy and unsafe relationship.93 By ignoring the underlying context of the intimate relationship, actions such as living together, driving together, and answering the telephone, become as “serious” as actual drug transactions. Moreover, ignoring the context of the relationship, together with the harsh punishment of low-level support acts,94 predominantly harms women rather than men, as women are more likely to play a low-level support role.95

89 Prather, 672 N.Y.S.2d at 563.
90 Feuer, supra note 87, at B3.
91 David Dolinko, Ethical Problems of Mandatory Minimum Sentences, Tikkun, Mar.-Apr., 1998, at 27, 30; Gregg Easterbrook, Run-on Sentencing, New Republic, Apr. 26, 1999, at 57, 57. While Nicole Richardson was sentenced under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the Guidelines are very similar to the Rockefeller Drug Laws in their treatment of the charged criminal acts of women in relationship.
92 Dolinko, supra note 91, at 30. One article summed up her case by noting that “[a] foolish 18-year-old named Nicole Richardson, whose boyfriend had been dealing drugs, gets ten years for a telephone conversation in which she told a buyer where to find him.” Easterbrook, supra note 91, at 57.
93 See supra text accompanying notes 54-61.
94 See supra text accompanying note 70 and infra notes 95-98 and accompanying text for discussion of how low-level acts are punished harshly under the Laws.
95 Research suggests that women, in general, play “peripheral roles in male-dominated drug selling networks.” Maher, supra note 54, at 87, 106-07 (additionally noting that hierarchy of labor within street drug market is based largely on gender).

Seventy percent of women prisoners in New York were convicted of nonviolent crimes. Corr. Ass’n of N.Y., supra note 5. Under the Rockefeller Drug Laws, in 1997, women constituted only 8.3% of those convicted of the most serious (class A-1) drug felo-
3. Low-Level Criminal Acts

The third category encompasses criminal acts committed by women who for the most part have a nonexistent, or a nonviolent, criminal history. This category includes acts such as the delivery of an envelope containing drugs or the completion of a drug sale. The "seriousness," or level of such a criminal offense under the Laws, is determined by the amount of the drug involved; the offense with which the woman is charged is linked neither to her state of mind nor to the context of the crime. A woman, therefore, will receive a sentence based on the amount of drugs in the delivery or sale without regard to her role in the larger drug activities or the motivations underlying her offense.

The story of Dolores Donovan illustrates how an intimate relationship can be intertwined with this category of offense. Ms. Donovan was charged with criminal sale of a controlled substance in the first degree, and criminal possession of a controlled substance in the first and third degrees. Her crime involved obtaining four ounces of cocaine to help her boyfriend complete a drug sale. Ms. Donovan was first seen entering the home of Mr. Kjellgren, her boyfriend, a man who was the subject of an investigation by the Long Island Drug Enforcement Task Force and who was known to be both a frequent user and seller of many types of drugs. There was no
reliable evidence, on the other hand, that Ms. Donovan had any previous involvement in drug activities. As the New York Court of Appeals noted in a later case, 

"[the] Defendant's involvement in the transaction was in procuring the drugs, apparently without personal profit, at her boyfriend's behest." At trial, Mr. Kjellgren was the primary witness against his girlfriend. In exchange for his cooperation with the government, Mr. Kjellgren, the original focus of the investigation, received a sentence of lifetime probation. For her act, Ms. Donovan was sentenced to two mandatory concurrent terms of fifteen years to life.

Ms. Donovan's story demonstrates how an intimate relationship may underlie criminal acts such as a single sale of drugs or the delivery of drugs to complete a sale. The woman commits the drug offense,

103 Id. at 122 (Mollen, J., dissenting). The only evidence that Ms. Donovan had experience in drug activities was uncorroborated and unsworn statements by her boyfriend, Mr. Kjellgren. Id.


105 Donovan, 454 N.Y.S.2d at 120 (Mollen, J., dissenting).

106 Id. at 121-22 (Mollen, J., dissenting). For further discussion of the cooperation aspects of this case, see infra text accompanying notes 140-43.

107 Donovan, 454 N.Y.S.2d at 119.


Tina Tovar had been found guilty of two counts of the criminal sale of a controlled substance in the third degree and one count of criminal possession of a controlled substance in the third degree. Tovar, 685 N.Y.S.2d at 528. She received an aggregate sentence of four to twelve years. Id. Ms. Tovar appealed her sentence as unduly harsh due to her lack of criminal history, the small scale of the offense, and her remorse for the offense, which "stemmed from her involvement with a drug-dealing boyfriend." Id.

In Migliore, the Appellate Division reversed the trial court's discretionary sentencing of Eucharista Migliore to four years to life and resentenced her to the mandatory fifteen years to life. Migliore, 540 N.Y.S.2d at 443. Ms. Migliore was found guilty of criminal possession of a controlled substance in the first degree. Id. at 442. The court disagreed with the sentencing court's finding that the "defendant played merely a passive role as a courier for her husband." Id. at 443. The appellate court found the record to show that she was an active participant in the drug sale, that she had committed perjury on the stand, and that she had committed other crimes in the past. Id.

