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Incapacitated Fatherhood: The Impact of Incarceration on African American Fathers

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For Kristina and McKenzie
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ABSTRACT

This project examines the ways that incarceration can shape the meaning and performance of fatherhood. Using 109 surveys and 30 in-depth interviews, three dominant themes emerged that constitute a model *father identity standard*: 1) being there for their children; 2) being an example for their children; and 3) providing their children with love, basic needs, and protection. The findings indicate that prison environment and post-incarceration restrictions do not support fathers’ ability to perform their roles as fathers, or the maintenance of healthy relationships between fathers and their children. Specifically, it disrupts the father identity confirmation process. As a result, relational strain occurs, causing excessive and at times irreparable damage to fathers and their children.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The unprecedented growth of African American men in the U.S. prison population over the past thirty years has caused tremendous harm to the men themselves, their families and to the communities in which they live. At low levels, incarceration rates can be viewed as having direct impact to individuals and families but relatively minimal impact on communities (Clayton and Moore 2003). However, the current state of disproportionately high incarceration among African American men constitutes an issue of critical importance not only to individuals, families, and communities but to society as a whole. While African American males make up less than 6% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2014), they now supply nearly 39% of the adult, male prison population and are imprisoned at a rate six times higher than that of non-Hispanic whites (Bureau of Justice 2013). Research further indicates that black males are at a 7% higher risk to be incarcerated sometime during their lifetime compared to their white counter-parts (Petit and Western 2004).

The meaning of the significantly higher rates and risk of imprisonment is that one third of African American men between the ages of 20 and 29 are under criminal justice control (in prison, jail or on parole or probation) on any given day (Mauer and Huling 1995; Clayton and Moore 2003). African American men are in
fact now more likely to be under criminal justice control than to enlist in military service or graduate college (Petit and Western 2004). This negative trend contributes to lower educational attainment and decrease the employment opportunities and income earning potential among African American men (Clayton and Moore 2003), further widening education and employment gaps between African American and non-Hispanic white males.

As a consequence of doing time, formerly incarcerated African American men can expect to work fewer weeks each year, earn less money, receive less benefits and have more constrained upward mobility prospects than their never incarcerated counterparts (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2010). Considering that the majority of incarcerated African American men are also fathers who were involved and contributed to their children’s wellbeing prior to their incarceration, the impact of incarceration on family life is substantial (Woldoff and Washington 2008).

As poignantly captured by Megan Comfort in her book, Doing Time Together (2008), the partners and spouses of incarcerated individuals experience what she refers to as a, “secondary prisonization” in which they are not just materially, but socially and emotionally imprisoned as well. Secondary prisonization forces the spouses and partners of the incarcerated to accept an inferior role and adopt prison norms that redefine them and their relationships.
(Comfort 2008). Incarceration also results in social stigmatization of families, causing material hardship and devaluation as humans (Braman 2004).

Much of the paternal incarceration research has focused on the effects of incarceration on child development (Geller et al 2011). Research by Wilbur et al (2007) shows that children with incarcerated fathers experience more depressive symptoms than children without incarcerated fathers. Additional research indicates that children with incarcerated parents are at greater risk of mental health problems, emotional problems, substance abuse, lower education attainment, unemployment and offending themselves (Murray and Farrington 2008; Wildeman 2009). In short, the depth and breadth of incarceration’s impact is not an isolated phenomenon limited to the individual; its impact is exponential, generational and societal.

This research study does not attempt to justify or minimize law breaking and acknowledges that the vast majority of people imprisoned have broken some law. Foucault (1977) charges that citizens failing to obey the laws of society are to be deemed an, “enemy of society as a whole” and should be punished (P.89). However, as Foucault and others have also recognized: racism, sexism, poverty, and access to education, exemplified by disparate prosecution and sentencing, racial stereotyping and profiling, inadequate or negligent legal counsel, planting of evidence, illegal searches, fabricated reports and untreated drug and mental
health problems, all contribute to the pervasiveness of the mass incarceration among African American men.

Given that the majority of men and women being sentenced to prison are convicted of non-violent offenses, imprisonment is of questionable value, given the form, function and collateral damage to non-violent offenders and subsequent harm to their families and communities that directly result from doing time. Research indicates that the collateral damage resulting from mass incarceration extends beyond the incarcerated person to their families and communities. Not only does incarceration fracture family relationships (Braman 2004), but it weakens mechanisms of social control, assigns social stigma, redefines citizenship and causes further erosion of the political and economic strength in already disadvantaged communities (Clear 2007, Roberts 2004).

This research study examines how doing time affects father identity and social relationships, inflicting damage on families and communities in important ways. The persistent harm to men and women, families and communities continues beyond the term of physical confinement and any additional period of probation or parole, resulting in what are effectively life sentences. This, I argue, constitutes a form of social violence.

**Studying African American Fatherhood**

This study begins by reviewing what we already know about fatherhood among African American men in comparison to what might be considered
traditional fatherhood, most often represented by white, middle-class models. The lack of literature on African American fatherhood, particularly on the topic of incarceration represents a gap in the literature. This research adds to sociology of the family and fatherhood literature by including a highly stereotyped and marginalized group: formerly incarcerated, African American fathers. It also helps us better understand how incarceration redefines men in ways that shape and reshape the meaning and performance of fatherhood.

The primary research questions guiding this study are:

A) What is the meaning of fatherhood among African American men?
B) How does the incarceration experience shape fatherhood?
C) What is the relationship between fatherhood and self-sufficiency among formerly incarcerated African American men?

This study is an initial step in further assessing the extent of the damage of incarceration to African American men. To explore the impact of incarceration on fatherhood, a mixed-method integrated research design and analysis is undertaken. Surveys and in-depth interviews allow for multiple levels of understanding of the meaning and performance of fatherhood and the impact of incarceration to African American men.

The Importance of Studying Fatherhood and Incarceration

As previously stated, the impact of mass incarceration is an issue of critical importance. It is particularly salient for the African American men who
disproportionately contribute to the U.S. prison population of approximately 2 million people each year. They are further disproportionately represented among the 6,937,600 people in the United States reportedly living under correctional control (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2012), many of whom are fathers.

The 2007, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that 52% of state and 63% of federal inmates as being parents with minor children. This translates into roughly one million incarcerated parents in any given year. This results in more than one million children without one or both parents each year. Fathers made up 92% of these incarcerated parents, more than half of whom, provided financially for their minor children prior to their incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak 2007). It is important to note that 40% of incarcerated fathers were African American (Glaze and Maruschak 2007).

When considering that African American children are seven and a half times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison (Glaze and Maruschak 2007), the importance of research on African American fatherhood becomes even more apparent. Whether formerly incarcerated or never incarcerated, fathers are vital parts of social networks providing social, emotional and financial support. Prisoners and the formerly incarcerated do not live in isolation, performing singular roles. As such, fatherhood among the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated is no less dynamic, though it can be more complicated than fatherhood among never incarcerated men. I liken the incarcerated father to
an epicenter of a very unnatural disaster that results from his absence in the lives of the children, partners, and other family members. Forced to shift into survival mode, families attempt to fill the gaping holes his absence produces.

**Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation seeks to engage discussion on the impact of incarceration on fatherhood among African American men. Despite the relatively small size and scope of this project, this study contributes important insights into the problem mass incarceration poses to African American fathers. Each chapter highlights various components of this larger issue.

Chapter Two reviews the literature used to provide a framework for this dissertation. As previously noted, little attention has been given to African American fatherhood, particularly in the area of incarceration’s impact. This chapter begins with a discussion of fatherhood from a historical perspective and is followed by discussion of the African American fatherhood experience and the development of mass incarceration.

Chapter Three explains the research design. I believe that in using multiple research methods a deeper understanding of the research questions was provided. The rationale for using a mixed-method approach is also provided.

Chapter Four presents an analysis of the research findings. I provide demographics of the formerly incarcerated men in the sample and those who have never been incarcerated along with statistical analysis of survey responses.
Interview responses were also used to analyze fatherhood and identity the fatherhood identity standard further analyzed in the remainder of this dissertation.

Chapter Five looks more closely at experiences of fathering among the formerly incarcerated men I interviewed. The chapter discusses how the experience of incarceration impacted how they saw themselves as fathers and changed how they performed the father role during their incarceration and after they were released.

Chapter Six, the conclusion, summarizes the research findings. I discuss how the mixed-method approach provides a better understanding of the meaning of fatherhood to African American men. I also suggest approaches to promoting criminal justice system policies that might better support meaningful fatherhood among the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

While the history of incarceration in the United States spans more than 400 years, the massive growth in the prison population is a much more recent phenomenon. Since the 1970’s, the U.S. prison population has undergone unprecedented growth due largely to increases in sentencing rates and length of terms related to punitive drug laws. Driven by race and class inequalities, the phenomenon known as hyper-incarceration, mass incarceration, mass imprisonment, and the carceral state is distinguished by the extreme size of the prison population and its concentration among young, minority men in poor communities of color (Alexander 2010; Wacquant 2009; Clear 2007). As Garland (2001) explains a system of mass incarceration emerges when:

…it (incarceration) ceases to be the incarceration of individual offenders and becomes the systematic imprisonment of whole groups of the population (p.6).

Among the grossly abnormal number of incarcerated men and women, a widely disproportionate number are African Americans who have been convicted of non-violent offenses. The Bureau of Justice (BJS) reported that in 2013, 51% of all federal prisoners were sentenced for drug offenses (2014). They went on to report that African American males were incarcerated at higher rates across all age groups. The incarceration rate for African American men, ages 25-
39 (the age range with the highest incarceration) was in fact, six times greater than the incarceration for white men and 2.5 times higher than that of Hispanic men (BJS 2014). Most disturbing is an incarceration rate nine times higher for African American males ages 18-19 than their white male counterparts. As a result of mass incarceration, collateral damage is inflicted on offenders, their families and the communities in which they live.

The disproportionate number of incarcerated African American men, the majority of whom are fathers, constitutes an issue of critical importance. As partners, friends, caretakers, emotional supporters, financial providers, and mentors, fathers play integral roles within social networks and their absence due to incarceration has individual and large-scale social implications, including stigmatization and marginalization. Despite the importance of this issue, little attention has been given to African American fatherhood, particularly on the topic of father identity among formerly incarcerated men.

Extant research on fatherhood has mainly focused on the impact on incarceration on children’s well-being (Geller et al 2001; Wilbur et al 2007; Murray and Farrington 2008; Wildeman 2009). Yet we know too little about these experiences from the father’s point of view and how incarceration shapes fatherhood experiences among African American men.

The purpose of this study is to systematically examine the meaning and performance of fatherhood and to assess the impact of incarceration on African
American men. A two-phase, sequential method will be employed. In the first phase, quantitative research questions are used to address the relationship between father identity, self-sufficiency and employment hope among 119 Springfield Urban League Male Involvement Program (SULMIP) participants. The SULMIP is a community-based program targeting low-income fathers in the Sangamon, Macon and Morgan counties of Illinois to help them improve their relationships with their families. Results from the first phase are explored further in the second, qualitative phase. In the second phase, in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 program participants are used to flesh out significant quantitative findings and to further explore the meaning of fatherhood to these men and the impact of incarceration on their experiences of fatherhood.

This literature review begins with a discussion of fatherhood from a historical perspective and is followed by tracing the unique experiences of both fatherhood and incarceration among African American men. The questions that follow provide a theoretical framework to begin answering the research questions guiding this study:

A) What is the meaning of fatherhood among African American men?
B) How does the incarceration experience shape fatherhood?
C) What is the relationship between fatherhood identity and self-sufficiency among formerly incarcerated African American men
Fatherhood: A Socio-Historical Perspective

In sociological terms, the family can be viewed as the smallest, most basic unit of society, or as a Leonard Benson put, a self-contained social microcosm (1968:15). Operating as a subsystem within the larger social order, the family functions as a primary mechanism of not only social control, but of love, security, material support, and social, moral and religious instruction as well. Our understanding of fatherhood must be situated within this understanding of family.

Mainstream sociological theory has long viewed stable families as the linchpin of stable societies. As components of stable families, fathers are key components of stable societies. Yet, fatherhood is a highly contested social role: as I peel back many layers of fatherhood, I will reveal, as Griswold (1993) argued that “fatherhood has become politicized: its terms are contested, its significance fragmented, its meaning unstable (p.9).” As such, the definition of fatherhood offered here will simply be used to ground and move the discussion forward.

Traditional definitions reflect the anachronous view of fatherhood as a role, a concept and an institution defining biological and social relationships between men and their children and designating rights and duties to men within families and society (Coltrane 2003). As Talcott Parsons (1955) contends, fatherhood connects the family to society and society to the family. Parsons’ concept of interpenetration is illustrative of this connection. For example: interpenetration holds that working fulfills an individual, occupational role, while
also designating the father’s role in the family whereby the family is connected to society and vice versa.

Benson (1968) theorized two dimensions of fatherhood: survival and expressive, which produce a universal set of fatherhood roles found in all cultures. The survival dimension of fatherhood is characterized by actions that materially and morally sustain the family including: reproduction and material support; commitment to order (teaching family and societal rules and encouraging children to follow them); basic survival skills (eating, sleeping, work, and such) transmission of personal qualities (imitable habits); crisis management; and cooperation with others. The expressive dimension of fatherhood includes actions that provide a sense of security to the family. Due to his gender, age, size, strength and depth of voice, a father’s presence “assures a kind of protectiveness for which we have no measure (Benson 1968: 67).” Theoretically, the collective universal fatherhood roles bolster the family and ultimately, society.

Conceptualizations of fatherhood are drawn from personal experiences as well as interactions with other fathers (Benson 1968). Therefore, fatherhood can be thought of as a reflection of individual beliefs as well as institutionalized norms and expectations found within society. Our understanding of fatherhood is then, constantly being shaped and reshaped by changing historical, social and political contexts (Marsiglio, Day, and Lamb 2000).
Research, however, has not kept up with the ebb and flow of these changing contexts, a fact supported by the relative lack of research on the topic. Fatherhood research continues to lag behind motherhood research. This is, perhaps, in alignment with Weber’s and others’ belief that the mother-child relationship is the only “natural” relationship; this belief could be one explanation for the seemingly unchallenged domination by motherhood in the literature. However, the growth of father’s rights’ lobbies and organizations in the last twenty years indicates that interest in fatherhood research is gaining traction.

Historical research has attempted to define the meaning and performance of fatherhood in different places and times (Williams 2008; Rotundo, 1985; Lamb 1987; LaRossa 1988; Pleck 1987). From this body of scholarship, three dominant models emerge representing changes in the social role and function of fathers: the agrarian based, market-based, and contemporary global economy models that can be characterized as: patriarchal, breadwinner and egalitarian fatherhood models.

Agrarian life in the United States was dominated by the patriarchal fatherhood model, in which the father’s role was front and center. His presence was visible and tangible. Work was also occurred in and around the home, positioning the father as a central authority figure; his power derived from economic control of the family (Rotundo 1985). During this period, the father was
also responsible for the moral and practical instruction of the children (Lamb 1987).

The industrial revolution marked the shift away from agrarian society which resulted in the decline of the patriarch and the rise of the breadwinner fatherhood model. Industrialization moved the father’s work away from the home/farm and into the factory, defining his role as the primary economic provider and subsequently delineating a gendered division of labor along the lines of nurturing and providing roles inside and outside of the home (Lamb 1987). As a consequence of the time spent working away from the home, the breadwinner father was considered less involved and more emotionally distant from his children than the patriarch father.

Post-industrial economic decline along with strides made by the gender equality movement resulted in changes in gender roles, leading to the decline of the breadwinner and the emergence of a more egalitarian fatherhood model (Rotundo 1987). This egalitarian model representing a combination of Rotundo’s (1985) “Androgynous Father” and Pleck’s (1987) “Involved Father” and Lamb’s (1987) “Nurturing Father” concepts has come to define contemporary fatherhood. The egalitarian father seeks to purposefully and actively engage his children and share in care giving responsibilities in ways in which the Patriarch and Breadwinner fathers did not. As an ideal type, the egalitarian father is expressive
and nurturing so much so that his participation in child rearing seems to blur the line between the mother and the father roles.

Criticism of the historical fatherhood literature is directed at the limiting presumptions of fatherhood models that all fathers believe, think and act in similar ways during a particular period of time and that changes follow a unidirectional path (Coltrane and Galt 2000). According to Griswold (1983), the breadwinner experience not only varied from group to group but also changed over time. LaRossa (1997) further argues that historical models represent a conjecture of what fatherhood could be and not a reflection of actual fatherhood practices.

To this point, researchers further argue that theories based on historical models are limited in that they are drawn primarily from experiences of white, middle class men (Coltrane & Park 1998; Nobles & Goddard 1984; McAdoo 1981; Staples & Johnson 1993). Coltrane (1998) contends that multiple ideals and multiple realities of fatherhood appear in every time period when class, ethnic, and geographic differences are taken into account. For example, the experiences of immigrant fathers in North America pursuing the promise of citizenship were similar in some ways but drastically different in other ways compared to those of Black fathers denied rights of citizenship by legal discrimination and political disenfranchisement during Jim Crow in the South;
these differences produced varied ideals and realities during the same chronological time period.

**Masculinity and the Construction of Fatherhood**

It is the variance among ideals and realities of fatherhood that is of interest here. As previously established, fatherhood conceptually reflects the beliefs, expectations and institutionalized norms found within society. These beliefs, expectations and norms are shaped by factors such as: race, class, gender, religion, and even politics. As such, fatherhood models and research must be contextualized when considering the topic of this research: the lived experiences of African American men. It is important to note that this research does not treat African American men as a monolithic group but asserts that the historical reality and legacy of racial oppression has uniquely shaped and reshaped the performance and practices of fatherhood for African American men as a group.

Understanding the role of masculinity in the construction of fatherhood is critical to research on African American men. As Connell (1995) defines it, masculinity is the sum of practices that men and women engage in that affix gender and the impact of those practices on individual life, ideology, and social institutions. In short, masculinity encompasses the attributes, behaviors and roles associated with being a man. As Kimmel (2006) contends, men, "define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other" (p.5).
Masculinity is then measured both between men and in contrast to women and the concept of femininity.

As such, the dominant, ideal form of masculinity has produced a standard of manhood that is heterosexual, white, middle-class, and native-born (Kimmel 2006). All other forms are defined in opposition to the ideal and in terms of perceived differences between: heterosexual/homosexual, white/black, middle-class/poor and native-born/immigrant. Others are subordinated and marginalized, viewed as outsiders and the reference point by which normality is determined. As a result, hegemonic masculinity ideology is produced that defines social relationships and prescribes social norms. Some research indicates that African American men tend to embrace traditional, hegemonic masculinity ideology more strongly than white men (Levant and Majors 1997; Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku 1993; Levant, Smalley, Aupont, House, Richmond and Noronha 2007).

Conforming to or deviating from manhood defined by traditional, hegemonic terms results in gender role conflict (O’ Neil 2008). Gender role conflict is a psychological state in which negative consequences to socialized gender roles can result in limiting, devaluing, or violating oneself or others. As race, class and gender are inextricably linked; gender role conflict is both raced and classed. Barriers to the performance of traditional role expectations created by classism, racism and discrimination may produce higher levels of gender role conflict among poor, African American men (Wade and Rochlen 2013).
The Construction of Black Masculinity and Fatherhood

According to Collins (2006), when white masculinity is used as a yardstick, African American men become, “defined as subordinates, deviant and allegedly weak (p.75).” These definitions of black masculinity reflect a small set of controlling images and stereotypes within the larger framework of society (Collins 2006). And as Russell (2009) contends, images and representations matter because they mentally and subconsciously (emphasis is mine) tell us that African American men are different and this difference warrants differential treatment.

According to E. Franklin Frazier, “the entire history of the Negro in the United States has been of a nature to create in the Negro a feeling of racial inferiority (1968: 239),” conversely creating a feeling of superiority among whites. This is due in part to the portrayal of negative images and stereotypes supporting the powerful ideology used to justify African American men’s oppression. As research indicates, stereotypes are powerful tools used to justify prejudice (Crandal, Bahns, Warner and Schaller 2011). The portrayal of Africans as primitive and animalistic fueled the ideology used to demonize and dehumanize African American men as oversexed and savage; it was also used to justify their oppression through slavery.

Racist ideology however, is not the singular cause of racial oppression in the United States. To be sure, economic, legal and political arrangements work in concert with ideology, ensuring that the systemic racial oppression embedded
within social institutions and operating through every dimension of society remains firmly in place.

The chains of chattel slavery in the United States physically and ideologically transformed African American men into property, precluding them from conforming to or fully identifying with any model of personhood let alone fatherhood. According to Dubois (1903), African American men were “emasculated by a peculiarly complete system of slavery (p. 25).” As slaves, African American males were not considered to be men and were defined by the construction of an incompatible male sex role in which they were expected to be submissive, non-protective, and powerless yet physically strong and fertile (Franklin 1994). It was through violence and sex, that African American and white men began constructing masculinities for African American men (Franklin 1994). These masculinities were rooted in the belief that African American men were inferior to white men and that African American men represented a potential threat to the economic and political system and posed a sexual threat to white women (Manning 1994).

The construction Black masculinity during slavery summarily devastated the role of the father (Patterson 1998). As the sexuality and fertility of Black men was controlled by slave owners, fatherhood was literally arrested. Men engrained in strong West African patriarchal traditions of providing and caring for their
families, were summarily stripped of their roles, authority, and ability to provide for their families.

In the infamous speech made in 1712, by the man for whom the term lynching is named, Willie Lynch, espoused the idea that perpetual control over slaves could be ensured by “killing the protective male image,” in order to break the bonds of family, culture and eventually, the mind and spirit of the women (2009:15). Slavery reduced former family patriarchs to the role of studs, deriving their value only from their labor and ability to pro-create. And as pieces of property, fathers could be collected, kept or sold at the whim of their masters without regard to family ties. As a result, the development and preservation of bonds between fathers and their children were limited at best. The dehumanization of men and the institution of laws, norms and expectations enforcing paternal disinvestment substantially impacted the performance and practices of fatherhood.

Some researchers argue that the preservation of family ties in spite of slavery’s tremendous assault on family and fatherhood can be attributed to slaves drawing upon West African traditions of extended kin networks (Collins 2004), while others credit the embracement of nuclear family norms (Genovese 1972). The latter argument is supported by research indicating that the dominant post-slavery family structure was nuclear (Gutman 1976; Dubois 1967). The disintegration of the Black nuclear family did not effectively begin until after the
mid 1920’s in response to massive migration and growing urbanization (Staples 1995). As Dubois (1967) eloquently penned, “the home was destroyed by slavery, struggled up after emancipation, and is again not exactly threaded, but neglected in the life of city Negroes” (p.196). Dubois, I believe captures the persistent challenge in maintaining African American families in the face of what he refers to as “unjust economic conditions.” The history of African American families has been one in which men in nuclear families and those in non-nuclear families have been constrained in their ability to economically provide and measure up to fatherhood models.

The images, ideas, laws and economic practices used to justify and perpetuate the enslavement of black people for hundreds of years, continued to serve the government as a well throughout the era of Jim Crow where the same ideas were used to rationalize the unceasing oppression of Black men. Stereotypes of a violent dangerous, hypersexual male slave have been reconstituted and reframed as the criminalblackman stereotype. The stereotype’s power is rooted in fear: fear of crime and fear of black men, which is reproduced and reinforced by negative media representations that portray images of African American deviance (Russell-Brown 2008). Contemporary representations of African American males as criminal and as an endangered species are manifestations of these ideas (Ferguson 2007). Without a doubt, these
controlling images have helped shape the construction of black masculinity and fatherhood.

Research and public policy have also played a part in reinforcing negative images of African American fathers. No better example can be found than the Moynihan Report¹. The Moynihan report charged the breakdown of the black family and root of social problems in the African American community to the creation of female-headed households due to absent fathers. As Dorothy Roberts (1998) noted, African American men have come to symbolize fatherlessness. The negative images of African American fathers in Moynihan’s report provided fuel for welfare reform ideology. Subsequent welfare policy contained provisions mandating the establishment of paternity and child support enforcement (Neubeck and Cazenave 2001).

The Continued Significance of Race

Here, the concept of race refers to the system for organizing social difference that reproduces advantage and disadvantage (Ferguson 2007). The institutionalization of racism guarantees the ongoing significance of race in American society. James and Redding (2005) characterize the raced nature of the state as, “the incorporation of race criteria within the fabric of state institutions and the basis for enforcing state policies” (p.195).

¹ In 1965, the U.S. Department of Labor published, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action”. The report written by then Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan has since become known as, “the Moynihan Report.”
In stark contrast and opposition to the argument made by William Julius Wilson in *The Declining Significance of Race*, that race was no longer the primary determinant of life chances for blacks in the U.S. as it had been during slavery and Jim Crow, I argue that race continues to be significant in the lives of African American men. The shackles of slavery have long been removed and Jim Crow era “white only” signs taken down, only to be replaced by social practices and institutional policies achieving similar results. Firmly rooted in racist assumptions, stereotypes and rhetoric presumed to have been left in the past, colorblind racism now operates through subtle, institutional and nonracial arrangements and practices that maintain racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2006). As a result, disparities affecting economic, social and political life are explained away using terms other than race. Terms such as “felon” or “criminal” are used to denote blackness and are used to discriminate.

Charles Mills’ racial contract theory (RCT) provides a basis for understanding how and why race and racism continue to be a significant factor in the lives of African American men and continues to shape fatherhood. According to Mills (1997), the racial contract consists of formal and informal social, political and moral arrangements that privilege whites over non-whites, exploiting, “their bodies, land and resources (p.11),” and blocking access to equal socioeconomic opportunities. The racial contract ensures the continuation of the racial caste
system which evolves over time but remains embedded in social, political and economic arrangements between whites and non-whites.

Through RCT, racial oppression derived from economic domination and exploitation sanctioned by the Slave Codes\(^2\) can be linked to the adoption of Black Codes\(^3\) after the abolition of slavery that were in turn refashioned to become the Jim Crow laws. Today the current manifestation of the racial caste system is referred to as the New Jim Crow. We will return to this topic in the discussion of mass incarceration to come.

**Prisons as Total Institutions**

Prisons are buildings that physically confine and control people. As institutions, they completely alter individual and social life. They are also tools used to shield unemployment and labor exploitation from the public gaze (Wacquant 2007) and are sources of political oppression, economic exploitation, emasculation and sexual repression. While incarceration experiences can vary by institution type, length of sentence, and programs offered, the experience

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2 The term “Slave Codes” refers to the Virginia Slave Codes of 1705, which firmly established that Negro, mulatto and Indian slaves were to be held as property (PBS 2011)

3 The Black Codes of 1865-1866 were laws enacted to manage the former slaves (Wilson 1965). Black Codes barred African Americans from voting, restricted migration, mandated labor contracts and drew heavily upon penalty to coerce compliance (Wilson 1965). Vagrancy laws ensured that the unemployed (anyone not under contract) were subject to fines and bonding out to work off fines or face imprisonment.
itself has a significant impact on individuals and their social relationships both
during and after release.

Few would disagree with the assertion that serving time in prison
somehow changes people. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) describes
prisons as “complete and austere institutions” facilitating the re-training and
“recoding of existence” (235). This is accomplished in part through the,
“deprivation of liberty and the transformation of individuals” (Foucault 1977:233).
The transformative power of prisons is derived from the constant and absolute
disciplinary control they wield over the lives of individuals.

Erving Goffman’s research (1961) provides an elaborated analysis on how
prisons serve as a critical type of *total institution*. In total institutions, groups of
people are isolated from greater society; daily life is formally regulated; and
social arrangements are altered such that there is no separation between where
one lives, works, eats and plays. Prisoners are subjected to the loss of autonomy
and to the *mortification of the self*, in which individuals are disconnected from the
life they previously lived and roles they performed. The confiscation of personal
property and the reassignment of given names to inmate numbers further alters
personal identity. For Goffman (1961), the loss of personal identity is balanced by
the acquisition of an inmate (institutional) identity, which facilitates assimilation
into the institutional culture and the correction of negative behaviors.
However, prisons do not necessarily or even generally facilitate the correction of negative behavior. In prisons, correctional officers manage prisoners; they do not necessarily help prisoners redeem and reform themselves. Though the prison environment is structured by routines, it is replete with constant uncertainty resulting in a “confused world” characterized by Clemmer (1951) as a culture in which:

…The inmates’ conflict with officialdom and opposition toward society is only slightly greater in degree than conflict and opposition among themselves. Trickery and dishonesty overshadow sympathy and cooperation…social controls are only partially effective (P. 213).

According to Clemmer (1951), prisonization or the process of assimilating into the “confused world” of prison is accomplished through: 1) learning your place (acceptance of an inferior role), 2) learning the rules (acquiring knowledge of prison organization), and 3) learning the ropes (developing new habits of eating, sleeping, dressing and ways of communicating). The resulting assimilation into prison culture changes the behavior of an individual and his or her sense of identity.

Prisonization acts as a mechanism of identity deconstruction and reconstruction. For example: Someone who once identified as John Doe from Decatur is reconstructed as inmate #ABC123 upon entering prison. Their identity is transformed again upon reentering society. While prison culture shapes the lives of prisoners, the degree of prisonization is believed to determine an individual’s ability to successfully reintegrate into society and refrain from further
criminality (Clemmer 1951). The disturbingly high recidivism rates in the United States (approximately 50%) might indicate a deficiency in the essential preparation needed for individuals to transition from their prisoner identity back into their individual identity in order to return to family and community life.

Burke’s (1991) psychological model linking identity and behavior provides a framework for understanding the deleterious effect of prisonization on identity. Identity is the meaning an individual subscribes to a social role that helps define who they are. Through the identity confirmation process, individuals enact behaviors that confirm their identity. The identity confirmation process is a feedback mechanism in which an identity standard is identified, appraised and compared to an individual’s behavioral standards. If inmate # ABC123 aka John Doe from Decatur’s identity standard is being a prisoner, he will attempt to modify his behavior to meet the standard. If not shed upon release, the prisoner identity standard can cause role conflict as he attempts to enact other social roles.

*Masculinity and Prisonization*

Though largely shielded from the public gaze, prisons are “melded into the social landscape and to the social relations of men and women” (Sabo, Kupers and London 2001:5). Prisons contribute to the gender order in which men dominate women and also dominate each other. In prisons, hegemonic masculinity, underscored by male dominance and violence is not only performed but reproduced (Sabo et al 2001). Hegemonic masculinity creates hierarchies
between males that enable dominant males to maintain influence and control over subordinated males. These hierarchies are typically constructed along the lines of race, class, and sexual orientation and further contribute to inequalities and shape behaviors during and after incarceration (Sabo et al 2001).

Phillips' (2001) study identifies strategies by which masculine identity is reconstructed in prison into a hyper-masculine, "stand-up man." The stand up man is an idealized "strong, impregnable male," who maintains control in a world without control and is filled with violence, manipulation, and the fear/threat of sexual predation (Phillips 2001). According to Miller (2006), the hyper-masculinity adopted or submitted to in prison in order to survive has a traumatizing effect, leaving men "ill-suited to be productive members of society (p.168)" and produces barriers to reintegration.

**African American Men and Prisonization**

In the wake of the emancipation of African American’s from enslavement in 1864-1865, confusion, passion and fear gripped the heart of the nation, and the question of what to do with Negroes prevailed. The economy and social life had been weakened by the emancipation’s destabilization in the foundation of the racial caste system. The end of the chattel slave system resulted in what Dubois referred to as, “Negro problem” taking root as a social problem (1903).

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery except as punishment for a crime, effectively authorizing a particular form of slavery as
punishment (Davis 1998). As a result, the criminal justice system was employed as a means to help control the massive population of former slaves and the construction of their emerging social status (Davis 1998). Prior to the end of the Civil War, secessionist southern states had amended their constitutions to adopt refashioned Slave Codes known as the Black Codes of 1865-1866 (Wilson 1965). Under the guise of social control, the Black Codes racialized penalties to coerce labor market participation and maintain the racial caste system. Among the many violations of civil liberties, the Black Codes barred African Americans from voting, restricted migration, mandated labor contracts and instituted apprenticeship and vagrancy laws (Blackmon 2008; Wilson 1965).

Apprenticeship laws forced orphaned minors or those whose parents were deemed unable to support them, into unpaid labor. Vagrancy laws subjected anyone deemed unemployed (anyone not under contract) or otherwise determined to be idle, disorderly or neglectful, to fines, working off the fines and imprisonment. The resulting convict-leasing system in which inmates were leased to private businesses and individuals greatly expanded the criminal justice system in the south, giving rise to the present prison industrial complex. Through

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4 Prison-Industrial complex is a term coined by Angela Y. Davis. Similar to the military-industrial complex characterizing the relationship between legislators, the armed forces and corporate interests, the prison-industrial complex represents legislators, the criminal justice system and corporate interests. Davis contends that racialized fear of crime resulted in the diversion of military spending toward the punishment industry. As a result, the punishment industry economically gains from the incarceration of large numbers of African Americans.
the convict-lease system, the state “became a dealer in crime,” deriving both
direct and indirect profit from prison labor (Dubois 1901: 741) and as Alexander
(2010) contends, the business of incarceration has become, “…deeply
entrenched in America’s economic and political system” (218). Prison profiteering
has now expanded to include private prison companies, legislators receiving
campaign contributions, commissary vendors, companies contracting prison
labor, and the ever-growing security and surveillance market built around criminal
justice system.

Targeted policing and subsequent disparate sentencing of freedmen
significantly contributed to the growth of convict-lease system in the South and its
racialization of crime (Dubois 1901). Chain gangs became associated with and
reserved for African Americans. The diversion of white law breakers away from
chain gangs except in the most extreme cases made it “very difficult to enforce
the laws in the South against whites (Dubois 1901: 741),” while making the
routine conviction of African American upon accusation in courts or by lynch laws
an accepted norm. As a result, a precedent for disparate sentencing was
established. Dubois’ (1901) further argues that the convict-lease system
effectively “linked crime and slavery” as “forms of the white man’s oppression” in
the minds of African Americans (p.741). As a result, imprisonment became
associated with injustice, diminishing its deterrent effect by eliciting pity not
disdain for the imprisoned.
Davis (1998) contends that the ideological connection between African Americans and criminality has now become naturalized. When crime is mentioned, African Americans are the criminals that many imagine. In their study on crime policy attitudes, Peffley and Hurwitz (2002) found that when thinking about crime and punishment, many whites tend to think about African American as criminals even when race is not mentioned. Another study found that when police officers were asked to make judgment calls of criminality based on facial appearance alone, black faces were reported to be criminal more often than white faces (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, and Davies 2004). Supposedly race neutral terms and rhetoric related to crime elicit powerful stereotypes and controlling images of African American men (Peffley and Hurwitz 2002). The importance of these controlling images is that they are used to justify oppression (Collins 2000). The stereotypes and controlling images of African American men as violent, dangerous and hypersexual used to justify oppression during Slavery and Jim Crow, persist in the justification of mass imprisonment.

**The Birth of Mass Incarceration**

In concert with racial ideology, economic, legal and political arrangements created and now, sustain mass incarceration as a system of racial oppression. During 1964 presidential campaign, republicans introduced the issue of crime control to the national stage. Crime control rhetoric linking street crime to civil rights protests fed into growing racial tensions and fear of racial violence
(Western and Wildeman 2009). Within this same period, urban deindustrialization began destabilizing the unskilled labor market in which African American men were concentrated. The combination of political rhetoric, public sentiment, presence of a large, unemployed population of African American men living in communities in which the drug economy was the most viable source of economic opportunity, provided the fertile ground for mass incarceration to emerge.