Mary Lee Robinson was convicted of the criminal sale of a controlled substance in the second degree. Robinson, 417 N.Y.S.2d at 88. Ms. Robinson was tried jointly with her husband, who was convicted of the same offense. Id. at 89. The husband's counsel reported that his client, Mr. Simmons, was threatened that if he did not cooperate, his wife would also be indicted. The husband did not cooperate. His wife, Ms. Robinson, was arrested approximately one month after her husband's arrest for the same incident. Id. The trial court judge said with respect to Ms. Robinson, "I feel she became involved in this case because of her husband, Mr. Simmons." Id. While her involvement in the sale was unclear, it appears from the record that she transferred the package containing drugs from her and her husband's home to the location of the eventual sale. Id. The trial court sentenced her to six years to life. Id. at 90. However, the appellate court decided that this was
not for her own financial profit, but rather as part of maintaining the emotional relationship. While it is true that the act that the woman commits is criminal, to focus solely on the act rather than the underlying circumstances can exaggerate the role the woman has in her partner's broader drug activity. As the dissenting judge in Ms. Donovan's case stated: "The defendant's role . . . seems to have been peripheral, since she simply made inquiries for her erstwhile boyfriend and acted as a courier for him in his attempt to obtain drugs."\textsuperscript{109} Women sentenced under the Laws, like Ms. Donovan, are typically low-level offenders with no serious prior criminal history.\textsuperscript{110} Women in relationship may be drawn to commit a single drug crime, not as part of a larger drug crime network, but as part of a larger intimate relationship. While the woman's drug offense should not be completely excused because of the underlying relationship, understanding the criminal act and judging the woman's ultimate blameworthiness require an examination of the reasons why a woman would choose to commit a crime rather than leave or end the relationship.\textsuperscript{111}

C. Providing Material Assistance Under the Laws

Regardless of the crime with which an offender is charged, an offender can seek a shorter sentence under the "material assistance" provision of the Rockefeller Drug Laws.\textsuperscript{112} "Material assistance" describes the information a criminal defendant can offer the prosecutor

\textsuperscript{109} Donovan, 454 N.Y.S.2d at 122 (Mollen, J., dissenting) (arguing that defendant's sentence violated Eighth Amendment); cf. Carmona v. Ward, 439 U.S. 1091, 1102 (1979) (Marshall, J., dissenting from denial of cert.) ("However serious its narcotics problem, New York cannot constitutionally treat those with peripheral involvement in drug trafficking as if they were responsible for the problem in its entirety.").

\textsuperscript{110} See supra note 95 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{111} See supra text accompanying notes 54-61. The probation report in Dolores Donovan's case stated that "the instant offense is out of character with the defendant's normal behavior." Donovan, 454 N.Y.S.2d at 122 (quoting report). Understanding the context of the relationship underlying the offense may help explain such out-of-character behavior.

\textsuperscript{112} N.Y. Penal Law § 65.00(1)(b) (McKinney 1998) (defining material assistance). Research on the application of the material assistance provision of the Rockefeller Drug Laws is scarce. Some researchers, most notably Myrna Raeder, have questioned and critiqued the parallel provision in the Federal Sentencing Guidelines. Raeder, supra note 19, at 980-84. For an excellent documentary on some of the results of reliance on assistance to the government, see generally Frontline: Snitch (PBS television broadcast, Jan. 12, 1999) [hereinafter Snitch], transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/snip/snip/etc/script.html.

Since there is little research on the New York provision, this Note will discuss it using studies of the federal provision. Despite some differences in application (e.g., different judges and prosecutors), the provisions are almost identical in text and structure. Compare
in exchange for a reduction in his or her prison sentence. The stated purpose of the provision is to provide an incentive for low-level drug offenders to give information about high-level drug offenders. Under the Laws, the prosecutor decides if the information is of "real importance"; in practice, this usually means determining whether the information will lead to the arrest of a person involved in drug activities. This is the only way a person charged with an A-1 felony can receive a reduced sentence of as little as lifetime probation.

Since the material assistance provision is the sole means of receiving a reduced sentence under the Laws, whether women in relationships have the ability to qualify for such a departure is a very important determination. There is little research on how women offenders fare in obtaining a reduction due to material assistance. Research on whether women or men receive quantitatively more "substantial assistance" departures under the parallel provision in the federal system is also unclear. The critical question, however, is not who receives more departures, but the reasons for which these depart-


113 In the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, this aid is labeled "substantial assistance." Federal Sentencing Guidelines Manual, supra note 98, § 5K1.1. The terms are interchangeable for the purposes of this discussion.


115 Id. ("'Material' is defined as being of real importance or great significance and 'assistance' is defined as help supplied or given."). The decision of whether the information offered is sufficiently helpful lies in the hands of the prosecutor rather than the judge. Id. at 776.