The systematic incarceration of African American men is not a conspiracy theory but a lived and historical reality. Laws, policies, and informal arrangements imbued with social stigma have given rise to mass incarceration as a racialized system of social control. Disparities in law enforcement practices, in arrests, convictions, and sentencing, as well as probation/parole policies all contribute to mass incarceration (Mauer 2011).

Disparate practices by law enforcement toward African Americans has a long, unfortunate past from the complicit participation by officers of the law in giving up prisoners to mobs or standing by while lynching’s occurred (Wells 1900) to police brutality brought to light by the media during the Civil Rights movement and the many recent shootings of unarmed African American youths by police. Racial profiling, the practice of targeting people for suspicion of crime based on their racial appearance is the unifying factor in these instances.
Police function as street level judges and juries, making decisions about how laws will be enforced and crime prevented. Racial disparities happen when racial bias (conscious or unconscious) influences their decisions such as the “driving while Black” phenomenon, the racial profiling of black motorists (Harris 1999). Research indicates that African American drivers are more likely than white drivers to be stopped, and if stopped, to be searched by police (Rojek, Rosenfeld and Decker 2012). Though the concentration of law enforcement in poor communities of color contributes to the likelihood of arrest, research indicates that the approximately 85% greater risk of drug arrest among African Americans is attributed to racial bias by police (Mitchell and Caudy 2015; Beckett, Nyrop, and Pfingst 2006). As such, policing plays a critical role in rise and maintenance of mass incarceration.

The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970\(^5\) and subsequent legislation created the framework upon which the “War on Drugs,” was built and mass incarceration emerged. The Anti- Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (The Act) expanded the focus of drug control inside and outside of our borders. The new strategy introduced punitive criminal sanctions to combat drug use and involvement instead of prevention and treatment, which substantially increased

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\(^5\) The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, was created to regulate the manufacture, importation, possession, use and distribution of certain substances. It also established the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
drug arrests (Mitchell and Caudy 2015). States were also encouraged and even provided incentives to adopt the federal drug control strategy.

In addition to calling for more arrests, the 1986 legislation established federal mandatory minimum sentencing for drug trafficking sentences ranging from five years to life imprisonment (United States Sentencing Commission 2011). The Act also created a “100-to-1” sentencing disparity between powder cocaine and crack cocaine convictions. The five year mandatory minimum penalty could be triggered by trafficking five grams of cocaine (associated with blacks) while 500 grams of powder cocaine (associated with whites) was required to trigger the same penalty. In 1988, the mandatory minimum net was cast even broader, additionally capturing people: in possession of more than five grams of cocaine, engaging in continuing drug enterprise (extended mandatory minimum terms from 10 to 20 years of imprisonment), and those guilty by association (conspiracy to comment offenses). Drug enforcement laws also placed restrictions on public housing and eliminated many public benefits for people convicted of drug offenses.

Following federal drug policies, Illinois passed the Controlled Substance Act (CSA) in 1975. Twenty of Illinois’ twenty five prisons were built after CSA went into effect (See below Figure 3: Illinois Correctional Facilities). From 1990 to 2000, prison admissions for drug charges increased by 459% with the number of African Americans admitted increasing by 450%. African Americans supplied on
average 80% of drug charge admissions and represented 59% of all admissions to prison during that same period leading Lurigio and Loose (2008) to conclude that the disparities in arrests and prison sentences were driven by state drug charges.

Figure 1. Prisons in Illinois

By the 1990’s republican and democrats had joined together in supporting stringent sentencing and rampant prison construction at the state and Federal level. The “get tough on crime” political mantra had succeeded in fueling
the punitive policies underlying the massive growth in the prison population. Research indicates that mass imprisonment continues to be targeted toward and concentrated in poor communities of color and among young, African American and Latino men in particular (Clear 2007). The resulting disparities have seemingly become normalized and, in the words of Angela Davis (1998), “neither the state nor the general public is required to talk about and act on the meaning of the racial imbalance” (p. 62).

One might resolve the meaning of the racial imbalance as one of gross injustice in which the racial caste system in the United States is reproduced (Alexander 2010). In the War on Drugs, poor, African American communities are the primary targets of intensive policing and prosecution despite the prevalence of illegal drugs in all communities (Alexander 2010). Consequently, disparate policing and sentencing resulting from myriad laws, rules and regulations (formal and informal) stigmatizes, marginalizes, and blocks formerly incarcerated people from participating in the mainstream economy once released (Alexander 2010).

Mass Incarcerated Communities

In contrast to the popular saying, “crime doesn’t pay,” crime does indeed pay. It pays attorneys, police, judges, prison guards, probation officers, the many other people employed by the criminal justice apparatus and the burgeoning area of the private sector known as the prison-industrial complex. However, it comes at immense social, economic and political cost. Supposed social benefits of
prisonization include crime reduction and economic development in prison communities. Supposed effectiveness in crime reduction through prisonization is debatable (Clear 2007) and economic benefit to prison communities might be measured against economic and social devastation in communities ravaged by mass incarceration.

To be sure, the social consequences to the civil penalties imposed on the formerly incarcerated are immense. Felony convictions produce civil disabilities, the sanctions placed on formerly incarcerated persons denying them participation in particular areas of civic life such as voting, holding public office, and jury service as well as placing restrictions on various professional licenses (Mele and Miller 2005), military service, public housing, and financial aid. Felony disenfranchisement dilutes voting strength and political power within entire communities (Roberts 2004). Mass incarceration has also contributed to increases in poverty (DeFina and Lance Hannon 2013). Alexander (2010) charges the War on Drugs and the subsequent prison boon with primary responsibility for poverty, unemployment, crime and broken homes in the African American community. In short, social, economic and political disadvantage converge in communities possessing large numbers of people who enter incarceration’s revolving door which by they are removed from the communities, returned only to be remove again.
Mass incarceration restricts family formation, disrupts families, and strains social networks. While it is certainly true that incarceration removes men from their communities and from pool potential marriage partners (Wilson and Neckerman 1987), it also stigmatizes them and my render them undesirable as marriage partners altogether (Lopoo and Western 2005). Similar to a teeter-totter, removal of the father from the family shifts the weight of all the previously shared financial and childcare responsibilities to the other partner or another caregiver and imposes additional expense on the partner or caregiver left behind to provide financial and emotion support and maintain contact. This exerts pressure on extended kin and social networks to help pick up the slack left by the father’s removal. The stress and strain on existing social networks over the incarceration period limits formation of new social capital (Clear and Rose 2001). Fathers can return only to find support in their social networks tapped out from their absence.

Mass incarceration alters and distorts mechanisms of social control (Roberts 2004). Imprisonment prevents fathers from participating in pro-social groups that might be found in their communities such as churches, sports leagues, community organization, parent-teacher organizations and neighborhood associations that help enforce informal social control. As Clear (2007) contends, informal social control is more important for public safety than formal social control. Research indicates that incarceration has a negative effect
on community solidarity (Lynch and Sabol 2004) which may also diminish the collective power within neighborhoods to discourage violence. A study by Parker and Reckenwald (2008) noted that the power of the traditional male role model’s presence in mediating youth violence was substantially diminished in mass incarcerated communities.

Place matters. According to Massey and Denton (1993), residential segregation resulting from racial discrimination in real estate and banking produced poverty among African Americans and was responsible for creation of an urban underclass. They further argue that racial segregation not only concentrated poverty and the social conditions that result from poverty but also undermines the ability of African Americans to advance their political interests (Massey and Denton 1993).

As Clear (2007) contends, “The quality of a neighborhood is an important condition in the quality of life for those who live and work there. (p. 73)”.

According to Turner and Acevedo-Garcia (2005), social and economic opportunity is affected by where one lives through the following factors: local service quality (including: schools, retail, child-care, and healthcare); shared norms and social control; peer influences; crime and violence; and access to jobs. Incarceration significantly impacts each of these factors.

Economic resources of families are stretched from the loss of an economic contributor and from the expense of supporting the incarcerated family
member while in prison. Research indicates that incarcerated men’s families are
negatively affected by diminished income and reduced abilities of the mothers
(Schwartz-Soicher, Geller and Garfinkel 2011). Economic mobility potential after
release is significantly diminished as formerly incarcerated people work less each
year, earn less money, and receive less employment benefits than their never
incarcerated counterparts (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2010). They are restricted
from occupations in areas with some of the greatest employment opportunities
such as: childcare, healthcare, education, and government. The path to
legitimate employment in many communities is obscured by the presence of the
drug economy in which prisonization has become “a routinized occupational
hazard” (Peck and Theordore 2008: 260).

Mass incarcerated communities are further impacted by
disenfranchisement which politically silences men and women branded as felons,
and consequently dilutes the voting strength and political power within poor
communities of color, impacting not only state and national elections but
decisions about local school funding as well (Clear 2007). Additionally, the
“counting” of inmates by communities where individuals are being held skews
employment and poverty statistics and redirects government aid and needed
resources away from their “home” communities (Roberts 2004). As a result,
“ingrained systems of structural oppression and economic disinvestment in
communities of color combine and collapse legitimate rights and benefits of American citizenship (Karanja 2015).

In *Unequal Freedom*, Glenn (2002) argues that citizenship draws membership boundaries which designate rights and privileges, respect and protection. She further theorizes two components of citizenship: formal citizenship (embodied by law and policy) and substantive citizenship (ability to exercise rights of citizenship). By absconding voting rights, limiting the ability of individuals to work and rescinding rights of protection, it can be argued that mass incarceration destroys both formal and substantive citizenship. Similarly, the concept of social citizenship espoused by T.H. Marshall holds the state responsible for maintaining a basic level of social and economic well-being for all of its citizens. Therefore, mass incarceration also destroys social citizenship (Roberts 2004) to which the right to vote, to work and to be protected are an essential part (Glenn 2002).

*The Impact of Incarceration on Children*

The children of the incarcerated fathers have often witnessed the criminal justice process from point arrest to sentencing and then visitation. Even children too young to fully understand what is going on pickup on the underlying emotions of confusion, anger, and fear and experience loss when the father is removed. These children are 130% more likely to experience family instability than children without incarcerated parents (Philips, Erkanli, Keeler, Costello, and Angold 2006).
During the period of separation from their fathers, children can also experience emotions such as sadness, loneliness and even guilt. Loss due to incarceration has been compared to loss of a parent to divorce or even death (Lowenstein 1986) and may cause children to undergo stages of the grieving process: denial and isolation; anger; bargaining; depression and acceptance. The experience of grief would be consistent with research on children of incarcerated parents reporting: depression, emotional withdrawal, aggression, acting out in the classroom and other behavioral problems (Wilbur et al 2007).

In mass incarcerated communities, a child might find many other children who have had or are having the same experience of incarceration to which they can identify. As people in households and indeed within neighborhoods flow to and from prison, over time, prisons becomes more routine and less infamous. According to some researchers, this may result in the routinization of prison whereby children may become “presocialized to prison” (Clayton and Moore 2003:94).

Socialization to prison is exacerbated by the popularization of prison culture, from the much debated “sagging” of pants to now vogue tattoo and body art. In addition, mainstream music continues to promote “Trap music”, a form of the hip hop genre of popular music. The “trap” is a slang term used to refer to places where drug transactions take place and to the difficulty faced in self-removal from the drug economy. Glorification of the “trap” lifestyle reinforces
negative stereotypes of African American men as drug dealers, primps and thieves. In addition, the commodification of prison life and violence through television shows such as: Oz, Prison Break, Orange is the New Black, the Wire and Alcatraz and reality shows such as Lockup and Scared straight minimize and may even normalize the horrific realities of the prison experience and beyond.

According to some researchers, ongoing exposure to prison decreases the power of stigma as a deterrent effect on children (Clear 2001). With more and more African American young men entering prisons than enter college or military service, going to prison has become a “distorted ceremonial expression of manhood for the black male in contemporary American society” (Müller 1997).

Literature examining the effects of paternal incarceration has largely focused on the father-son relationship (Murray and Farrington 2005; Wildeman and Western 2010). Research indicates that paternal incarceration contributes to numerous negative outcomes and an increased risk of imprisonment among sons. Daughters are differently but equally harmed by their father’s incarceration. The protective benefit of the biological father’s presence to daughters during puberty is lost when the father is in prison (Foster and Hanagan 2007). In short, the impact of mass incarceration on both sons and daughters is immense.

**Incapacitated Fatherhood**

Hairston’s research found (1998), the majority of incarcerated African American fathers are unmarried and have one or more children with multiple
partners. This can present challenges to family relations during incarceration and upon release as one man attempts to fulfill the role as father in multiple households (Tripp 2003). Further considering that the majority of incarcerated African American fathers were involved and contributed to their children’s wellbeing prior to their incarceration, the impact of prisons on family life is substantial (Woldoff and Washington 2008).

The location of many facilities in rural areas and the transferring of inmates in the federal system to facilities around the country, limits the ability of fathers to maintain contact with their children, further straining relationships. In addition to the physical separation, fathers become disconnected from their roles and responsibilities while in prison (Western and Wilderman 2009). In their study of the criminal justice system, race and father engagement, Woldolf and Washington (2008) found a significant negative relationship between incarceration and father engagement. African American fathers who have been incarcerated were found to be less engaged with their children than white formerly incarcerated fathers. Clayton and Moore’s (2003) research provides one explanation for this phenomenon. They argue that prisons erode social skills and prison experiences reinforce the cool pose⁶, which inhibits the development of nurturing relationships.

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⁶ The cool pose can be thought of as a way to understand how African American men manage their self-presentation to others. It is a coping mechanism that incorporates unique patterns of speech, dress and behavior (Majors and Billson 1992).
Roy’s (2006) research on how paternal life experiences shape the subsequent father identity development found that men with absent fathers had limited images upon which to draw from in order to construct a model of father involvement for themselves. This has implications for fathers attempting to construct a father involvement model while in prison and for their sons whose experiences of a father model will subsequently be shaped.

The prison setting itself presents barriers to the parent-child relationship (Dyer 2005). Hairston’s (2001) research found that while the prison environment shapes the parenting roles and behaviors of fathers, the behaviors required by prison rules and regulations are not conducive to developing or strengthening the behaviors needed for effective parenting. She argues that the prison environment discourages, “behavior required to be a responsible parent” (p. 121). According to Braman (2004), incarceration encourages destructive behaviors such as infidelity, distrust and neglect that reinforce negative stereotypes of poor, minority fathers. With a disproportionate number of fathers behind bars being African American, incarceration is especially damaging to African American children (Woldoff and Washington 2008).

Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2001) argue that incarceration weakens the bonds between parents and their children, creating insecure attachment, decreased cognitive abilities, and weak peer relationships. Other research suggests that children of non-violent offenders are particularly, negatively
affected by incarceration (Wildeman and Western 2010). Of great concern is the research indicating that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to become offenders themselves (Barnhill 1996; Wolf 2006). Dyer (2005) hypothesizes that masculine identity constructed in prison may also lead men away from a father identity that can support their children’s positive development.

What it means to be a man and father in the U.S. is inextricably tied to providing for oneself and one’s family. Economic disadvantage before, during and after imprisonment contributes to social role displacement. In this sense, Talcott Parson’s (1959) statement that, “virtually the only way to be a real man in our society is to have an adequate job and earn a living,” still applies today, at least ideologically.

For the formerly incarcerated and never incarcerated alike, work and economic self-sufficiency more specifically, are firmly entrenched in public opinion as keys to achieving the American dream. However, formerly incarcerated men and women face many and varied disadvantages on the job market that are both individual and structural in nature. The majority of those in prison or on probation or parole are young, have less education, less work experience and more barriers to employment such as mental or physical problems that impair their ability to participate in the job market (Freemen, 2003). They face deficits resulting from limited job skills, a work history of unemployment or underemployment, and poor life skills that contribute to poor
job performance prior to offending. These deficits often continue upon release which limits their ability to find and maintain employment (Henderson, 2001; Scott 2010). William Julius Wilson argues that restricted opportunities and employment constraints reduce self-efficacy and lead to a “decreased commitment to fatherhood (p. 26)”

Returning Fatherhood

The challenges that men face returning home after incarceration can be conceptualized by two perspectives: reentry and reintegration (Travis 2004). The reentry perspective looks to reduce recidivism through pre-release programs such as job readiness and substance abuse treatment. The reintegration perspective focuses on social and economic support after incarceration.

Research by Smoyer, Blankenship and Maclntosh (2010) indicates that African American men on probation or parole face ongoing challenge to performance of their role as fathers. Having had few responsibilities while incarcerated, upon release, they take on responsibilities of correctional requirements and well as responsibilities to their children. Formerly incarcerated fathers are vulnerable to economic hardship due to challenges in securing employment and securing public benefits upon release (Harding, Wyse, Dobson, and Morenoff 2014). Economic demands such as restitution payments and parole/probation supervision fees further reduce their ability to provide financially
for their children. Restrictions on personal time due to mandatory meetings or classes as well as travel and housing restrictions can also limit contact.

The quasi-correctional state of being on probation or parole creates a sense of insecurity and stress, further challenging their ability to rebuild relationships with their children. At the same time, research indicates that father’s who spend time with their children as less likely to be depressed or engage in criminal activities (Visher 2013).

As the role of women as mothers is generally understood, unsurprisingly, family and incarceration research tends to focus on women as the primary caregivers of children. However, the importance of men as fathers is lacking in both family and incarceration literature and in criminal justice policies. If fact, fathers make important contributions both positive and negative to family life.