116 The relevant part of New York Penal Law § 65.00(1)(b) reads: The court . . . may sentence a person to a period of probation upon conviction of a class A-II felony or a class B felony defined in article two hundred twenty if the prosecutor either orally on the record or in a writing filed with the indictment recommends that the court sentence such person to a period of probation upon the ground that such person has or is providing material assistance in the investigation, apprehension or prosecution of any person for a felony defined in article two hundred twenty or the attempt or the conspiracy to commit any such felony . . . .

N.Y. Penal Law § 65.00(1)(b) (McKinney 1998).

117 Huling, supra note 10, at 19.

118 In researching this Note, no studies or documentation were found on the application of the material assistance provision of the New York law.

119 For example, Ilene Nagel and Barry Johnson report that the data of the U.S. Sentencing Commission indicates that female drug offenders are considerably more likely than male drug offenders to receive substantial assistance departures. Nagel & Johnson, supra note 45, at 217 (analyzing data from fiscal years 1991 and 1992). In contrast, Myrna Raeder, looking at the same data, concludes that substantial assistance accounts for a larger percentage of all departures given to men than given to women. Raeder, supra note 19, at 980 (analyzing data from fiscal years 1991 and 1992). As Raeder notes, the difficulty in analyzing this data is the lack of information on the individual circumstances in each
tures are given. Researchers agree that women offenders often lack sufficient information to merit a departure based on substantial assistance.\textsuperscript{120} Furthermore, research suggests that for women who do receive such departures, considerations other than the value of their information may have been the prosecutors' or judges' motivation.\textsuperscript{121} Women offenders, however, cannot rely consistently on prosecutors' sympathy or other discretionary factors that may support a material assistance motion, and subsequently, a lower sentence.\textsuperscript{122} It is there-

\textsuperscript{120} While Nagel and Johnson state that female drug offenders are more likely than males to receive a departure due to substantial assistance, they still give credence to Raeder's contention that women offenders often lack sufficient information to provide legally sufficient assistance. Nagel & Johnson, supra note 45, at 218 & n.175 (stating this proposition and citing to Raeder in corresponding footnote).

\textsuperscript{121} Id. at 218 (citing research of Nagel and Professor Stephen Schulhofer). Factors such as sympathy toward a woman offender or the belief that the mandatory sentence is too harsh may influence the prosecutor's decision to make a motion and the judge's decision of how great a reduction in sentence to grant. Id.; see also Ilene H. Nagel & Stephen J. Schulhofer, A Tale of Three Cities: An Empirical Study of Charging and Bargaining Practices Under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, 66 S. Cal. L. Rev. 501, 531 (1992) (suggesting that under Federal Guidelines, substantial assistance departures may be awarded to sympathetic defendants rather than defendants who provided substantial help to prosecutors). While these discretionary factors apply to both male and female offenders, in practice they disproportionately may benefit women offenders. Nagel & Johnson, supra note 45, at 218 (stating that disproportionate share of substantial assistance departures given to women defendants may reflect judges' and prosecutors' greater sympathy for female offenders). Nagel and Johnson argue that their finding that women receive more substantial departures than men is evidence of continuing special treatment for women, but Kathleen Daly argues that such disparity can be seen as judges addressing, and attempting to remedy, the fact that the guidelines have "not been fashioned with women or variations in their lawbreaking in mind." Daly, Sentencing, supra note 42, at 166.

There are other considerations that apply to both male and female offenders that might cause prosecutors to ask for a substantial assistance departure. E.g., Roberto Suro, More Informers Buy a Break on U.S. Sentence Guidelines, Wash. Post, Aug. 12, 1997, at A1 (stating that whether defendant gets deduction may depend on how defendant performs as government witness at trial).

\textsuperscript{122} Raeder describes the current use of the substantial assistance departure by stating "the fortuity of the departure is evident." Raeder, supra note 19, at 983. Raeder goes on to say, "[w]e will never know whether the wife was really granted the departure as a way of ensuring the husband's participation . . . , whether she had enough information to justify a departure, or whether she simply appeared deserving enough to warrant a sentence below the mandatory minimum." Id. Discretion also removes any checks on prosecutors' decisions whether or not to award material assistance. See People v. Garcia, 558 N.Y.S.2d 63, 64 (App. Div. 1990) (holding that N.Y. Penal Law § 65.00(1)(b) "in no way commits the prosecution to taking any action to facilitate or otherwise accept defendant's offer of assistance"); see also Stuart, supra note 85, at 42 (discussing case of Kemba Smith and claim by her lawyers from NAACP Legal Defense Fund that government reneged on promise to make substantial assistance motion in federal court).

Although the sympathy of prosecutors and judges and their feelings about mandatory sentencing laws may lead to a more appropriate sentence for a particular woman offender, reliance on such feelings is not an appropriate policy solution. Mechanisms in the actual
fore necessary to evaluate women offenders’ ability to satisfy the legal requirements of the provision.

Examination of the ability of women in relationship to offer sufficient information under the Laws highlights the problematic aspects of the material assistance provision. It is likely that women, particularly women in relationship, will be unable to provide the requisite assistance as stated by law. Because the amount of information required to obtain a reduction is both substantial and unclear, low-level offenders often do not have enough information to turn in higher players in the drug chain. Given the gender-based role patterns in drug activities, it is disproportionately women who will not be able to offer sufficient information. For a woman in relationship, her sentencing process should be created for the fair and appropriate sentencing of offenders statewide, rather than forcing offenders (those who happened to know sufficient information to be considered for an assistance motion in the first place) to rely on the possibility of sympathy. For a policy proposal regarding the material assistance provision, see infra Part III.B.1.

Additionally, the fact that prosecutors or judges may grant an “unearned” material assistance motion because of their belief that the sentence would otherwise be too harsh speaks for the need to evaluate and reform both the material assistance provision in particular and drug penalties in general. See Daly, Sentencing, supra note 42, at 166 (arguing that gender disparity in sentence deductions is due to legal officials redressing an unjust, male-normed sentencing scheme and suggesting more general reform based on viewing women as sentencing subjects).

Many of the reasons why a woman may not be able to offer legally sufficient material assistance, such as threat of physical harm and lack of sufficient knowledge, also may apply to male defendants. See, e.g., People v. Eason, 353 N.E.2d 587, 588 (N.Y. 1976) (stating that despite fact that defendant told prosecutor all he knew about local drug crime, prosecutor is not required to deem that sufficient material assistance); Juan Gonzalez, A Loving Dad Dies in Prison, N.Y. Daily News, Sept. 14, 1999, at 12 (reporting that offender Jose Garcia did not take offer to provide substantial assistance to government as gang leaders threatened to hurt his family if he testified against them). This Note does not argue that these reasons are exclusive to female offenders. Rather, it highlights that these reasons why offenders cannot offer sufficient material assistance are often present in the context of women’s drug crimes.

See supra note 95 (discussing women’s low-level support role in drug crimes); see also infra note 127 (examining women’s common role as low-level offenders as related to providing assistance).


See supra notes 54, 56, 95 (discussing women’s general roles in drug activities).

Huling, supra note 10, at 19 (noting opinion of drug enforcement agents and prosecutors that women rarely can offer valuable assistance due to marginal roles); Raeder, supra note 31, at 61 (stating that women’s peripheral roles in drug activities place them “at a disadvantage” in obtaining assistance departure because they often have little to offer government); Jack B. Weinstein, The Effect of Sentencing on Women, Men, the Family,
partner more likely will be able to provide assistance to the government as he likely will be more directly connected to the drug activity.\textsuperscript{128}

It is critical to realize that, in addition to not having sufficient information, a woman in relationship may not offer material assistance because to do so would require her to "snitch"\textsuperscript{129} on her boyfriend or husband. This aspect of providing information to the government is particularly problematic for women in relationship given certain characteristics of relationships that involve drug activities.\textsuperscript{130} There are many reasons why a woman may choose to place greater value on the relationship rather than on her individual interest in avoiding a lengthy prison sentence. The woman may depend in part upon her partner for economic support for herself and/or their children. Additionally, the choice to snitch may not be a realistic one if she is in an abusive relationship or her partner threatens to harm her if she contacts the authorities.\textsuperscript{131} Since many female offenders do not have a supportive family environment, as evidenced by the high rates of reported physical and sexual abuse,\textsuperscript{132} a woman offender may rely on her partner to provide familial support and structure, something he could not do if he too were incarcerated. Finally, the traditional socialization of women impresses upon a woman the need to "stand by her man."\textsuperscript{133} Images of women who are deemed "valuable" and the Community, 5 Colum. J. Gender & L. 169, 174 (1996) (stating that women's minor roles in drug trade, dominance of men, and fear for their children make it unlikely that women will receive assistance reduction).

\textsuperscript{128} See, e.g., infra notes 140-43 and accompanying text (presenting story of Dolores Donovan); see also supra note 127 (discussing disadvantage of women generally in obtaining assistance motions).

\textsuperscript{129} In mainstream culture, offering assistance to prosecutors often has negative connotations. Most commonly referred to in prison culture as "snitching," providing material assistance is also referred to in the mass media as when someone "turn[s] in a few friends," helps "rat out" others, or, in the case of a large-scale drug dealer who comes forward, a "kingfish who turned state's evidence." Jakes & Caher, supra note 3, at A1.

\textsuperscript{130} See supra text accompanying note 55 (listing comfort and companionship as positive reasons for maintaining relationship, and drug addiction and domestic abuse as negative reasons for doing so).

\textsuperscript{131} Even if the woman is not actually threatened with physical harm by an abusive partner, as a victim of possible emotional and mental abuse, she may not have the courage, self-esteem, or outside support needed to give information about him to the government and survive the possible consequences.

\textsuperscript{132} Forty-seven percent of the female state prison population have been victims of physical abuse, while thirty-nine percent report being victims of sexual abuse. Many have been victims of both. Mauer et al., supra note 37, at 1; see also supra text accompanying note 55.