The topic of fatherhood and incarceration has been little studied in the fields of family and criminal justice in comparison to motherhood research until recently. Mounting political pressure and community concern are fueling the demand for reentry research aimed at identifying factors that might reduce recidivism and promote desistance from crime. Employment (Freemen 2003; Tripodi, Kim and Bender 2010); education (Sedgley, Scott, Williams and Derrick 2010); family ties (Carlos and Cevera 1991); and substance abuse treatment (Phillips 2010) have all been identified as key but not as singular factors in reducing recidivism.
Increasingly, researchers view desistance from crime as a process requiring offenders to undergo a lifestyle change (Serin and Loyd 2009). According to Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002) shifts in thinking and identity are, “fundamental to the change process (p. 999).” Fatherhood can act as a hook for change to help reduce the desirability of criminal activity (Giordano et al 2002).

Much of the research on incarceration and fatherhood has focused on the importance of maintaining contact with children while incarcerated (Hairston 2001); the socio-emotional effect it has on the children (Wilbur 2007); and the impact on family life (Comfort 2008, Western and Wildeman 2009; Braman 2004). Limited research exists on the impact of incarceration on paternal identity (Tripp 2003 and 2009; Dyer 2005 and Secret 2012). Dyer (2005) proposes the use of identity theory as a means to understand the impact of incarceration on father identity. According to Dyer, the father identity confirmation process is disrupted by incarceration which affects family relationships (2005). This research adds to the literature on incarceration and fatherhood by further assessing incarceration’s impact on the identity and performance of fatherhood among African American men while in prison and after they have returned home.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Much of paternal incarceration literature focuses on the effects of parental incarceration on their children (Swan 1981; Fishman 1990; King 1993; Hairston 1995; Gabel 2003; Geller et al 2011). Little attention has been given to incarceration’s impact on the father, his identity and the practices of being a father. Within the limited amount of fatherhood identity research (Fox and Bruce 2001; Tripp 2003; McBride 2005; Arditti, Smock & Parkman 2005; Dyer 2005; Roy & Dyson 2005; Roy 2006) no research assesses whether incarceration’s impact on father identity continues after the father is released.

This study addresses that question by exploring the meaning of fatherhood among African-American men and how the incarceration experience shapes their experiences of fatherhood. Specifically, I ask the following questions:

A) What is the meaning of fatherhood among African American men?

B) How does the incarceration experience shape fatherhood?

C) What is the relationship between fatherhood and self-sufficiency among formerly incarcerated African American men?

While acknowledging that African American men are not a monolithic group, we assert that the historical reality of racial oppression in the United
States has uniquely shaped the lived experience of being a man and being a father among African American men as a group. The legacy of racial oppression is evidenced by persistence of the embedded racial caste system whereby plantations have been transformed into prisons. The assault on fatherhood and disruption of family life instituted under slavery continued under Jim Crow and now, under mass incarceration, contributes to the reproduction of social injustice.

To address this issue, I used a mixed methods approach. It combines quantitative research to examine relationships between variables and qualitative research to explore what those relationships mean to individuals and groups. This study draws from surveys and in-depth personal interviews with formerly incarcerated African American men who and from those who have never been incarcerated.

**Participants**

Due to the challenge I encountered in gaining access to participants in the only reentry program in Springfield, Illinois, I sought alternate arrangements. The Springfield Urban League Male Involvement Program (SULMIP) was the only other program providing direct services to formerly incarcerated people in Springfield, Illinois. The Springfield Urban League is a non-profit, community-based organization providing direct services, research and policy advocacy to assist and empower African American and other minority individuals and communities.
The SULMIP is funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant funding and targets low-income fathers in the Sangamon, Macon and Morgan counties in the state of Illinois. The goal of the program is to help African American men improve their relationships with their families and increase their levels of personal responsibility. The program attempts to do this through education and job readiness training as well as through male support groups, marriage and parenting classes.

While the SULMIP is open to both men and women, ages 18 and older, the program focuses on low-income, African American fathers or fathers-to-be who previously received, currently receive or are at-risk of receiving Temporary Assistance For Needy Families (TANF) benefits or unemployment benefits. The program also targets those re-entering the community from prison.

The research sample was drawn from people participating in the SULMIP between August 2013 and April 2014. The target of this study is African American men between the ages of 18 and 40 who identify as having biological children with a focus on formerly incarcerated men whose children were under the age of 18 when they served time in a state of Illinois, federal or private prison. Those men must have been incarcerated within the last two years from the time of study (2010-2012) for non-violent offenses and have served no more that a total of 10 years in prison during their lifetime.
Fatherhood Experiences Survey (FES)

I created the FES (Appendix A) to measure perceptions and experiences of fatherhood, self-esteem, employment hope, self-sufficiency, and citizenship. This information can be correlated with demographics such as: age, gender, race, education level, marital status, number of children, and ex-offender or non-status, which enables a variety of groups who participated in the SULMIP to be analyzed.

I used the FES to explore the relationship between fatherhood and self-sufficiency among African American men in this program. Additionally, relationships between self-esteem and employment hope among African American men were also examined. The FES contains 14 questions on fatherhood. Twelve of the fatherhood questions were drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study¹ (Fragile Families) questionnaire, and I developed two additional items. The Fragile Families dataset was selected for its wide use by researchers studying parental incarceration (Geller et al 2009, Geller et al 2011; Wildeman 2009; Swisher and Waller 2008; Woldoff and Washington 2008; Lewis et al 2007; Western, Lopoo and McLanahan 2004; Western 2006; Wildeman and Western 2010).

¹ The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, conducted by Princeton University and Columbia University is following a cohort of nearly 5,000 children born in 10 large U.S. cities between 1998 and 2000. Approximately 75% of the children were born to unmarried parents. The term “fragile families,” is used to refer to unmarried parents and their children as being at greater risk of breaking up and living in poverty than more traditional families. The core Fragile Family study was created to address the capabilities and conditions of unmarried parents, particularly fathers.
Fatherhood measures were further grouped into three categories: practices, experiences, and father identity. Fatherhood practices correspond to six items identifying the value the respondent placed on providing and caring for, teaching, protecting, showing love and affection to their children on a three-point scale from “very important to “not important at all”. Fatherhood experiences correspond to five items eliciting agreement or disagreement with statements about being a father on a four-point scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Father identity corresponds to ratings on three items: the importance of being present in the lives of their children; being an example to their children; and providing for their children.

Self-esteem is defined as a self-assessment of how much an individual believes that he or she is capable, significant, and worthy (Coopersmith 1967). In this study, self-esteem is measured using 10 items on Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale (Blaskovich & Tomaka 1991). Self-sufficiency is defined as the self-assessed level of financial independence and well-being. The 15-item, WEN economic self-sufficiency scale was used to measure self-sufficiency (Gowdy & Pearlmuter, 1993).

Employment hope is defined as a transformation in which one becomes psychologically empowered with self-worth and motivation about the future and is then able to progress toward his goals by utilizing skills and resources (Hong and Choi 2013). The 24-item Employment Hope Scale was used to measure
employment hope as a dimension of psychological self-sufficiency (Hong, Polanin and Pigott 2012).

In addition to the fatherhood questions described above, the survey asked individuals whether their biological father was involved in their lives and if so, the extent of that involvement. They were also asked to identify what they believe to be the three most important characteristics of fathers and identify the three most important things that a father should provide for his children. The survey also asked them about the importance of particular activities such as: providing financial support, care, protection, and love; the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with normative statements about being a father; their feelings about themselves; and their feeling about employment. They were then asked to rate themselves on statements about their current financial situation. The final questions ask respondents to disclose if they had ever been incarcerated in their lifetimes, and if so, for what offense and for what length of time. The survey concluded with a consent form to be contacted for a personal in-depth interview.

A convenience sample of 141 adults participating in the SULMIP was obtained for the quantitative study. Surveys were administered during the program’s orientation or group sessions by me or the program staff. After collecting the surveys, I entered them individually into the SPSS database that I created for this study.
In-Depth Interviews

While FES was designed to provide insight on fatherhood experiences among formerly incarcerated and never incarcerated African American men by identifying categories and allowing the researcher to compare groups, it did not and could not capture what incarceration means to these men, their families and their communities. Qualitative research provides a way to explore the meanings individuals assign to larger social problems (Creswell 2009). To provide a deeper understanding of how fathering perceptions and practices are impacted by incarceration, I conducted 30 in-depth interviews with African American fathers who identified as being formerly incarcerated or never incarcerated. Given the re-entry research indicating that people convicted of non-violent offenses serving short-term prison sentences posses more potentially rehabilitative capabilities\(^2\) than people convicted of violent offenses, I created a profile to select formerly incarcerated men to interview, a process that is detailed in the section below.

*Interview Sampling and Recruitment*

In order to focus on formerly incarcerated fathers, the qualitative interviews of this study were limited to the sample to survey respondents fitting the following profile: African American males, ages 18-45 who identified as being formerly incarcerated or never incarcerated with one child or more under the age of 18 for whom at they were responsible for during and after their

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\(^2\) Longer prison terms result in greater detachment from an individual's community (Travis, Solomon and Waul 2001) and degree of institutionalization (Haney 2003)
The ex-offender sample was further limited to those who reported serving no more than a total of 10 years in prison over their lifetime for non-violent offenses.

Surveys from consenting respondents were grouped into two categories: formerly incarcerated and never incarcerated. Individuals with reported histories of violent offenses and those serving more than 10 years in prison were excluded from the ex-offender group. Interviewees were then selected randomly from each group. I called selected persons to arrange interviews using the contact number that they provided on the consent form. Interviews were conducted at the Springfield Urban League’s program office or at an alternate office location located directly across the street.

**Challenges in Recruitment**

Many of the challenges I encountered in studying these men’s experiences can be attributed in large part to the social and economic instability of their lives. Potential interviewees were contacted within 7 to 21 days of completing the survey.

Many times I would call to set up interviews only to find out that the cell phone numbers provided had been disconnected. I would leave messages if they had voicemail. Some men admitted that they screened their calls and that my leaving a message is what compelled their return call.

There were instances where potential interviewee did not have their own phones and gave a family member or friend’s number as their contact
number. When I called, the respondent was not there. In those instances, I would attempt to leave discrete messages, providing my name and contact information. Sometimes friends and family members would promise to give the respondent my message the next time he called or came around. On several occasions, I was questioned by women about who I was and my purpose for calling the respondent. When I identified myself as doing a survey with the SULMIP, one woman accused me of lying and hung up on me. I did not attempt to call back. When I was able to reach some respondents directly by phone, I typically spent the initial part of the conversation reminding them that I was the person who had administered the survey and that they had given me permission to contact them when they took the survey and that I was not a bill collector.

Among the men I was able to reach, I found that interview times were frequently changed or cancelled by respondents who were working or those chasing job leads and interviews. I found myself having to make myself available whenever they could agree to an interview time.

Another challenge I encountered was in the screening the sample for formerly incarcerated participants. There were a number of formerly incarcerated SULMIP program participants that were female or identified as non-African American or had served prison sentences longer than 10 years, or had been convicted of violent offenses, rendering them ineligible for inclusion in the analysis of this study. One SULMI female participant expressed a strong
desire to share her story, and I felt compelled to interview her but excluded the interview from analysis.

**Interview Procedures**

Interviews lasted between 30 and 130 minutes. The questions covered four main topic areas: fathering experiences, the meaning of fatherhood, employment experiences and incarceration experiences. *Fathering experiences* questions asked respondents about their relationship with their own father and their experiences when they became fathers. *Meaning of fatherhood* questions focused on the meaning they personally assigned to fatherhood and how they felt that fatherhood was defined by society. Employment questions asked about respondent’s employment experiences. *Incarceration experiences* questions explored what their experience of fathering was while in prison and how they were affected.

I generally followed the interview guide found in Appendix B, utilizing open-ended questions. All but one interview was conducted in person. The interview not conducted in person was done by phone due to not having a suitable interview space when the respondent was available.

Though the consent form provided interviewees with information about the purpose of the study and uses of the research, I found that some participants seemed hesitant to be interviewed and for the interviews to be recorded. I had one interviewee question my personal and professional motives for doing research on African American men and how my work would
help and not exploit the incarceration epidemic in the African American
community. He was confrontational almost to the point of making me feel
uncomfortable, and I fully expected him to walk out without being interviewed.
At one point he stopped abruptly, and looked me straight in the eye and asked
work is foundational to this study, I was happy to share my honest opinion
about the book. With my response he smiled, relented and allowed me to
conduct the interview, which ended up lasting more than 2 hours. In other
interviews, I found that when I began the interview divulging that I had an
incarcerated loved one, seemed to make them more comfortable and more
willing to share their stories with me.

The use of in-depth interviews allowed me to elicit responses that could
not be captured in the survey by creating a place and space that fostered
greater explanation by respondents (Weiss 1995). Through the survey, I
learned that many formerly incarcerated men identified incarceration(s) as
period(s) of time in which they were unable to be in the lives of their children.
During in-depth interviews, they went into greater detail and discussed how not
being in their children’s lives affected them and their children.

Table 1 provides a list of formerly incarcerated interview subjects and
their demographic characteristics.
Table 1. Interview Subjects, Formerly Incarcerated Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym, Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th># of Biological Children</th>
<th># of Other Children</th>
<th># of Mothers</th>
<th>Total Time in Prison</th>
<th>Offense Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stanley, 24</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Yr, 6 Mos</td>
<td>DCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel, 39</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 Yrs</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn, 28</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 Yr, 3 Mos</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, 35</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7 Yrs, 8 Mos</td>
<td>Drug Trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason, 30</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 Yrs</td>
<td>DCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry, 35</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 Yrs, 6 Mos</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn, 29</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 Yrs</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve, 28</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 Yrs, 10 Mos</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard, 37</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 Mos</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy, 21</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Yrs</td>
<td>DCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl, 25</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Yrs</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd, 32</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 Yrs, 4 Mos</td>
<td>SCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antwan, 37</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 Yrs, 6 Mos</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David, 44</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8 Yrs, 6 Mos</td>
<td>CSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas, 40</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18 Mos</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, 36</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Yrs</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zach, 23</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 Yr, 6 Mos</td>
<td>SCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam, 27</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 Yrs</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry, 32</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 Yrs</td>
<td>DCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeke, 24</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 Yr, 6 Mos</td>
<td>PCS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 provides a list of never incarcerated interview subjects and their...
demographic characteristics.

Table 2. Interview Subjects, Never Incarcerated Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psuedonym, Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th># of Biological Children</th>
<th># of Other Children</th>
<th># of Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan, 38</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall, 28</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry, 30</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry, 36</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian, 23</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore, 27</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas, 34</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric, 33</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson, 23</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathon, 40</td>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mixed Methodology Rationale**

The combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods provides greater depth and strength than can be achieved by either method alone (Creswell and Plano -Clark 2007). To explore how incarceration impacts the identity and social relationships of African American fathers, a sequential research strategy was employed. The initial phase, surveys was followed by a second phase, in-depth interviews. The second phase built upon the analysis from the surveys. Figure 2 below provides an illustration of the research design.
Mixing methods allowed the meaning of fatherhood among African American men to be analyzed in two different ways: the quantitative surveys of the experiences and beliefs among a large sample of the population and the qualitative interviews with a small sample of fathers.

**Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative analysis was designed to provide a means to show how the fathers in the sample view fatherhood and to statistically describe the relationship between identity, fatherhood and self-sufficiency. It also helped to quantify the differences between ex-offender and non-offender fathers. To gain a greater understanding of the contexts in which African American men father, FES data was used to draw comparisons between descriptive characteristics and offender status. The descriptive data findings are reported in the next chapter.

Three levels of analysis were utilized: uni-variate, bi-variate and multi-variate analysis. The SPSS statistical program was utilized for data analysis. All surveys were entered into SPSS by me. Survey responses were verified after being entered. Data analysis began with the selection of cases to exclude non-male and non-African American respondents from the analysis.
Bi-Variate Analysis

While the descriptive characteristic data provides comparisons among fathers, it does not provide statistical evidence of identified differences. As such, bivariate analysis was used to explore the relationship between fatherhood and self-sufficiency. Independent samples t-tests were employed to better determine the relationship between offender status and self-esteem, self-sufficiency, employment and fatherhood. Measures of self-esteem, self-sufficiency, employment hope and fatherhood were analyzed separately to provide a context for discussion.

Multi-Variate Analysis

Multiple regression was used to further explore the effect of fatherhood on self-sufficiency among formerly incarcerated men. The regression model tested is indicated in Figure 3.
Identifying Themes

Quantitative data was utilized to identify themes used in the initial phase of coding the interview transcripts. Survey respondents were asked to identify the three characteristics that they felt were most important to being a good father. Responses with the highest frequency identifying characteristics of fathers and the most important things for fathers to provide were combined to create coding themes.

Qualitative Analysis

After interviews were conducted, I transcribed them. For the initial phase of coding, each interview transcript was coded utilizing the primary themes derived from the quantitative data. The initial coding phase helped
identify what respondents believed a father is and what fathers do. The second coding phase focused on what it means to be a father to the men I interviewed. The third coding phase was used to identify how men father while being incarcerated. Fathering practices on while incarcerated and after release were explored. To better understand of how father identity is affected by incarceration, the fourth coding phase identified Father Identity Confirmation Process markers among interview participants. Father Identity Confirmation Process markers included: 1) changing behaviors, 2) changing the father identity comparison group, 3) changing the father identity standard, and 4) abandoning the father identity standard.

Figure 4 below provides an illustration on the coding phases.

Figure 4. Interview Transcript Coding Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Phase</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Coding Phase</td>
<td>Being There, Being an Example, and Providing Love, Basic Needs and Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Coding Phase</td>
<td>Becoming a Father, Learning How to Father and The Meaning of Fatherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Coding Phase</td>
<td>Fathering on the Inside and Fathering on the Outside of Prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Coding Phase</td>
<td>Changing Behaviors, Changing Comparison Group, Changing Standard and Abandoning Father Identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Synthesis of Data

The characteristics of fatherhood identified through the survey formed the basis of the fatherhood identity standard that is analyzed further in the following chapter. The fatherhood identity standard is comprised of: being there, being an example and providing for their children. The father identity standard was used to define how men in the study felt that fathers should be and what they should do.