\textsuperscript{133} See, e.g., Tammy Wynette, Stand By Your Man, on Stand By Your Man (Sony/Epic 1968) (imploring listeners to "[s]tand by your man / And tell the world you love him / Keep giving all the love you can / Stand by your man"), available at http://ckcountry.homestead.com/standbyman-ie4.html; see also Kathryn Abrams, Choice, Dependence, and the Reinvigoration of the Traditional Family, 73 Ind. L.J. 517, 521 (1998) (arguing that...
because they do not abandon their boyfriend during trouble continue today to be a part of the mass-media culture. Therefore, while a woman in relationship personally may gain in one respect by providing assistance (a shorter prison sentence), such action may not only be an option that is unrealistic and would cause the intimate relationship to end, but also one which would lead her to lose value as a woman in the eyes of society.

Given that a woman in relationship often does not have, or does not want to give, sufficient information, her and her partner's sentencing often results in what is termed "inverted sentencing." "Inverted sentencing" describes the following scenario: The more serious the defendant's drug crimes, the more information he possibly has to offer to the government, and thus he ends up with a lower sentence than someone who is a lower-level offender. This result directly contra-
dicts the stated purpose of the assistance provision: to find and punish high-level offenders.\(^{137}\) For this reason, inverted sentencing is troubling enough when it occurs between any two offenders or between people involved in the same incident. The most manifest injustices, however, occur when it is the result within the context of an intimate relationship.

In many cases, a woman in relationship is not able to provide assistance to the government while her boyfriend or husband is able to do so, thus resulting in inverted sentencing within the relationship.\(^{138}\) What is even more troubling, however, is that the assistance provided by the male offender in these cases may include not only giving information on his other drug contacts, but helping in the prosecution of his wife or girlfriend as well.\(^{139}\) Recall for example, the story of Dolores Donovan.\(^{140}\) Ms. Donovan, who had no knowledge about drug dealing, was unable to provide sufficient material assistance and received a sentence of two concurrent fifteen-years-to-life sentences.\(^{141}\) Her boyfriend, on the other hand, the original focus of the law enforcement investigation, agreed to cooperate with the government in exchange for lifetime probation.\(^{142}\) His cooperation included testifying against Ms. Donovan at trial.\(^{143}\)

An examination of the ability of women in relationship to receive a material assistance departure brings to light its many troubling aspects. Women in relationship have a difficult time securing such a reduction due to their lack of sufficient information or because of the

\(^{137}\) See supra text accompanying note 114.

\(^{138}\) The case of Nicole Richardson illustrates this problem. See supra notes 91-92. Ms. Richardson and her boyfriend were convicted of conspiracy to distribute drugs. Dolinko, supra note 91, at 30. Her boyfriend received a sentence of five years as he was able to provide substantial assistance to the government. Id. Ms. Richardson, on the other hand, was not able to give enough information and received a sentence of ten years. Id.

\(^{139}\) For example, Dorothy Gaines received a twenty-year sentence under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines. She was involved with a man who used and sold drugs. In exchange for a reduced sentence, he implicated her in the crime. Snitch, supra note 112 (discussing story of Dorothy Gaines).

Such assistance by men is not helping put more serious drug offenders behind bars; their girlfriends are rarely high-level drug offenders. Rather, the men are simply helping to secure another conviction and their own reduced sentence. See supra notes 95, 127; see also infra Part III.B.1 for proposal against "snitching down."

\(^{140}\) See supra notes 99-107 and accompanying text.

\(^{141}\) People v. Donovan, 454 N.Y.S.2d 118, 121 (App. Div. 1982) (Mollen, J., dissenting) (noting that defendant stated she was unable to provide more cooperation as she had no further knowledge about drug dealing).

\(^{142}\) Id. at 120 (Mollen, J., dissenting). Mr. Kjellgren was originally facing a fifteen-year minimum sentence. Id. at 121-22 (Mollen, J., dissenting).

\(^{143}\) Id. at 120 (Mollen, J., dissenting).
risks involved in providing such information. Additionally, the problem of inverted sentencing, given the differences in men's and women's ability to give information, becomes even more troubling when the context of an intimate relationship is highlighted.

III

Reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws

Examining the Laws' treatment of drug offenders from the perspective of women in relationship reveals that, in application, the seemingly gender-neutral Rockefeller Drug Laws are not gender-neutral at all. Instead, sentences under the Laws are particularly unjust with respect to women in relationship and the crimes they commit. This focus on women in relationship is critical in order to propose reforms that will adequately and fairly address their lives and offenses. Moreover, a focus on how women in relationship fare in sentencing illuminates general problems in the Laws, the reform of which will result in more just treatment of male and female offenders alike.