The mixed method research design provided context and meaning to the research topic that could not be achieved by each method alone. The FES descriptive data initiated our understanding of what fatherhood means to African American men and how attitudes toward being a father are differentially affected by incarceration. The interviews further fleshed out the meaning of those differences.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

African American men are often viewed as fathering children but less often as being fathers (Coles and Green 2010). Negative depictions of unmarried, African American fathers in media and literature help reinforce negative stereotypes. Too often, they are fingered as the absent fathers profiled in Moynihan’s report and summarily labeled as uncommitted, uninvolved deadbeat dads deserving of Presidential reprimands.

Statistics indicating that more than half (53%) of African American households are headed by single women and that 42.5% of those households live below the poverty line further fuel charges of African American men being absent fathers (U.S. Bureau of Census 2013). However, media, statistics and reports present only one side and sometimes, only select pieces of the story. This research found that there is much more to be considered. Fatherhood among African American men is complex and father involvement is dynamic, being impacted by historical, economic, social, and political forces that are both within and outside of the father’s control (Julion, Gross, Barclay-McLaughlin and Fogg 2007).

This chapter reports the findings of the quantitative and qualitative research undertaken to better understand a) the meaning of fatherhood among a
particular group of African American men; b) how incarceration shapes fatherhood experiences among them; and c) the relationship between father identity and self-sufficiency among these African-American men.

**Survey Results**

141 SULMIP participants completed surveys. Based on the research purpose of exploring the meaning of fatherhood among these African American men, female and non-African American respondents were excluded from the analysis. The resulting survey sample represented 109 participants ranging in age from 18 to 64.

The average age of respondents was 37 years. On average, twelfth grade or GED was the highest level of education achieved. 58% of respondents reported having never been married. 70% of respondents reported being fathers with between one and ten different mothers to which being just friends was the most frequent relationship status reported.

The FES was used to quantitatively explore the first research question regarding the meaning of fatherhood among African American men. Survey findings indicate that African American men do find value in their role and experience as fathers. 94% of respondents (n=102) affirmed fatherhood as one the most fulfilling experiences a man can have. 96% of respondents (n=105) viewed not being in their children’s lives as one of the worst things that could happen to them.
Survey respondents were asked to identify the three characteristics that they felt were most important to being a good father. More than 24 characteristics were identified by respondents with the following reported with the highest frequency: giving/showing love, being there, being an example/leader, and providing for their children and teaching/giving guidance or direction. Table 3 provides a list of the survey responses and their frequency.

Table 3. The Most Important Characteristics of Being a Good Father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving/Showing Love</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being There</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being an example/leader</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a Provider</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/giving guidance or Direction</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Discipline</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectfulness</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending Time</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Involved</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Strong</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Affectionate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey respondents were also asked to identify the three most important things that they felt fathers should provide for their children. More than 12 items were identified by respondents, with love, shelter, food, clothing, financial support and protection being reported with the highest frequency. Table 4 provides a list of the survey responses and their frequency.

Table 4. The Most Important Things a Father Should Provide for His Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Support</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals/Values</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses with the highest frequency identifying characteristics of fathers and the most important things for fathers to provide were combined to form the basis of father identity reported by the sample. Father identity here is used to represent what one believes he should be and do as a father. Collectively the responses listed in Table 5: being there, being an example, and providing love, basic needs and protection are used to define the father identity standard analyzed by this study. The father identity standard was also used as primary themes for coding the interview data.

Table 5. Resulting Father Identity Standard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Being There</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Being an Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Providing Love, Basic Needs (Food, Shelter and Clothing), and Protection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

62% of participants (n=68) reported having served time in a state, federal or private prison sometime in their lifetime and 38% of participants (n=41) reported having never been incarcerated. 51% of formerly incarcerated men (n=35) in the study had been incarcerated for non-violent, drug related charges. 30% of formerly incarcerated men (n=20) reported violent offenses such as unlawful use of a weapon, armed robbery, sexual assault, aggravated battery, or murder. 18% of formerly incarcerated respondents (n=12) did not specify the charges for which they had been incarcerated.

To better understand how the incarceration experience shapes fatherhood we explored differences between formerly incarcerated and never incarcerated respondents. Table 6 below provides the demographic differences between
respondents by incarceration status. Notable differences were found on financial stability measures, with a majority of formerly incarcerated respondents reporting being unable to pay their bill and as not having plans to retire or retirement funds.

Table 6. Demographic Data for Respondents by Incarceration Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formerly Incarcerated</th>
<th>Never Incarcerated</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-30</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41+</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School Diploma/GED</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level of Education-12th Grade/GED</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/Technical Degree</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College but no Degree</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree or Higher</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Father Involvement:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Involved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Not Involved</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do Not Live With Children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Stability:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Health Ins</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Health Ins</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Pay Bills</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot Pay Bills</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>77.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Retirement Fund</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Retirement Fund</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bi-Variate Analysis**

The FES was further used to explore the second research question: how incarceration shapes fatherhood experiences. Independent sample t-tests were run on fatherhood, self-esteem, employment hope, and self-sufficiency measures to determine difference between formerly incarcerated and never incarcerated men. No statistically significant findings were found between formerly incarcerated and never incarcerated respondents on Self-Esteem measures.

Independent Sample t-Tests resulted in significant findings on two fatherhood experience measures: taking care of the children is more work than pleasure and the importance of providing direct care to their children. This study found that formerly incarcerated respondents expressed significantly higher levels of disagreement with the statement that taking care of their child (ren) is much more work than pleasure compared to never incarcerated respondents, t
The study also found that formerly incarcerated respondents had significantly higher levels of expressed importance in providing direct care to their children compared to never incarcerated respondents, $t(106) = 2.014, p = 0.047$.

Statistically significant findings were shown in one Self-Sufficiency measure: the ability to pay their own way without borrowing from family and friends. This study found that formerly incarcerated respondents had significantly lower ability to pay their own way without borrowing from family or friends compared to never incarcerated respondents, $t(106) = 2.326, p = 0.022$.

One Employment Hope measure yielded a statistically significant finding. This study found that formerly incarcerated respondents had significantly lower reporting of being in the process of moving forward toward reaching their goals than never incarcerated respondents, $t(105) = 2.12, p = 0.037$.

To address the third research question, bi-variate correlations were run on the total scores for fatherhood (fatherhood experiences, fatherhood practices and fatherhood identity) and self-sufficiency measures. This study found that there is a correlation between fatherhood practices, experiences and identity and the self-assessed level of financial independence and well-being of men in the sample. Fatherhood practices are positively related to level of self-sufficiency, $r = .177, p < .005$. Fatherhood experiences in particular are positive related to self-sufficiency, $r = .178, p < .005$. 
Multi-Variate Analysis:

Multiple regression was used to better understand the relationship between fatherhood and self-sufficiency. The multiple regression model containing the variables: fatherhood experiences, practices and identity as predictors produced $R^2 = .466$, $F(3, 93) = 27.006$, $p < .001$. Fatherhood experiences had significant positive regression weights, indicating formerly incarcerated men with higher scores on these scales were expected to have higher self-sufficiency, after controlling for the other variables. Fatherhood practices and identity did not significantly contribute to the model. Multiple regression weights are listed in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Multiple Regression Weights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatherhood Identity</td>
<td>-20.105</td>
<td>-.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatherhood Practices</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatherhood Experiences</td>
<td>3.206</td>
<td>.693***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p < .001$

Interview Results

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the meaning of fatherhood among this group of African American men and how the incarceration experience shapes performances and practices of fatherhood. 20 formerly incarcerated and ten never incarcerated fathers were interviewed. The ages of the men interviewed ranged from 21 to 40 with the mean age of 33 years old.
Interview data coding revealed patterns in how men felt about becoming a father, what it means to be a father, how they learned how to father, and the practices that make up how they men “do” fatherhood.

**Becoming a Father**

For most of the men I interviewed becoming a father was an unplanned event. Many reported the ideal time to become a father to be at a point when maturity and financial stability has been achieved, but as one father reflected:

I wanted to wait until I was at least 35, like the age I am now (to have kids). Experience life. Got all the partying, clubbing and all of that out of my system…I figured I’d be more responsible. But you have no control over stuff sometimes. Sometimes it just happens and I just have to roll with it basically.

Some of the men reported being able to “roll with it” upon receiving the unplanned pregnancy news, while others were not. Many of those less thrilled by receiving news of impending fatherhood reported feeling unready to start a family at the time, while others questioned paternity. A few simply did not want to have children. “Rolling with it” was an expression used to describe acceptance of the idea and responsibility of being a father. Unsurprisingly, those questioning paternity found it more difficult to “roll with it.” One man shared how questioning the paternity clouded his thoughts about becoming a father:

I didn’t think they were my kids. I knew one was because we were together for three years but the other ones were in and out. I knew they were messing with other people so, I really didn’t know until the DNA test.
Meaning of Fatherhood

Despite experiencing surprise, shock, and a vast range of other emotions at the news of becoming a father, fathers overwhelmingly expressed that being a father holds meaning for them. Reported meanings included: Mixed Emotions, Life Turning Points, Sense of Purpose and Opportunity for Redemption.

*Mixed emotions.* Many fathers described having mixed emotions, a combination of positive and negative thoughts and feelings about becoming a father for the first time. Feelings of surprise, excitement and happiness were coupled with feeling pressure and anxiety about being a father. The combination of emotions can produce an emotional roller coaster, as one father describes:

> It was kinda frightening...had all these emotions...The frightening part is like man, I got somebody I gotta look out for now. I gotta provide for this little dude and be getting clothes and shelter, ya know? The sad part...I had dreams and ambitions...once she told me she was pregnant, it threwed me for a loop...And, when he came to the world, all that just went away. I seen him, cut that umbilical cord and been in love with him ever since. That's what I mean by it's like a roller coaster ride because you have all these emotions...

*Life turning points.* Becoming a father is described as being a major turning point in the lives of many of the fathers I interviewed. Having children reportedly gave them a new perspective and changed their priorities, plans and goals for their lives. One father described how becoming a father as helped him to become more focused in his life this way:

> I love being a dad. I love my kids. It's like the best thing that happened. Because, at the time (I became a dad), I was just out here. No goals. No plans. Just out here but it's (being a father) made me more responsible. Instead of just having to look out for myself, I got other people to be responsible for. So, I'm happy as a dad.
Some men described fatherhood as causing them to have an “ah-hah” moment in which they gain clarity and chose to reflect on and re-evaluate their lives. They are then motivated to change and become more responsible in their lives, as one man described:

I have to be more grounded as far as making wiser and better decisions because the children see me. Especially the older ones, they are looking at me, you know? So, I have to be more wise and make sound decisions, you know.

*Sense of purpose.* Along with joy and pain, fatherhood gives meaning and provides a sense of purpose in the lives of many of the men I interviewed. One father expressed the sense of purpose his children provide this way:

When it comes to my kids, that’s really all I care about. I don’t really care about too much of nothin’ but my kids. That’s what makes me go get a job. My kids make me want to live every day. Other than that, I don’t think I got a purpose for being here, not even a purpose for living but my kid’s, that’s it.

*Opportunity for redemption.* Some of the fathers I interviewed described fatherhood as an opportunity to redeem themselves particularly, with their sons. Time after time, men expressed a belief that their young sons have the potential to be better versions of themselves, as if too late for themselves. They held a deep desire for their sons to accomplish the things that they had not accomplished in their lives. Fathers wanted to help their sons avoid the mistakes that they made and avoid traps they fell into. These men did not believe they would achieve their goals as if their lives were over at the ripe ages of 40 and under. One father shared his hopes for his then unborn son’s future this way:
He carries my genes. He’s a little me. That’s something to be proud of if he can accomplish the things I haven’t.

*Learning How to be a Father*

There were a variety of ways in which the men I interviewed reported learning to become fathers. Being a father was most often described as a learning process. The learning process is ongoing as described by one father, “the thing is, it’s a learning process every day. I believe when I’m fifty, I'll still be learning.”

For some men, learning to be a father was facilitated by not having their biological father in their lives. As one father explains:

I learned how to be a dad by not having a dad...having that experience and feelings and saying well, “I’m not gon’ never put my child through this,” which I eventually did. But, I did everything that wasn’t done for me from a male’s perspective.

Many men reporting not having their biological father’s in their lives often credited *Others* in their lives such as: friends, older brothers, sisters and mothers for teaching them how to be fathers. These others served as father figures. One father described how he learned from positive and negative father figures in his life:

I had father figures. My grandfather. My uncles. I’ve had good uncles and I’ve had bad ones. I have an uncle that’s been with is kids and his wife, my auntie all of their lives. Pretty much raised his family and always stayed on top of his job…. had a career and I seen how they turned out…then I got uncle’s that’s like f*ck this, f*ck that…They getting’ a check on the first of the month…They drink. They smoke…I see the difference and I wanna be better.
Life experiences were also reported to be an important teacher to fathers in this study. One father explained how he learned to father through different types of life experiences:

I learned on my own. I didn’t have a choice…I have family, but I don’t really have family. I just started to be on my own, you know. Then, by me being with girls with kids, I learned to deal with kids by being around them and by being around my nieces and nephews. I didn’t think it was a hard job to be a dad.

Another man described the process of learning to be a father as on-the-job training with his children:

I don’t think you learn how to be a dad. There ain’t no owner’s manual. I don’t care what the books say, you know. It’s day to day. You learn every day…Being a dad is a huge learning curve. You have to adapt to it. You have to prioritize things in your life and your schedule.

I also interviewed men who could not identify how they learned how to be fathers. When I asked one man how he learned to be a father, he responded:

Don’t really know and I think that’s the biggest thing in the African American community. I really don’t know. Like, we didn’t have no parenting. Just because you have a child, don’t mean you’re a father…Like. I’m learning to this day. And, it’s sad to say but I know a lot of people having kids, they think they ready to be a father but they don’t have the tools to know what it really is. Because, you wouldn’t even have kids if you knew how much it costs to take care of them. So, you bring a child into the world and I gotta struggle and I gotta make my child struggle too. So, it’s really wrong.

Doing Fatherhood

Extending West and Zimmerman’s (1987) concept, “Doing Gender,” fatherhood can also be viewed as a social construct. Fatherhood encompasses not only what a person is but what they do as well. Fatherhood is done through everyday social interactions. Doing fatherhood represents a
conceptualization of father identity, what one believes they should be and do as a father. Drawing from the quantitative data, the three most important characteristics of being a father identified were: being there, being an example and providing for their children. In addition, the three most important things for a father to provide were: love, basic needs and protection. Collectively, these components: being there and being an example along with providing love, basic needs and protection were grouped together to form the basis of father identity.

**Being There.** Many fathers spoke of the importance of being physically present in the lives of their children. Physical presence was expressed as being an essential component of father identity. As one father expressed:

> Just being around. That’s the most important part (of fatherhood). People think it’s about money but it’s just being around that matters most. Honestly, that’s what I think anyway. I think being around is the most important thing.

Not living in the home with their children makes being physically present in their lives on a daily basis more challenging. Some non-resident fathers reported making concerted, conscious effort to be present and active in their children’s lives. One father described the effort he makes in order to be what he claims to be “constantly” involved in his children’s lives:

> I’m always there for my kids. Whenever they call me and wanna come over, I go get’em. When I wanna see them, I go get’em. When I wanna do something with them, I go get’em. It’s like, I’m constantly involved in my kids’ lives. It’s never been a time that they can say that I wasn’t there.
A non-resident father's ability to be or not to be there for their children can be limited by the mothers of their children. Maternal gate keeping, the active process of encouraging or discouraging father involvement was cited as a source of tense relations and great frustration (Roy and Dyson 2005). One father expressed his frustration in having to negotiate for time with his children through their mother:

I can always adjust my schedule to get my kids. But if she (their mother) ain't having a good week or good month, I can't see them ... She knows how dear my children are to me, so you would think she would allow me some time. But, the ball is in her court.

One father bemoaned not being able to see his children due to conflicts with their mother:

It was like five months when the mother of my two kids, we got into it and she tried to keep them from me. It was depressing cuz', I was with my kids from the beginning. So, it was like, you took my kids away from me. You ripped a whole piece of my heart out.

For some fathers, having children with multiple partners makes physically being there for all of their children on a daily basis more challenging or even prohibitive. One father lamented not being able to be there for his children on a daily basis:

I'm missing out on time. Each day. I can't be in four or five different places at one time... Time is very important.

*Being an example.* Fathers spoke of finding value in being an example to their children. Being an example was described as characteristic of what a father should be and what a father should do. One father described how being an example to his children made him feel:
Being a role model...being a hero...being a leader. They look up to you for everything. You’re their first teacher. It makes me feel like a hero to my children. That’s how they look at me.

Setting an example for their children, was also expressed as being important to them. Setting an example was believed to help develop character positively or negatively as one father remarked, “everything you say and do teaches them.” Another father expressed his thoughts on setting a good example for his children this way:

Not just telling them when they’re wrong but setting a good example. You know how some people say, “do as I say and not as I do?” I can’t tell them not to do this and I turn around and do it. I can’t tell them not to act a certain way and then turn around and do it. And, if I do, I owe them an explanation of why I did it.

Providing love, basic needs, and protection. What it means to be a man and father in the U.S. is inextricably tied to providing for oneself and one’s family. Fathers I interviewed expressed a belief that making sure their children had a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs and food in their stomachs to be an essential part of being a father. Providing for their children constituted a central component of father identity as one father described:

Gotta make sure the baby eats. Gotta make sure the baby got clothes to wear. Definitely gotta make sure the baby has a roof over their heads at all costs. That’s the basics.

For some, the pressure to provide for their children’s basic needs leads them to do so by any means necessary, legal or otherwise. One father divulged taking risks to provide for his children’s needs:

I can’t provide for them like I want to but everything they want, I always manage to get it. Not always the right way but I manage to get it. I don’t
always want to have to take a risk to get stuff for my kids. I should be able to work for it. I try to keep them happy. One day it’s gonna catch up…I don’t want them hurting for nothing or have to want for nothing, to have to ask for nothing.

Summary

This chapter presented findings of the sequential research design. In the initial phase, quantitative surveys captured self-reported data. The FES findings indicate that African American men do place value on their role and experiences as fathers. There are statistical differences in fatherhood, self-sufficiency and employment hope measures between formerly incarcerated men and those never incarcerated.

Men in this study identified what it means to be a father, what a father is and what fathers do, and their responses were used to form the basis of the father identity concept for this study. The resulting father identity standard included: being there, being an example, and providing love basic needs and protection. Further discussion of father identity and the impact of incarceration will be taken up in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

INCAPACITATED FATHERHOOD

“This camp (prison) brings out the very best in brothers or destroys them entirely. But none are unaffected. None who leave here are normal…” (Jackson 1994: 32).

The words of Soledad Bother author, George Jackson ring tragically true for many of the formerly incarcerated men that I have worked with, known, and even some of those interviewed for this study. The prevailing sentiment expressed by many of friends and family members of formerly incarcerated men is that their loved one has “changed” since going to prison. Communicated is the sense that incarceration somehow changes people, their behavior, and their performance of identity.

Incarceration’s reach extends beyond one’s physical confinement into virtually every area of their life. Through what Goffman (1961) termed, mortification of the self, prisoners are literally stripped of the life they previously lived and roles they performed. Induction into the prison culture begins with the confiscation of clothing personal property and reassignment of given names to inmate numbers. Deprived of liberty, prisoners lose control over, “where they eat, sleep and shit,” as one man put it. Subjected to constant monitoring and degradation rituals such as strip searches, prisons attempt to coerce people into gradual and ongoing acceptance of a new identity and a set of prison
roles and expectations. In theory, the objective of prison is the transformation prisoners into docile bodies to be “subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Foucault 1994: 136).

According to Tripp (2009) prisoners do not undergo a direct transformation from one identity to a prison identity as has been previously theorized, but instead simultaneously manage the acquisition and loss of multiple identities. Applying Tripp’s theory, imprisoned men attempt to manage their father identity, their new inmate identity, and other roles and identities, while simultaneously losing roles and identities. Men behind bars are particularly challenged in their ability manage their identity as fathers.

This research extends that research trajectory by examining some of the challenges to the performance and practices of fatherhood as experienced by formerly incarcerated African American men. The men in this study resoundingly expressed meaning and value in their role and experiences as fathers. At the same time, the experience of being an incarcerated father was depicted as a psychological and emotional hell. This chapter examines into impact of incarceration on how these formerly incarcerated men saw themselves as fathers and performed the role of fatherhood. To do so, it develops the concepts, “incapacitated fatherhood” and “father identity.”
Disabled Fatherhood

Similar to research Arditti et al (2005), this study found that incarceration disables fatherhood. The disabling effect results in part from the physical separation that occurs between fathers and their children, in some instances for years at a time and over great distances. 55% of the fathers in federal prison and 44% of fathers in state prisons lived with at least one of their minor children prior to incarceration (Mumola 2000), but 62% of fathers in state prisons and 84% of those in federal prison were confined more than 100 miles away from their homes and 43% of fathers in federal prison were more than 500 miles away from their homes (Mumola 2000). According to Federal Bureau of Prisons, inmates are designated to facilities based on their security classification and program needs within a 500-mile radius of their release residence (See Figure 4: Federal Prison Location Map). Re-designation can occur for changes in security classification and program needs or for administrative reasons such as prison overcrowding. Men I interviewed who had served time in the federal system, reported being shipped from Illinois to states as far away as Arkansas, Virginia and North Dakota. One father claimed that he had been moved around so frequently that at times, it took up to a year for him to get letters from his family. Another father who served four years “in the feds” described how the distance limited his ability to see and interact with his children in this way:

I was in the feds (federal prison system). So, it wasn’t like I was local where they could visit me. I was always getting’ shipped here or there. Kentucky. Arkansas. Nowhere close by home...So, I really only seen them
5 or 6 times and then just pictures and stuff and like, phone calls but it really isn’t the same as being there.

Figure 5. Federal Prison Location Map

Other factors such as the length and number of prison sentences, contribute to the disabling effect of incarceration on the father-child relationship. Drug convictions result, on average, in 12-13 month long prison sentences (Bureau of Justice 2014). A Bureau of Justice report (2014) on the recidivism among prisoners released in 30 states in 2005 found that 76.6% of drug offenders had committed new crimes and 80.8% of African Americans had returned to prison within five years of their release. Multiple and consecutive stints in prison can add up to substantial time away from their children for some men.

Prison doors have become revolving ones for far too many fathers between the ages of 20 and 40. Prisoners do their time; are released; they are then rearrested or violate probation or parole and become re-incarcerated.
According to research, the revolving door that pushed them in and out of prison and in and out of their children’s lives does not stop until these men reach their mid-forties (Freemen 2003). More research is needed to explore why the revolving door stops. It is possible that as men age, aversion to risks taking may increase. Men, particularly over the age of 30 would comment, “I’m too old for this,” to explain why they have chosen to desist from illegal activities.

The physical distance and loss of physical contact can also result in emotional distance between fathers and their children. Many fathers said that they did not feel as close to their children as they wanted to be while they were incarcerated. Fathers described how difficult it was to adjust to being away from their children and having their interactions reduced to letters, phone calls and monitored visits. One father described how visits from his children made him feel:

I didn’t like it (visits)...I loved them but I didn’t want them to see me like that. It hurt ...When they started asking questions like “when are you coming home?” That really hurt me. I just wanted them to be children.

Mothers or caretakers of their children were described as either buffering or aggravating the deleterious effect of incarceration on their relationship with their children. They read letters to children who could not read. They also “kept money on the phone” in order for fathers to talk to their children and brought them to visit, often at great expense. Other mothers or caretakers cut off all contact and communication with fathers. As Roy and Dyson (2005) found, in blocking or facilitating paternal involvement, maternal gatekeepers can assist fathers in finding new ways to enact meaningful behaviors to confirm their
identities as fathers. In a sense, they help shape how the fathers are able to define fatherhood.

Though federal, state and private prison vary by security level, all place constraints on interaction between fathers and their children. Prisons maintain various levels of contact restrictions ranging from: full contact visits, allowing various forms of physical contact such as hand holding; open, noncontact visits allowing visits to occur without a physical barrier; barrier visits, which occurs across a barrier such as Plexiglas and more recently, video visitation. Video visitation is similar to video conferencing, which allows for individuals to see and talk from different physical locations, eliminating the need for travel.

Visitation, as with every other aspect of the prison environment is strictly controlled. From the institutional perspective expressed to me by one prison administrator, visitors heighten security concerns and represent additional bodies to be managed, controlled and confined. The prison administrator wished that “we could get rid of visitation all together” because visitors “get in the way.” In my experience, the sentiment expressed by the administrator is not a novel one and is shared by many other prison officials and guards. Visitors are not treated as guests. They become pseudo inmates during their brief visits to prison. The spouses, partners and even children of inmates experience secondary prisonization which forces them to accept an inferior role and adopt prison norms that ultimately redefine them and their relationships (Comfort 2008).
To assimilate into the prison culture, visitors must learn the rules of the institution and how to follow them. Visitors must have prior approval by the institution to visit. In many cases, the prisoner submits a list of names that they would like included on their official “visitor list”. The approval process often includes background checks and varying amounts of processing time. In some cases, only the documented biological children of the inmate are allowed to visit.

Proper identification such as a state issued driver’s license or ID cards for adults is required for admission into the institution. Illinois prisons require two forms of identification such as a driver’s license and social security card. Birth certificates for minor children may also be required. Once, I drove a grandmother the two grandkids that she was “keeping” 60 miles for a prison visit only to be turned away for not having proper documentation. The prison’s visitation policy dictated that only the custodial parent or legal guardian was allowed bring children into the institution even though she had entered into an informal custody arrangement by “keeping” the children while their father served his time. As a result of their informal arrangement, she had no paperwork establishing legal guardianship.

Upon entering the prison, visitors experience a relative loss of liberty. Through initiation rituals visitors are transformed into pseudo prisoners and are similarly viewed and treated as docile bodies to be “subjected, used, transformed, and improved (Foucault 1994: 136). After surrendering personal identification, pictures may be taken of visitors before they are herded through
metal detectors. Should the detector sound off, visitors are then taken into custody and searched. Similar to prisoners, they are also subjected to confiscation of personal property and body searches. Prison policies further regulate everything from who can visit and how often to what visitors wear, where they can go and what they can do. Access to an institution can be denied for any offense such as wearing the prohibited clothing colors or fabric types.

Many family members describe the prison environment as one of constant uncertainty. As one family member put it, “you never know what’s gonna happen” and “never know what’s really going on.” The monitoring of calls, letters and visits breeds an air of distrust that feeds into fears of mistreatment by prison officials against their incarcerated loved one. It is psychological torture for the family members worried about their loved ones’ health and safety in an environment peeked in violence.

Fear of lock-downs that can occur when there is any disturbance such as fights in the institution looms. When lock-downs occur, the institution shuts down to the outside world. Visitation comes to an abrupt end or can be cancelled without any notice and all visitors are expelled or prohibited from entering until order is returned to the institution. All communication to and from prisoners is cut off, leaving family members with questions and concerns. Another fear is of their loved one being sent to the “hole,” better known as solitary confinement, where they aren’t allowed phone calls or contact visits. However, for many family members, victimization by sexual or physical violence is their ultimate fear. It is
under immense emotional and physical constraints that fathers and their children attempt to maintain meaningful relationships.

Hairston’s (2001) research found that prison environment shapes parenting roles and behaviors of fathers while simultaneously requiring behaviors that are not conducive to developing or strengthening the basis for effective parenting, such as active involvement and positive reinforcement. Hairston (2001) found that affection, communication and discipline are inhibited in the prison environment. The association between communication and relationship satisfaction has tremendous implications for incarcerated fathers who have limited ability to communicate with their children (Dindia 1994). In my study, fathers claimed that they found it difficult to interact or play with their children during visitations because the prison required that their children remain seated and quiet during the visit. The policies aimed at maintaining order and control also suppress one hallmark of father-child interaction, rambunctious, stimulating and emotive play (Lamb 2004).

**Father Identity Concept**

Many formerly incarcerated fathers in this study counted their incarceration period(s) as a time when they felt that they were unable to be fathers to their children. They described how the physical separation from their children for years at a time restricted their ability to enact behaviors as fathers and impacted their identity as fathers.
There are many components to father identity. The concept of father identity presented here represents what the men in this study thought a father is and what fathers should do. Collectively, the father identity components define a father identity standard. The key components of the father identity standard identified by the men in the study were: being there, being an example, and providing (love, basic needs, and protection). Fathers described how imprisonment prohibited them from enacting behaviors to confirm the father identity standard. While in prison, they were not able to be there, not able to be the example they wanted to be to their children and not able to effectively provide love, basic needs and protection.

*Not being there.* Fathers expressed negative emotions including: sadness, disappointment, and regret when they talked about not being able to be physically present in the lives of their children during their incarceration. Year after year, fathers missed birthdays and holidays with their children. They missed hearing the children’s first words and seeing them taking their first steps. Some even reported missing their child’s birth. Others reported missing first days of school, parent-teacher conferences and graduations. Reflecting on how it felt to miss time with his children, one man said, “It was hard because I had to watch them grow up on pictures.” Rituals, as Durkheim theorized, are important for publicly cementing bonds between fathers and their children. They are also essential tools which men use to construct their identity as fathers (Burke 2003).
Inability to perform rituals while in prison was devastating to their identity as fathers.

The physical separation can strain even the strongest relationships. Many found maintaining bonds during incarceration to be difficult and found it challenging to build bonds with one’s children while in prison. One father explained how going to prison affected his ability to build a bond with his infant daughter:

When I went in she was seven or eight months (old) so, she didn’t know me. It was kinda hard to see when she would come visit, she didn’t know me and I’d been gone so long that she would kinda act funny with me but now she’s all, she’s a daddy’s girl... but like I say, she didn’t really know me so, it was hard for us to bond but she got better.

Maintaining bonds with young children under the age of five was expressed as particularly challenging to do in prison. Fathers with young children noted how their children developed rapidly during that time and that many milestones were missed. One father described how he had been in his son’s life from day one to when he was three years old until he went to prison for one year. When he returned home from prison his son told him, “You’re not my daddy. You’re a stranger.” When I asked how his son’s response made him feel, he looked down at the floor and then back up at me, took a long, deep breath and responded “tough.” Being called a stranger by his son seemingly struck an emotional chord which he was unable to further articulate.

Some men expressed a sense of not being able to fulfill what they described as their role and duties as a father during their incarceration,
particularly where their sons were concerned. According to them, their sons were being raised by mothers or other care takers in their absences, leaving their sons without anyone to help them learn “how to be a man” and “get ready for the world.” Many shared the sentiment that, “only a man can really teach his son how to truly be a man.” For these men, training their sons how to be men included teaching their sons how to use the bathroom, play sports, and how to interact with women. In addition to not being able to teach life skills, they also reported finding it difficult to instill morals and values from prison. They reported finding it difficult to see themselves as possessing authority in their children’s lives, to administer correction for breaking rules, having broken the law themselves.

Relationships that were damaged before or during incarceration were not immediately repaired upon release. The time missed was time lost for many. Fathers noted how it took time to adjust and reassume roles previously held such as being an authority figure or disciplinarian in their children’s lives. Upon release, one father explained his hesitancy in reassuming a disciplinary role with his son:

I haven’t seen’em in three and a half years. Who am I to try and tell him to sit down. I had to build that rapport back with him.

Not being an example. Disappointment, regret and shame were expressed by fathers regarding their involvement in illegal activities. They framed their involvement in illegal activities as a “mistake” or as a consequence of falling in with the wrong crowd. Going to prison was not the example that they wanted to
set for their children. They expressed a desire to turn their lives around and stay out of trouble in order to set a positive example for their children.

Being marked as a “felon” or “criminal” weighed heavily on the minds of many fathers. This stigmatization resulted in expressions of shame and embarrassment. One father told his son not to come visit him because he did not want his son to see him in a prison jumpsuit or see all that prisoners “go through” such as being strip searched and treated disrespectfully by the guards. Many made references to hating to and have to “check the box” on job applications because they felt that people held their criminal past against them. Yet, many expressed hope in finding employers who might “give them a chance” and allow them to prove themselves.

Not providing. Prior to incarceration, many fathers had been involved in providing for their children’s basic needs. I met a few fathers who reported sending money home to their children from funds received while in prison. However, for the majority, not being able to provide for basic needs was a source of stress and frustration. One father expressed his frustration despite leaving money with family members prior to going to prison to help provide for his son’s financial needs in his absence:

It was kinda hard tryin’ to be a dad. I put money up with my parents so, financially, he (his son) was taken care of but, ya know, it’s more than finances to raising a child.
Father Identity Confirmation

The identity confirmation process links identity (who one is) and behavior (what one does). In a feedback loop, men enact behaviors meaningful to their identity as fathers. Appraisal (by others) is given for their actions and is then compared to an identity standard (how one believes they should behave as a father), and stress resulting from any discrepancy between the appraisal and the identity standard drives the modification of subsequent behaviors (Burke 2003). According to Dyer (2005), incarceration interrupts the identity confirmation process in a way that forces, “a change in the nature of his identity as a father and subsequently a change in his sense of self” (p. 207).

Father identity confirmation is limited at best during incarceration and further challenged upon release. Prisons culture, policies and procedures prohibit men the enacting behaviors that confirm their identity as fathers which ultimately disrupt the identity confirmation process, producing stress. Amelioration of the resulting stress is accomplished when fathers modify or abandon the identity standard.

Abandoning the Fatherhood Identity Standard. In theory, identity standard changes that resulted from incarceration should be reversed when fathers return home and resume enactment of the behaviors they performed prior to their incarceration. However, incarceration’s reach extends itself into the lives of fathers and their children even after release through the correctional control systems of probation and parole and ongoing social stigmatization.
Fathers described how parole and probation requirements and restriction affected their ability to interact with their children. For example, one father I interviewed had been the custodial parent and caretaker of his infant son prior to going to prison. His identity standard reflected being the primary parent responsible for feeding, bathing, taking his son to the doctor, and all other care giving activities. While in prison, he was unable to enact the behaviors meaningful to identity as a father. Upon release, he was further prevented from enacting these meaningful behaviors, because conditions of his parole restricted him from traveling more than 60 miles from where he resided. However, his son lived in a town 90 miles away.

Electronic monitoring and movement restrictions (meaning that he can only leave his parole address between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm) further deterred him from attempting to visit his son. As a result of not being able to see his son, he described his stress this way:

Me being a father, it means so much to me but it's just so little right now. It's like sometimes I leave out the house and feel like I'm not even a father at all.

Unable to modify his behaviors to resolve his stress, he described attempting to abandon the identity standard:

I try to erase him for awhile but it don't work. I don't think it's a good thing to try and erase him either but it just be so hard. I be tryin' to find any method I can to get through it but it just don't work. And it's like... I dunno.... It's just hard to explain. It's sad too. It sads me a lot.

He went on to divulge that drinking was his method of getting through and coping with the stress of not being able to be actively involved in his son's life.
Other fathers described responding to the stress by “giving up” and abandoning their father identity altogether. One father said that he gave up on his eighteen-year-old son when he returned from prison because he said that he son “thinks he grown.” He viewed his son as no longer needing or wanting him to perform the father role.