A. General Critique of the Laws and Current Efforts for Reform

After highlighting the crimes and sentences of women in relationship, it is clear that the Laws do not allow judges to sentence offenders according to their level of blameworthiness. The Laws currently forbid judges from taking into account either the characteristics of the offender or the characteristics of the offense.\(^4\)\(^4\) The lengthy mandatory sentences, and the fact that the amount of the drug involved is the only consideration used to determine the level of offense, force judges to sentence offenders to harsh terms of imprisonment that they personally might believe are not appropriate. These problems in the Laws, brought into focus by analyzing the treatment of women in relationship, apply to many other offenders as well. All women offenders are hurt by the Laws' refusal to look at the underlying gender roles in drug crimes.\(^1\)\(^4\)\(^5\) Low-level offenders, both male and female, are harmed by the Laws' sole focus on the weight of the drug and prohibition against looking at the offender's role in the offense.\(^1\)\(^4\)\(^6\)

Reforms that respond to these criticisms of the Laws ultimately will help make the Laws more just for many offenders, both male and

\(^{144}\) See supra text accompanying note 97.
\(^{145}\) See supra text accompanying notes 95-98; cf. Raeder, supra note 19, at 990 (stating that mandatory sentences and prosecutors' power to plea-bargain can often disadvantage women because of their minor roles in drug conspiracies).
\(^{146}\) See supra text accompanying notes 97-98.
female. But the focus on a particular impacted group—in this case, women in relationship—is a critical component of evaluating and proposing more general reforms. Without this focus on the particular groups affected, there is no assurance that the proposed reforms actually will address the injustices towards the offenders who many reform advocates believe are deserving of more just treatment. Indeed, some current proposals for reform will not address adequately the concerns raised by recognizing an intimate relationship as the context of many women’s drug crimes.147

Today, there are calls for reform from people on all sides of the debate.148 People with various political viewpoints have proposed legislative reforms that range from relatively narrow and specific reforms to proposals for complete repeal.149 Proposals for reform have come in great numbers, but reform has not been carried out as of early 2001.150 Although eventually blocked in the New York state legislature due to political disagreements,151 Governor Pataki’s proposals
have had more political acceptance than most.152

An analysis of Governor Pataki's reform bill153 demonstrates how, without a focus on women in relationship during the formulation of the reforms, proposals may inadequately reform the current harshness in their sentencing.154 For example, the Pataki bill offers appellate review of the sentences of the most serious drug offenders and the possibility of a one-third reduction in their sentences.155 In application, this reform bill would not have a sizable impact upon women in relationship because the vast majority of them are not convicted of the most serious felonies.156 Moreover, even for women who are eligible for the reduction, an appeals court would be instructed, before granting such a reduction, to look at factors such as whether the offense was an isolated incident versus a pattern of activity and whether the defendant derived a benefit from the sale of drugs.157 In light of these factors, women in relationship likely would not receive the reduction. Because she may live with her partner and perhaps raise a child with him, the woman's crime may be seen as part of the pattern of her partner's drug activity, and acts such as buying food and clothing may be viewed as receiving the benefits of drug money.
B. Proposals for Reform

By ignoring the characteristics of the offense and the offender, the Laws have failed to address adequately the needs of many offenders. This failure particularly harms women in relationship because their crimes often have characteristics that affect their ultimate blameworthiness. Reform proposals formulated through the lens of women in relationship can be viewed as taking a “woman-normed” approach to sentencing.158 It is an approach that considers “women as sentencing subjects”159 and uses the circumstances and experiences of women’s crimes as a basis for asking broader questions about fair and appropriate sentencing for all offenders, men and women.160 The following reform proposals are made in this vein.161

I. Reforms of the Laws

The evaluation of the Laws’ treatment of women in relationship illuminates three substantial areas for statutory reform. First, the level of offense should not be determined solely by the amount of the drug involved.162 The use of amount as the only determining factor in

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158 Coombs, supra note 19, at 1703-04 (using this phrase to describe her approach as replacement for traditional male-focused and allegedly gender-neutral criminology).

159 Daly, Sentencing, supra note 42, at 166.

160 Id. at 167 (arguing for investigation of circumstances of women’s lives and crimes and using findings as starting point for discussion of broader questions about appropriateness of men’s and women’s penalties); see also Coombs, supra note 19, at 1706 (arguing that once certain factors that affect notions of blameworthiness in crime are observed in women offenders, these factors should be taken into account in both women’s and men’s lives).

The proposed policy changes are motivated in part by the need to point out the traditional centrality of the “male” perspective in the formation of policies and the lack of incorporation of the realities of women’s lives. However, as part of the awareness of the exclusion of women’s experiences from this “male” perspective, it is recognized that men of color and low-income men are also not included in this traditional “male” perspective. Therefore, while this Note focuses on a dialogue about women, this dialogue does not have to exclude the experiences of men. Reforms in this vein “maintain[] a focus on women’s lives and on redressing harms to women, but . . . do[ ] not ignore those men who have been crippled by patriarchal, class, and race relations.” Daly, supra note 20, at 15. Thus, by suggesting policy reforms that focus on the realities of women offenders’ lives, these policies also strive to address the similar needs of many marginalized men.

161 Reform proposals emerging from an analysis of women’s drug crimes are arguably gender-neutral, as opposed to gender-specific, thus achieving one of the goals of the Laws’ original sponsors. Kathleen Daly defines gender-neutral policies as those “that have considered the varied ways in which sex and gender matter in the social organization of crime, in the particular contexts in which crimes emerge, in the seriousness of crime, in the culpability and blameworthiness of offenders, and in the consequences of punishment.” Daly, Sentencing, supra note 42, at 166. The proposals are not gender-specific because they can be applied to both male and female offenders.

162 The amount (measured by weight) of the drug currently mandates the level of crime committed and the corresponding sentence. See supra note 97 and accompanying text.
the seriousness of the crime should be rejected because it ignores the various roles offenders play in drug activities.\textsuperscript{163} For women in relationship, it often overvalues her marginal role in the crime and ignores her involvement in a relationship in which the man is the one significantly involved in drug activities.\textsuperscript{164}

Second, the material assistance provision should be amended to address the concerns raised by focusing on women in relationship. For example, in order to fight the result of inverted sentencing, "snitching down"\textsuperscript{165} should not be allowed unless it could be shown that the sentencing of the low-level offender is more critical to fighting the drug trade than the sentencing of the high-level offender. In practice, this would mean that drug dealers who are the original focus of police investigation would not be allowed to give information on low-level drug offenders, such as their girlfriends or wives, in exchange for a reduced sentence. It also would mean that the prosecution of the low-level offender within a relationship, most often the woman, based solely on the testimony of the higher-level offender in that relationship, most often the man, would not be allowed.

Third, some judicial discretion should be reinserted into the sentencing process. Judges must have the ability, other than relying on the provision for material assistance,\textsuperscript{166} to tailor sentences to the blameworthiness of the offender. They should have a mechanism for the consideration of both the characteristics of the offense and the characteristics of the offender. A return to the pre-1973 setting of full judicial discretion in the sentencing process is not likely, nor is it necessarily desirable, given the importance of some uniformity in sentences and the probability that racial and gender prejudices might reemerge. Therefore, explicit mechanisms to harness judicial discretion are necessary.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{163} If quantity of drugs were determined to be an important factor in assessing blameworthiness, it would be possible to add consideration of the amount as an aggravating factor to the sentence. This is the approach in California. Cal. Penal Code § 1170.73 (West Supp. 2001) (stating that court should consider quantity of drugs in determining whether to impose aggravated sentence).
\item \textsuperscript{164} See supra note 95 (discussing women's low-level roles in drug crimes).
\item \textsuperscript{165} This term is used to describe when an offender gives information on a lower-level offender, thus snitching on someone lower on the drug chain.
\item \textsuperscript{166} While it is recognized that the government depends on the provision for material assistance to provide needed sources of information, given that many offenders, particularly women in relationship, cannot provide sufficient information, see supra Part II.C, it should not be the sole mechanism for sentence reduction. Other means of reduction, such as the mechanisms suggested in this Part, should also be available.
\end{itemize}
One option is to create limited and narrow instances when a judge can go below the mandatory sentence by a set amount.\textsuperscript{167} To address the concerns of women in relationship, a downward sentence adjustment could be provided explicitly for cases in which it is probable that, but for the relationship, the offender would not have committed the crimes charged. Other possible adjustments, such as one for a minor role in the offense, would benefit women in relationship as well as other offenders judges may also find less blameworthy.

Another option for reform is to give the judge more discretion in determining the sentence but to provide guidelines that list what factors are appropriate to evaluate, and what the corresponding sentences should be. Voluntary guidelines could be adopted that suggest factors, such as the influence of an intimate relationship, that would justify a lower sentence.\textsuperscript{168} Alternatively, specific lower sentencing ranges could be provided for cases in which certain mitigating factors, such as a minor role in the offense, are present.\textsuperscript{169}

The concerns of women in relationship would be addressed either by a fixed sentence adjustment for certain cases where the drug crime was tied to an intimate relationship, or by guidelines that instruct a judge to consider this context in determining the sentence. In applica-

\textsuperscript{167} This option is exemplified by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines. While this option still does not allow a lot of judicial discretion, it would allow more tailoring of sentences than currently allowed under the Laws. Under the Guidelines, there are explicit set sentence adjustments for certain circumstances of the offense or offender (e.g., role in offense, acceptance of responsibility). Federal Sentencing Guidelines Manual, supra note 98, §§ 3B1.2, 3E1.1. A larger departure is possible under the Guidelines but is rarely used by judges. Judges are able to depart from the given sentencing range if they find circumstances in the case that make it unlike most other cases and render the defendant less blameworthy. Id. at ch. 1, pt. A(4)(b) (stating guidelines for departures outside sentencing range); see also, e.g., United States v. Milken, Fed. Sec. L. Rep. (CCH) ¶ 96,933, 1992 WL 196797, at *1 (S.D.N.Y. Aug. 5, 1992) (No. SS 89 CR 41 (KMW)) (mem.) (granting reduction by taking into account substantial assistance by defendant, defendant's good acts in prison, defendant's actions to work towards settlements of other related lawsuits, and illness in defendant's family). While this second type of adjustment is relatively rare, it is still a means of rendering the sentence more appropriate. Currently, under the Rockefeller Drug Laws, judges do not have the ability to reduce a sentence in either manner.