*Modifying the Father Identity Standard.* Other fathers were also challenged in their attempts to take up where they left off with their children when they came home. Many found that not being in their children’s lives during period(s) of incarceration had changed the nature of their relationship. Some noted they had not helped to raise their children. Raised by others, their children possessed different and sometimes conflicting value systems which presented challenges to bonding.

Attempts to modify the identity standard led many fathers to make changes in their lives. Many reported changing the group of people they associated with as one father described:

Since I’ve been out, I only want my kids around me. I have a few people I hang with. Nobody wants to hang with kids so, the (the old group of friends) don’t come around anymore.

Another change in behavior was referred to as, “letting go of ego.” The majority of the men interviewed had been involved in the lucrative self-employment which the drug economy provided prior to incarceration. Some had never held any other job. Upon release, they struggled to join the mainstream economy. As one father explained:
I'm used to having about twenty grand ($20,000) of my own money...it’s hard to now be satisfied with a check for $8.50 an hour.

Similarly, other fathers who did not return to the drug economy upon release described undergoing a lifestyle change. They had to adjust from making “fast money” selling drugs to making slow money on a regular nine-to-five job or having no money at all. For many, the challenge in accepting these new conditions was due to what some practitioners in the re-entry field refer to as having a lifestyle addiction. This addiction is often characterized by a desire to make money, have material possessions and enjoy sex, power, excitement and fame/popularity. Success in recovering from the lifestyle addiction credited is attributed to making conscious decisions to let go of pride and choosing to do “whatever you gotta do,” to make money legally and stay out of prison.

Just as the incarceration experience affects the entire family, overcoming the lifestyle addiction is a process that is also experienced by the whole family. Some fathers discussed how their children had gotten used to their fast money lifestyle and expected it to continue when they returned home. One father explained:

I would say about six months after I came home, I had to sit my children down and tell them, “don't ask me for nothin’.” That was really hard. (I told them) as long as I can, I am going to provide everything you need. Don’t ask me for nothing else because it got to the point where every time I talked to them they asked me for something.

Even as fathers attempted to make up for lost time when they returned, many expressed experiencing an ongoing emotional distance from their children. Some described it as a continuation of the distance created by their
incarceration. One father shared the profound insight that he does not think that his bond with his children can be repaired. He believes that his incarceration changed him, them and their relationship. He recognizes that his role as their father in no longer central in their lives and now attempts to redefine what it means to be father to his children from the periphery of their lives.

*There’s Always Hope*

In the face of many and complex challenges, fathers remained hopeful that they would eventually find more and/or better job opportunities and that the relationships with their children would improve and remain strong. Men discussed future plans to get more education, write books, mentor youth, purchase homes, start a business, and save money for their children’s college education. Staying focused and remaining free was identified as key factors in their future success, followed closely by finding employment. Many described undergoing psychological and lifestyle transformations. Change was described by one father in this way:

My mind has changed. I’m not thinking about the street no more. I don’t wanna hustle no more.

And when asked how his lifestyle has changed since coming home, another father responded:

I feel better as a man because I’m taking steps to do what I’m supposed to do but I’m not tryin’ to take any shortcuts unless it’s available and it’s the right thing to do. I’m a work in progress right now.
Summary

I used first-hand accounts to show how the correctional system does not support the maintenance of healthy relationships between fathers and their children. Incarceration deeply disrupts the father identity confirmation process. Prisons, in fact, prohibit the enactment of behaviors that support healthy relationships and father identity conformation to the degree that it creates not only relational strain but inflicts irreparable damage to fathers and their children. Consistent with George Jackson’s depiction of prison, all of the men I interviewed were changed in some way, particularly in their identity as fathers and their relationships with their children. Recommendations to address this egregious situation are taken up in the next and final chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

“Hundreds of thousands of black men are unable to be good fathers for their children, not because of a lack of commitment or desire but because they are warehoused in prisons, locked in cages” (Alexander 2010:175).

This research provides a glimpse into formerly incarcerated men’s perceptions of how incarceration impacted their identity as fathers and performance of fatherhood before and after their release. Incarceration research on families has predominately focused on motherhood. Considering the disproportionate rates of incarceration and recidivism among African American men, far too little attention has been paid to the impact of incarceration on fatherhood and father identity. My research shows that the prison experience has both an acute and ongoing effect on how men see themselves and do fatherhood.

Media representations, public discourse and literature portraying African American men as absent or uncommitted, uninvolved deadbeats deflects from the role the criminal justice system plays in the perpetuating the myth of the missing black father. Black fathers are not MIA but are as Michelle Alexander aptly states, far too many of them are “locked in cages.”
While locked in cages, fatherhood is incapacitated. Fathers are prohibited from enacting behaviors needed to support healthy relationships with their children. As previously noted, fatherhood is a social construct that is done and redone through social interaction and transformed by ever changing historical, economic, social and political forces. As such, mass incarceration has uniquely shaped the performance and practices of fatherhood and the concept of father identity among African American men.

Among other findings, education, marital status, and financial stability reported among the formerly incarcerated and never incarcerated men in this study were more similar than not. This may reflect a commonality of experiences. Low-income African American men are more likely to be incarcerated (Petit and Western 2004) and formerly incarcerated men are more likely to be low-income (Harding et al 2014; Wildeman and Western 2010; Freemen 2003; Mendez 2000), thus illustrating an intersection of oppressions when one is poor, black and male. If felon disenfranchisement produces a system of oppression, as Wheelock (2005) contends, Patricia Hill Collins’ concept of intersecting oppressions might be extended to depict the linked aspect and particularity of oppression when one is poor, black, male and a felon.

Consistent with previous research on incarcerated fathers, this study found that incarcerated men were less likely to be married and to have multiple children (Hairston 1998). Despite the decline of marriage among African
American men, research by Edin and Nelson (2013) confirms that low-income men desire to achieve married status but only after they are economically and emotionally ready and have found the right woman. Economic disadvantage and indeed incarceration both limit the ability of men to get ready for marriage and have to have an opportunity to find a marriage partner.

Despite the challenges to marriage black men face, fatherhood is embraced. The fathers in my study reported finding meaning in their roles as fathers. At the same time my study found that, fathers were also more likely to report a relationship status of being “just friends” with the mothers of their children which may indicate an unlikelihood of marriage to the other parent(s) in the future. In their study of low-income fathers, Edin and Nelson (2013) noted a shift away from the two-parent family norm’s “package deal” where the adult relationship taking precedence over the relationship to the kids. Fathers are now more willing to commit to their children than to the mothers. Their findings contradict William Julius Wilsons’ conceptualization of a “decreased commitment to fatherhood” as a by-product of economic disadvantage among low-income African American men. As this study has shown, a number of factors constrain and complicate a father’s ability to be present and involved in their children’s lives. As Alexander (2010) points out, many fathers are not uncommitted or uninterested, they are incarcerated and as this work has shown, incarceration incapacitates fatherhood.
Additionally, this research found that fathers with children by multiple women were challenged in providing equal time and financial support to all of their children. Being stretched over multiple households can prevent men from achieving the “whole fatherhood experience” where they live with a child, witness their development firsthand and help raise them (Edin and Nelson 2013). Having multiple children with multiple partners can also be a source of great tension and conflict with the mothers and with the children vying for one man’s attention. Multiple households also disperse rather than concentrate the father’s limited financial resources. Additional research is needed on how the responsibility by one father to multiple households might be impacted by incarceration and reentry experiences.

Future research is needed to explore this study’s finding that a majority of formerly incarcerated men cannot pay their bills, did not plan to retire or have no retirement fund. This may have implications for future accumulation assets. Research suggests that increased asset ownership in addition to employment might reduce recidivism (Martin 2011). The inability to accumulate savings or assets also has implications for the economic and social challenges that the formerly incarcerated may face as they age.

The concept of father identity presented here represents what the men in this study thought about what a father is and what fathers should do. They viewed: being there, being an example, and providing (love, basic needs, and
protection) as essential components of father identity. Fathers in this study described how being in prison prohibited them from enacting the behaviors needed to meet the father identity standard. While imprisoned, they were not able to be there, not able to be the example they wanted to be and not able to provide love, basic needs and protection for their children. Unable to meet the father identity standard, some attempted to modify their behaviors while other abandoned their father identity altogether while in prison.

Findings here support previous research examining fatherhood and incarceration. Similar to previous studies, fathers described how the prison structure constrains their relationships with their children (Arditti 2005; Tripp 2009, Kelly-Trombley et al 2014) and find it difficult to identify as fathers while in prison (Dyer 2005; Tripp 2009). Findings here suggest that the stress and strain placed on fathers’ relationships with their children by the criminal justice system produces pervasive damage and for some, irreparable damage.

Limitations

The use of convenient sampling for the quantitative portion of study and relatively small number of interviews conducted with African American men precludes the researcher from confidently stating that the sample is representative of the population (Creswell 2007). Additionally the small sample size reduced the statistical power of the quantitative research findings. The study was limited to non-violent formerly incarcerated men who served shorter prison
terms, and is therefore not representative of formerly incarcerated fathers as a population.

**Implications**

No effort is made here to propose what *should or should not* be done to redress the many gross injustices of mass incarceration. Such a judgment is beyond the scope of this work. The goal here is to present two approaches to further addressing the damage inflicted by the criminal justice system on fathers and their children: Father Friendlier Prisons and Prison Abolition.

**Father Friendlier Prisons**

“Punishments that exceed what is necessary for protection of the deposit of public security are by their very nature unjust” (Beccarai 19764: 13).

Moral justification for prison as punishment is founded in a belief that individual lawbreakers should be punished. From this standpoint, it is presumed that the punishment inflicted is limited to the lawbreaker. However, as this work attests, the children and families of the incarcerated are also punished. The impact of imprisonment extends far beyond the prison walls, inflicting harm in the lives of children and families.

The state has a moral obligation to protect and not harm its citizens. Bulow (2013) argues that mass incarceration’s collateral damage to children and families violates their right not to be harmed. As such the continued use of imprisonment gives rise to residual obligations to those harmed. Residual obligations include admitting mistakes, apologizing and then making amends.
There is also an obligation to ameliorate the conditions that produced the harm. To right the wrongs, Bulow (2013) proposes that concerted effort is made to: make prisons friendlier and more accessible; remove communication barriers; provide financial support to children; work with families to address needs they may have; and incorporate family therapy into reentry programs.

Movement toward father friendlier policies may be gaining traction. Consideration accorded to the father-child relationship can vary by state and within states by institution. I spoke with an Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) administrator who reported that all Illinois’ facilities are under orders to update their visiting rooms to be more family friendly by painting murals on the walls in the visiting rooms and making games available for use during visitation. However, funding was not allocated for this endeavor and it is not clear if and when the updates might be completed. The IDOC confirmed my suspicion that it is possible to make the visitation setting in prisons more “family friendly” without compromising the safety of the institution as a whole. Presumably, the move toward father/family friendlier facilities is a part of larger state and national efforts to “strengthen families” weakened by incarceration.

*Marriage and relationship programs on the inside.* The importance of contact has been noted as promoting the maintenance of parent-child relationships while incarcerated, successful re-entry into the community, decreased recidivism and contributing to desistance from crime. In response,
reentry programs and policies have begun to address the need for contact among a growing number of imprisoned parents through programs such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated Fathers and their Partners (MFS-IP) (Lindquist, MacKay, McDonald, Herman and Bir 2009). The MFS-IP grants provide services promoting health relationships, improving parenting and promoting economic stability for couples when one parent involved is incarcerated. Grantee approaches have incorporated teaching skills to help couples maintain healthy relationships which include classes for the inmate and their partner held in the correctional facility. Approaches also support family contact through assistance with travel expenses to visit, subsidized phone calls, postage assistance for letters and negotiating approval for contact visits. Support is also provided to families through case management, family counseling and support groups.

**Fatherhood programs on the inside.** Many federal and state prisoners are able to voluntarily participate in classes such as anger management and parenting. IDOC does offer voluntary fatherhood programs in some but not all of its facilities. IDOC utilizes the National Fatherhood Initiative's, “InsideOut Dads” curriculum designed to connect men to the families while incarcerated and prepare them for assuming their role as father upon release (The National Fatherhood Initiative). Other efforts by IDOC to promote fathering include,
offering the video storybook program by which recordings of fathers reading books are then sent to their children.

Possibly responding to research indicating that fathers who retain contact with their children while in prison and after release are less likely to recidivate (Lanier 1993; Bales and Mears 2008), prisons appear to be shifting toward more father friendlier policies. Some federal funding is beginning to be directed toward prison and reentry programs for fathers. If the goal is to truly create a family friendlier environment, barriers to contact must be addressed. Research by Swanson, Lee, Sansone and Tatum (2013) suggests that addressing institutional and family barriers might improve the father-child relationship.

Deliberate effort should be made to place and keep fathers as close to home as possible. Regular visitation may contribute to successful reentry (Lui, Pickett, and Baker 2014) and should be encouraged and supported by institutions. Extortion of families’ resources must cease and be replaced with subsidies to off-set the cost of transportation and hotel accommodations required for visitation and the exorbitant cost of prison phone calls (Geller 2013). Assistance with postage is also needed. Additional forms of communication such as e-mail and video visitation (to be used in addition to but not in place of contact visitation) should be expanded. Prisoners should be accorded the right to earn living wages and support their families.
Evaluation of MFS-IP identified key components of programs targeting incarcerated fathers including: relationship and parenting classes and employment-related support (2013). Maximum program impact requires a holistic approach, addressing needs that can mediate the father-child relationship such as: substance abuse treatment, employment, housing, domestic violence, and mental health. Promoting faith-based or character-based programming “supporting individual transformation” was also recommended. Another finding supports my contention that reentry should begin at the point of entry and continue after release. Effort should be made to support the maintenance of family connections throughout the incarceration and reentry process.

Efforts to “strengthen families” must take into account the structural, psychological and social barriers present in the lives of prisoners and their families. However, doing so would require movement away from top-down, neoliberal policy prescriptions such as the Personal Responsibility and Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. Neoliberalism is defined here as the ideology and practices favoring market over government policy directions; free trade over protectionism; trickle down approaches to economic development and individual responsibility for poverty reduction rather than redistributive change (Moore, Kleinman, Hess and Frickel 2011). Neoliberal ideology equates moral responsibility to rational action, suggesting that, “the individual bears full
responsibility no matter how severe the constraints on their actions” (Brown 2005:42).

PRWORA and other neoliberal policies have focused on the individual and their ability to achieve independence from government assistance through an employment pathway to self-sufficiency not the family. As a result, PRWORA has been successful in moving people off of welfare but not out of poverty. Clearly, an alternate approach to family focused policy is warranted. In contrast to a top-down approach, research suggests that a bottom-up approach to self-sufficiency can enhance the quality of services and strengthen policies which might translate into better outcomes for people (Hong, Sheriff and Naeger 2009). A bottom-up approach would also allow the voices of those experiencing the impact of punishment most directly to be heard.

Fatherhood classes and programs within the institution are conceived as being part of the punishment. Most prisoners and their families do not trust prison officials, making a “buy-in” by them essential to achieve successful programming. As Lanier (2003) found, direct participation from the fathers on the development and implantation of prison parenting programs is key.

I encountered a prison based family program that had been funded by IDOC but was unable to get off the ground. Though the program offered relationship building classes inside of the institution with the loved one, transportation assistance and case management services, the staff was unable
to get voluntary participation from the families. Reported reasons for family members’ unwillingness to participate include: not trusting prison personnel; not wanting to come to the prison for programs and be subjected to treatment as prisoners; not being able to take off of work to come to the prison for the program; and not wanting further criminal justice system involvement in their lives.

Incorporation of family case management models such as the Family Justice Program, formerly known as La Bodega de la Familia (The Bodega Model)\(^1\), is a potentially useful tool to address the barriers and needs of inmates and their families, both during and after incarceration. Research on the Bodega Model indicates that the family case management provides an opportunity for partnerships between crime justice system involved people, their families and probation/parole that support reentry (Flavin, Jeane and David Rosenthal 2002). Under a family case management model, parole officers work together with the family case managers to engage the family prior to release so the supervision process is understood and additional needs can be assessed. A change in the nature of the relationships between the parolee and parole office from adversity to collaboration was also reported.

\(^{1}\) In 1996, the Vera Institute initiated La Bodega de la Familia as a demonstration to test whether engaging and supporting families of drug users in community based justice supervision would impact relapse, recidivism and other harms to families. The program proved to be extremely successful by using a family-focused case management model with four core principles: focus on families; focus on strengths; operation from a case management perspective; and partnership with the community.
The challenge of overcoming the “trust issues” of the incarcerated and their loved ones warrants repeating, as it will take tremendous effort to overcome these issues. Even if a father friendlier approach is somehow fully embraced by policy makers and institutional personnel, it may not adequately address the damage inflicted by mass incarceration on fathers and their children. Codd (2008) offers the following word of caution regarding the embracement of father/family friendly prison policies:

“The operation of family-focused schemes by prisons can serve to obscure the realities of the damage done to relationships; it allows prisons, and government for that matter, to say ‘look what we are doing for families’ whilst rendering less visible the immense damage done to relationships by imprisonment” (P.168).

Prison Abolition

“Society eliminates by sending to prison people whom prison breaks up, crushes, physically eliminates; the prison eliminates them by “freeing” them and sending them back to society;...the state in which they come out insures that society will eliminate them once again, sending them to prison” (Foucault in Simon 1991:27).