\textsuperscript{168} Delaware is one of several states that have a voluntary guidelines system. See Tonry, supra note 18, at 27-28 (discussing sentencing system of Delaware). One caveat is that some studies show that voluntary guidelines have little effect on the sentences imposed. See id. at 27. Delaware may be the one exception. See id. at 27-28.

\textsuperscript{169} This mechanism currently is used in California. California has a determinate sentencing system in which the judge has the option of sentencing an offender to one of three sentence terms for the particular crime: the base term, the aggravated term, or the mitigated term. See Cal. Penal Code § 1170 (West Supp. 2001); Cal. Ct. R. 4.405 (defining sentencing terms). Circumstances of aggravation and mitigation explicitly are listed. See Cal. Ct. R. 4.421 (listing aggravating circumstances such as vulnerable victim and abuse of position of trust); Cal. Ct. R. 4.423 (listing mitigating circumstances such as being induced by others or playing passive or minor role).
tion, these mechanisms would allow the judge to reduce the sentence below the mandatory sentence if the judge determined that the relationship played a critical role in the offender's decision to commit a drug crime, thereby reducing the blameworthiness of the offender.\textsuperscript{170} Although it is difficult to define what circumstances will be sufficient for this reduction,\textsuperscript{171} judges traditionally have evaluated other difficult-to-determine sentencing criteria, such as the offender's acceptance of responsibility, the influence of others on the offender, and the offender's family responsibilities.\textsuperscript{172} In evaluating the context of the relationship, the judge's inquiry would include looking at the person who was the initial focus of the investigation, the role the defendant played in the actual offense, and the influence that the partner and the relationship had on the defendant and her decision to commit the crime.\textsuperscript{173} It is therefore both possible and appropriate for judges to consider the intimate relationship, either by explicit direction to evaluate the influence of the relationship on the offender, or within a broader mandate to consider the offender's role in the offense.

2. Policy Reforms

If New York is serious about wanting to reduce both drug crime and drug usage, the legislature must explore meaningful alternatives to incarceration, including mandatory drug treatment.\textsuperscript{174} Harsh pun-
ishment of low-level offenders, particularly women in relationship, ignores the complex social problems that impact the lives of these offenders.\textsuperscript{175} In fact, imprisoning the offender often compounds the problems the offender faced before committing the offense because the offender then becomes a victim of the prison system.\textsuperscript{176} To address effectively the complex societal problem of drugs, we must attempt to prevent drug crime before it starts. This entails constructing meaningful ways for women to leave violent and unhealthy relationships. Programs that help fight poverty and abuse and help women achieve greater autonomy also would reduce the number of women involved in drug crime.\textsuperscript{177} It also is critical that once women commit an offense and are incarcerated, they, along with other offenders, have options of drug treatment, educational programs, and counseling.\textsuperscript{178} Such programs will support an independent and healthy life whether in prison or out, and whether in a relationship or not.

**Conclusion**

These reform proposals are only the first steps in the reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws and other similar drug sentencing laws across the country.\textsuperscript{179} While it is crucial that reform start immediately, it is equally critical to begin the reform process by questioning and
examining the theoretical and practical foundations of this reform. The Laws’ failure to consider the social context of the offender’s crime particularly hurts women, as the context of drug crime is often gender-linked,\textsuperscript{180} both in terms of the context itself (women committing drug crimes within a relationship) and the position of women within that context (women’s support role in the drug activity and relationship). Moreover, by ignoring the context of an intimate relationship, the Laws also ignore problems within the relationship and the overlapping societal subordination based on race, gender, and class.\textsuperscript{181} Recognition of these characteristics of the offender and the context of her crime is important because it acknowledges both that many offenders are subordinated and marginalized in society on the basis of race, gender, and class, and that these same processes occur in the context of drug crimes.\textsuperscript{182} Issues of violence, poverty, substance abuse, and discrimination underlie and contribute to people’s decisions to commit drug crimes. By sentencing offenders without regard to these problems, we end up “shaming and blaming those whose needs are exposed.”\textsuperscript{183} This not only hurts the individual offenders, but also injures society’s own notions of equality and just punishment.

\textsuperscript{180} The term “gender-linked” is used to suggest that the various circumstances of an offender’s drug crime will differ depending on the gender of the offender. These differences are not innate to gender; rather, they are a product of the role gender plays in shaping the circumstances and context of crime. See Coombs, supra note 19, at 1689 (supporting proposition that differences in men and women’s crimes are not product of gender as such, but rather are “gendered”).

\textsuperscript{181} See Chesney-Lind, supra note 5, at 4 (arguing that gender, race, and class of women offenders often place them at periphery of socioeconomic society); see also Kimberle Crenshaw, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color, 43 Stan. L. Rev. 1241, 1246 (1993) (stating that in context of battered women of color, systems of race, gender, and class domination converge); supra note 40 (providing statistics regarding race and class of women offenders).

\textsuperscript{182} See Ann C. Scales, The Emergence of Feminist Jurisprudence: An Essay, 95 Yale L.J. 1373, 1394-96 (1986) (arguing that law should focus not on gender differences but on social and economic deprivation, which is promulgated based on these differences); see also supra note 54.