Mass incarceration can be conceived as symptomatic of an ailing criminal justice system in need of repair. It can also be, as Foucault conceived, be functioning properly in the removal of undesirable people from society. Meaning as Jones (2013) speaks of mass incarceration, “the system isn’t broken, it was designed that way.” If we are to believe the latter conceptualization of the criminal justice system as creating and perpetuating racial inequality and disadvantage, then its correction will require some radical and critical sociological imagining.
A critical approach in addressing the damage inflicted by mass incarceration on fathers and their children incorporates the core premises of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The first premise being that racism, sexism and classism are not only real but they have been normalized. They are not unusual or abnormal and represent the rule, not the exception to the rule in relation to our social structure and social arrangements. They are fundamental and interwoven throughout society and are not relegated to small fringe groups. As a result, the structuring or privileging of whites over people of color, men over women and non-poor over the poor is accepted, constituting *the way it (society) is.*

The second premise asserts that the culture, “constructs its own social reality in ways that promote its own self-interest” (Delgado and Stefancic 2000). Meaning that the rules and ideas governing society are not fixed; they are constructed. They can be reinforced or remade. By deconstructing racism, sexism and classism, CRT promotes the production of alternate, social realities.

The third premise is built on the concept of *interest convergence.* Interest convergence functions as a mechanism regulating progress and maintaining domination. It maintains that advances by the racially, gendered or class disadvantaged occur only when those possessing advantage can also advance. Advancement never occurs at the expense of the dominant groups such that blacks advance only when whites advance, women advance only if men advance, and the poor only advance if and when the rich do as well.
In the application of CRT, racial, economic and political oppression underlying mass incarceration is conceived as being real as well as normalized. It also acknowledges that the rules and ideas governing mass incarceration are not fixed, meaning that it is possible for it to be altered and deconstructed as a social reality, and for alternate realities to be constructed in its place. As a means to maintaining systemic oppression, mass incarceration functions to insure that improvement of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated’s lot only occurs when the dominant group’s lot improves as well but not at their expense. In other words, mass incarceration will continue “as is” until improvement in the lives of prisoner’s and their families is also viewed as beneficial to the dominant group.

Through this lens, the challenge of change becomes more apparent. In order for mutual benefit to occur, the way that society as a whole views incarceration must change. Where crime is viewed as the supposed basis for incarceration, Davis argues that, “race and economic status play more prominent roles in shaping the practices of social punishment than does crime (p.105).” Needed change in societal views entails confronting racism, sexism and classism and the barriers that they produce in order for what Hong and Werner (2007) describe as, “consideration of the common good” to emerge.

Based on research indicating that incarceration is particularly harmful to those convicted of non-violent offenses and increases rates of recidivism than
those on probation (Spohn and Holleran 2002), alternatives to incarceration for this group should be prioritized and instituted. Scholars recommend incorporating a “no-entry” public policy framework that treats addiction as a brain disease and provides resources for treatment and application of colorblind drug laws and enforcement strategies (Lurigio and Loose 2008). At the very least, sentencing disparities might be completely removed and punitive sentencing measures repealed. A complete departure must be made from policies that reduce but do not eliminate sentencing disparities such as the 2010 Fair Sentencing Act, which significantly reduced (from 100:1 to 18:1) but did not eliminate the sentencing disparity between powder and crack cocaine.

Prevention and diversion need to be the guiding principles of the juvenile justice system. As previously suggested, reentry efforts and programming needs to begin at the point of entry and must include education, job and vocational training, substance abuse treatment and counseling. According to Travis (2012), prison re-entry programs are a “low-cost way to prevent crimes (p.10)”. Travis (2012) also suggests reallocating reentry resources to provide greater support during the first six months after release, when the risk of recidivism is highest. A more comprehensive model would include long-term post-release job placement, counseling and housing support.

Reentry and reintegration efforts must be re-orientated around “consideration of the “common good” as a society and ultimately contribute to the
re-humanization of formerly incarcerated men and the restoration of their citizenship. The initial steps in this process have been taken by efforts such as the city of Philadelphia’s institution of an ordinance to change the language for the formerly incarcerated from “ex-offender” to “returning citizen” (Leitner, 2013). The term ex-offender is a disempowering, stigmatized term, while “returning citizen” is empowering and reflects engagement in the reintegration process. Using a massive bottom-up or ground-up approach in the form of a returning citizen social movement may have the power to turn the tide.

At the opposite, radical end of the spectrum would be to consider the foreboding words of Audre Lorde (1984):

“For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (P. 111).

From this orientation complete deconstruction the entire criminal justice apparatus provides the only direct the path to change. However, the deinstitutionalization of the criminal justice system may be as difficult to imagine as the demise of slavery and end to Jim Crow were sure to have been in the past. Deinstitutionalization is likely to be viewed as a radical idea and is sure to have strict opposition based on some legitimate questions and concerns about public safety and economic displacement. These questions, as stated earlier, I do not propose to answer here. What I have attempted to do through this work is
to engage conversation on mass incarceration’s effect on fatherhood and suggest paths to change that might be pursued.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE
FATHERHOOD EXPERIENCES:

*Tell me about your children?

*When did you think would be a good time for you to start a family?

*How did you feel about parenting leading up to the time you became a father?

*How did you learn how to be a father?

*Can you tell me about a time when you learned something that helped you to be a father?

*Can you give me an example of a situation (other than incarceration) or someone that affected the way you father your children?

*What was your father like?

*How are you different as a father with your child (ren) than your father was with you as a child?

*Tell me what being a father means to you?

*What do you think fathers should do for their children?

*Tell me how you think society defines being a father?

*What do you think that your children would say about you as a father?

*What do you think the mother(s) of your children would say about you as a father?

FATHERHOOD AND LIFE INTERRUPTIONS: (skip to Fatherhood and Prison section for ex-offenders)

*Have you ever been unable to be a father to your children? If so, how?

-How did you feel about it?
FATHERHOOD AND PRISON: (skip for non-offenders)
*Tell me what it was like being a father to your children while you were in prison?

*Give me an example of how being a father while you were in prison different than it is now?

*Did your ideas about being a father change while you were in prison? If so, how?

*What about any effect being incarcerated had on you as a father?

*How do you think your incarceration affected your children?

*Tell me about any programs or classes about being a father that you participated in while in prison? How did they affect your ideas about being a father?

*Tell me about any individuals in the prison such as case managers, guards or other inmates affect your ideas about being a father?

INCARCERATION AND IDENTITY: (skip for non-offenders)
*Think about the time prior to your incarceration. Tell me about how you felt/what you thought about yourself then?

*How do you feel about yourself as a person now?

*Tell me about any goals you have for yourself for your future.

CITIZENSHIP:

*What is the meaning of citizenship (being a citizen) to you?
*Tell me how did you saw yourself as a citizen growing up? Before prison? While you were incarcerated? And now?

*Did your ideas about being a citizen change while you were in prison? If so, give me an example?

EMPLOYMENT:

*Tell me what your employment experience before your were incarcerated or experienced an interruption in was like? How is different now?

*Tell me about any trades, skills or advice you received in prison that have helped you in the job market now?

*Tell me what the meaning of self-sufficiency is to you?

*How does employment affect your self-sufficiency?

*Tell me what you think being a father has to do with self-sufficiency?

*Tell me about how you plan to achieve self-sufficiency? Are their any barriers?

LIFESTYLE CHANGES:

*Tell me about your lifestyle before you went to prison or experienced an interruption in fatherhood? How does that compare to your lifestyle now?

*Tell me how being a father affected your lifestyle before prison or experienced an interruption in fatherhood? How does it affect you lifestyle now?

FUTURE:

What do you want to provide to your children? How?
What provisions have you made for your future? Your children’s future?
Has going to prison has affected how you will provide for your children in the future?
How do you want your children to remember you when you die?
At what age do you plan to retire? How will you support yourself?
Where and with whom do you plan to spend your retirement?
When you get old or if you get sick, who would take care of you? How?
What three things do you feel are most important for a father to provide for his children?
When you think about the future--10 years from now--what would you want your children to be able to say about you as a provider?
What are the most outstanding skills you have to offer a prospective employer?
Do you feel that planning for the future is important.
What advice would you give to your child(ren) about looking ahead to their future?
APPENDIX B

FATHERHOOD EXPERIENCES SURVEY
Introduction: This is a survey of African-American fathers to explore the ways in which being a father shapes how men see themselves, interact socially and pursue self-sufficiency.

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS:

1. What is your age? __________ I was born in __________ (year)

2. What is your gender? ____
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other

3. What is your race/ethnicity? ____
   - Native American or Alaska Native
   - Asian or Pacific Islander
   - Black or African American
   - White or European American
   - Non-White Hispanic
   - Bi-/multi-racial
   - Other (specify)________________________________________

4. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? ____
   - Less than High School Diploma
   - 12th Grade/HS Diploma/GED
   - Vocational/Technical diploma
   - Some college but no degree
   - Associates
   - Bachelor’s Degree or higher

5. Do you have a profession, trade or skill? ____
   - Yes
   - No
5a. If yes to question 5, what is it? ________________________________

6. Have you ever served in any branch of the U.S. Military?
   - Yes
   - No (If no, skip to question 8)

6a. Which branch of military did you serve in?
   ________________________________

7. Were you ever in active duty?
   - Yes
   - No

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

8. What is your current marital status? Are you...
   - Married
   - Widowed
   - Separated
   - Divorced
   - Never Married

9. Do you have any children that you fathered, adopted, been a foster parent to, or any other children you consider yourself to be the parent of?
   - Yes
   - No (If no, skip to question 17)

10. How many children do you consider yourself to be a father to?
   _____

11. How many of these are your biological children (under 18)?
   _____
12. How many of these children under 18 are living with you now? _____

13. How many of these children are NOT living with you now? _____

14. Where are your other child/children living now? Are any of them living…

☐ With another parent
☐ With another relative
☐ On their own
☐ In foster care/child protective services

15. How many different mothers do your biological children have? _____

16. What is your relationship with the mothers of your children now? For each of
the mothers of your children please indicate whether you are: 1) Married; 2) Romantically involved/In a committed relationship; 3) Separated/Divorced; 4) On a again/Off again relationship or sexually involved but no relationship; 5) Just friends; 6) Not in any kind of a relationship; or 7) Mother Deceased

16a. Mother 1 _____

16b. Mother 2 _____

16c. Mother 3 _____

16d. Mother 4 _____

FATHERHOOD EXPERIENCES
The following are questions about your biological father and his involvement in
your life.

17. Did you know your biological father when you were growing up? _____

☐ Yes (skip to question19)
☐ No (If no, continue to question18)
18. Was there another man who was like a father to you when you were growing up?

☐ Yes
☐ No

18a. Who was that person?

☐ Adoptive Father
☐ Stepfather
☐ Grandfather/Great Grandfather
☐ Brother/Stepbrother
☐ Other (Specify: ______________________)

19. While you were growing up, would you say that your father was…

☐ Very involved
☐ Somewhat involved
☐ Not at all involved

*Please read the following statements about being a father. Please check the box indicating how much you agree or disagree with each statement.*

20. Being a father and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a man can have.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

21. Not being a part of my child’s life would be one of the worst things that could happen to me.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Strongly disagree
22. Being a father is harder than I thought it would be. Do you . . . ____
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

23. I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a father. Do you . . . ____
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

24. I find that taking care of my child (ren) is much more work than pleasure
   ____
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

25. I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from raising a family. Do you . . . 
   ____
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Somewhat agree
   □ Somewhat disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Please check the box indicating how important each of the following activities is to you:

26. Providing regular financial support? ____
   □ This is very important
   □ Somewhat important
   □ Not important

27. Teaching children about life? ____
   □ This is very important
28. Provide direct care, such as feeding, dressing, and childcare?  ____
   □ This is very important
   □ Somewhat important
   □ Not important

29. Showing love and affection to children?  ____
   □ This is very important
   □ Somewhat important
   □ Not important

30. Providing protection for children?  ____
   □ This is very important
   □ Somewhat important
   □ Not important

31. Serving as an authority figure and disciplining children?  ____
   □ This is very important
   □ Somewhat important
   □ Not important

32. Have you ever experienced a time that you were unable to be in your children’s lives for a period of time?  ____
   □ Yes
   □ No

   32a. If yes, why were you unable to be in your children’s lives:___________________________________________________

33. What three characteristics do you feel are most important to being a good father?
   1 _____________________
   2 _____________________
   3 _____________________
34. What three things do you feel are most important for a father to provide for his children?

1 _____________________
2 _____________________
3 _____________________

CITIZENSHIP QUESTIONS:

Please check the box indicating how important each of the following activities is to you

35. How important do you feel it is for Americans to vote in elections? _____

☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

36. How important do you feel it is for Americans to volunteer time to do community service? _____

☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

37. Self Esteem

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Circle SA if you strongly agree, A if you agree, D if you disagree, and SD if you strongly disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
a. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. | SD  | D  | A  | SA |
b. At times I think I am no good at all. | SD  | D  | A  | SA |
c. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. | SD  | D  | A  | SA |
d. I am able to do things as well as most other people. | SD  | D  | A  | SA |
e. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. | SD  | D  | A  | SA |
f. I certainly feel useless at times. | SD  | D  | A  | SA |
g. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | SD  | D  | A  | SA |
I wish I could have more respect for myself.  

All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.  

I take a positive attitude toward myself.  

38. Employment Hope. After reading some statements about employment, please rank the following by circling a number on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 indicates strong disagreement to the statement, 10 indicates strong agreement, and 5 indicates neutral.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Thinking about working, I feel confident about myself.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I feel that I am good enough for any jobs out there.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. When working or looking for a job, I am respectful towards who I am.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. I am worthy of working in a good job.</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. I am capable of working in a good job.</td>
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<td>f. I have the strength to overcome any obstacles when it comes to working.</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. I can work in any job I want.</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. I am good at doing anything in the job if I set my mind to it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. I feel positive about how I will do in my future job situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>j. I don't worry about falling behind bills in my future job.</td>
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<tr>
<td>k. I am going to be working in a career job.</td>
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<tr>
<td>l. I will be in a better position in my future job than where I am now.</td>
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<tr>
<td>m. I am able to tell myself to take steps toward reaching career goals.</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>n. I am committed to reaching my career goals.</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
o. I feel energized when I think about future achievement with my job.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
p. I am willing to give my best effort to reach my career goals.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
q. I am aware of what my skills are to be employed in a good job.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
r. I am aware of what my resources are to be employed in a good job.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
s. I am able to utilize my skills to move toward career goals.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
t. I am able to utilize my resources to move toward career goals.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
u. I am on the road toward my career goals.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
v. I am in the process of moving forward toward reaching my goals.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
w. Even if I am not able to achieve my financial goals right away, I will find a way to get there.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
x. My current path will take me to where I need to be in my career.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

39. Self-Sufficiency
Think about your personal economic situation over the past 3 months. For each of the following items, circle the number that most clearly indicates where you rate yourself, using the scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My current financial situation allows me to</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Yes, all of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
a. Meet my obligations                                                            | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
b. Do what I want to do, when I want to do it                                     | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
c. Be free from government programs like AFDC, Food Stamps, general assistance, etc.
|                                                                              | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
d. Pay my own way without borrowing from family or friends                        | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
e. Afford to have a reliable car                                                  | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
f. Afford to have decent housing                                                 | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
g. Buy the kind and amount of food I like                                         | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
h. Afford to take trips                                                          | 1              | 2            | 3          | 4                | 5                   |
<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Buy &quot;extras&quot; for my family and myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td>Pursue my own interests and goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k.</td>
<td>Get health care for myself and my family when needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l.</td>
<td>Put money in a savings account</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.</td>
<td>Stay on a budget</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n.</td>
<td>Make payments on my debts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o.</td>
<td>Afford decent child care (leave blank if you don't have children)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40. Are you currently employed? _____
   □ Yes
   □ No (if no, skip to question 41)

If yes, are you employed □ Full-time or □ Part-time? _____

40a. How long have you been employed in this job? _____
   _____ Years _____ month’s _____ days

40b. Do you receive health insurance from this job?_____
   □ Yes
   □ No

41. Are you able to pay all your bills with your income? _____
   □ Yes
   □ No

42. At what age do you plan to retire? _____

43. Do you have a retirement fund? _____
   □ Yes
   □ No

**INCARCERATION QUESTIONS**
44. Have you ever served time in any state, federal or private prison?  
   ____
   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No (If no, skip to the end of the survey)

45. Are you currently on probation or parole?  
   ____
   [ ] Yes
   [ ] No

46. What is the total amount of time you have been incarcerated in your lifetime (total amount of time served)?
   ____ Years ____ months ____ days

47. For what type of offenses were you sentenced to prison and how long was the sentence? Be specific (Example: Possession of a controlled substance)

1. ________________________________ (Most recent incarceration)
   Time Served: _____ years _____ months _____ days

2. ________________________________
   Time Served: _____ years _____ months _____ days

3. ________________________________
   Time Served: _____ years _____ months _____ days

4. ________________________________
   Time Served: _____ years _____ months _____ days

5. ________________________________
   Time Served: _____ years _____ months _____ days

*Where were you most recently incarcerated?
   ________________________________ (Name of correctional facility)
Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.
Contact Information Form

If you would like to be contacted to participate in a personal interview in the future, please provide your contact information below.

1. What is your full name?

__________________________________________

What is your address?

Street address: ________________________________ Apt# ________

City: _____________________________ State: _____________________

Zip Code: ____________________________

What is your telephone number?

Area Code: ________ Phone number: ______________________________

What is the best time to reach you by phone?

__________________________________________
REFERENCE LIST


Wilbur, MaryAnn, Jodi Marani, Danielle Appugliese, Ryan Woods, Jane Siegel Howard Cabral and Deborah Frank. 2007. “Socioemotional Effects of


VITA

Dara Lewis was born and raised in Springfield, Illinois. Before, pursuing a doctoral degree at Loyola University Chicago, she attended the University of Illinois at Springfield, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology in 2000. She also received a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from the University of Illinois at Springfield in 2007.

While at Loyola, Lewis was awarded a Graduate Merit Fellowship and the Community and Global Stewardship Award. She also participated in the Graduate Students of Color Alliance and served on the Center for Urban Research and Learning’s Advisory Committee.

Currently, Dr. Lewis is a director of a supportive housing program for homeless women and children and returning citizens in Springfield, Illinois.