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# The Fatherhood Factor: The Impact of the Father-Child Relationship on the Social, Interpersonal, and Recidivism Risk Factors of Previously Incarcerated Men

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THE IMPACT OF THE FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP ON THE SOCIAL,  
INTERPERSONAL, AND RECIDIVISM RISK FACTORS OF PREVIOUSLY  
INCARCERATED MEN

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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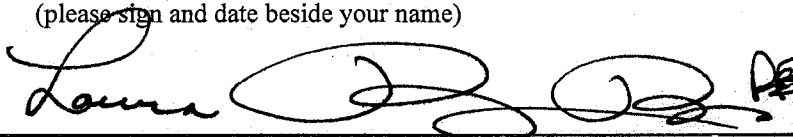
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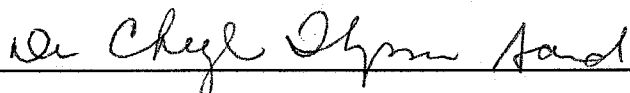
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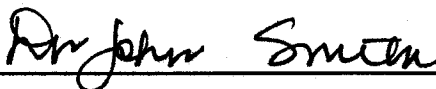
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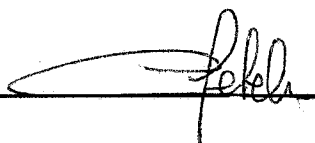
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## Abstract

Of the men who return home from prison, nearly 7 out of 10 will be re-arrested and sent back within 3 years of their release (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). This trend has large-scale implications, not just for individuals, but for their families and communities as well. Clearly, understanding the factors that contribute to a man's success or failure in staying out of prison is extremely important in constructing policy and programs to assist these at-risk individuals and communities. Of the few studies that have explored the lives of previously incarcerated men, some have found fatherhood to be a salient factor (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005). The current study investigated this particular relationship by looking at the father's perceived quality of the father-child bond, and how that relationship is related to the father's risk for re-offending. The study also investigated the contribution that social and individual factors play in facilitating the father-child bond, as well as the contribution that those factors may make in predicting recidivism risk; specifically, the father's own experience of being parented, the quality of communication they have with their child's mother, their perception of social support, and individual factors associated with motivation to change. The study found empirical evidence to suggest that a positive father-child bond may reduce recidivism risk for previously incarcerated men. In addition, the study found that the father-child relationship may be a more significant predictor of recidivism risk than individual characteristics, intergenerational influences, co-parental communication, or social support alone. This evidence suggests that the father-child relationship is not only an important familial tie that can be correlated with better re-entry, but may be a potentially salient area for future intervention to aid this at-risk group of men, their families, and communities.

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fathers who have been incarcerated and who are struggling to reconnect and/or maintain the bonds they have with their children. Furthermore, I am forever grateful to Mr. Arthur Townes, director of the Alumni Association for the Community Education Centers. Without his help and his tireless dedication to those trying to reclaim their lives after incarceration, this project would not have reached many of the participants, nor been able to illustrate the important role that fatherhood plays in these men's lives. He went out of his way to connect me with participants and community resource centers, and there are no words to express how grateful I am for all of his efforts.

I would also like to sincerely thank the many men who gave their valuable time and effort to answer all of the questionnaires for this study. Their generous participation, illustrates their resilience and commitment to helping themselves, and other fathers, recover from the effects of incarceration and go on to lead healthy, loving lives. Without their openness and honesty this project would not have succeeded in its goals, and to them I am truly grateful.

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and strength waned, he inspired me to go on. He was my comfort when I felt overwhelmed and my rock when I didn't think I could push myself any further. Long nights and long days were spent in dedication to this project and to my doctoral study, and never did Bill wane in his caring. Although there were many times when I was not able to be his equal in our marriage, he continually picked up the slack and made it possible for me to focus on my goals and pursuits. He showed me the true definition of partnership, and I can never thank him enough for standing by me through this process with unwavering support. I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved husband Bill, the person who has shown me in so many ways the strength of love and the power of family.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### U.S. Incarceration Trends

Currently the United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009). This high rate is not only 6 to 10 times greater than other Democratic nations, but also countries like Russia, China, and Iran (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009). At any given time 1 in 100 people or 1 in 31 men are incarcerated in a county jail or federal prison (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). In the years between 1980 and 2000 the number of incarcerated individuals rose from 300,000 to more than 2 million (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009). At the end of 2007 there were a reported 7 million adults behind bars — an increase of over 400% (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009; Visher & Travis, 2003).

This rise in arrests and convictions has continued despite an overall decrease in crime since the 1970s (Alexander, 2012). Many criminologists have explained this trend as a result of law enforcement and political measures enacted as part of the war on drugs (Alexander, 2012). For over two decades drug offenses have accounted for more than two thirds of all federal inmates and half of all state prisoners — an increase of 1,100% between the years of 1985 and 2000 (Mauer, 2006). During these two decades there was a dramatic increase in funding for drug related search, arrest, and sentencing policies due to public and political emphasis on problems with crack cocaine, a drug that spread rapidly through predominately poor minority areas (Alexander, 2012). In 1985, the Reagan administration launched a legislative campaign to counter the crack epidemic and make headway in the war on drugs (Reinarman & Levine, 1995). Some of these initiatives included state level three strikes laws, and mandatory minimum sentencing for federal drug charges (Garland, 2001; Western, 2006). For example, Proposition

184 in California requires a mandatory sentence of 25 years to life for any person convicted of their third felony drug charge (Swisher & Waller, 2008). In New Jersey, law 2C:35-7 mandates a drug possession be considered a felony charge if the person is within 1000 feet of a school at the time of their arrest (Alexander, 2012). In many urban areas, there are few places that are not within 1000 feet of a school, making almost any drug possession a potential felony for individuals living in more densely populated settings (Alexander, 2012).

Despite media coverage that portrayed the crack cocaine initiatives as a relatively benign governmental attempt to address drug issues, the racial and socioeconomic disparities in drug convictions has led to an explosion in predominately poor, young, minority men within the prison system (Human Rights Watch, 2000). The disparate levels of drug arrests and incarcerations suggests that law enforcement and judicial policy is not free from the conscious or unconscious racial bias that has plagued most of America's political and social systems for centuries (Alexander, 2012). These racially inequitable practices have accumulated and over time have become ingrained within the criminal justice system, leading to a national trend that currently reflects the highest numbers of racial and ethnic minority incarcerations in the world (Mauer, 2006). Strikingly, a larger proportion of Black men are imprisoned in the U.S. than were in South Africa at the height of apartheid (Alexander, 2012). In Washington, D.C., it is estimated that three out of every four Black men will be incarcerated at some point in their life. Similar incarceration rates can be found in predominately Black communities throughout the U.S. (Braman, 2004).

The disparity of poor, young, minority men who are arrested and incarcerated for drug crimes is evidenced by studies that have shown relatively equal levels of drug use and drug distribution between racial groups (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). In

fact, a study by the U.S. Department of Justice reported that the only significant racial differences in drug crime were found to be in the higher rates of White, juvenile, male drug use and distribution (2006). However, despite this finding and the implied lower rates of drug use and distribution, Black men are admitted to prison 20-50% more often than White men (Human Rights Watch, 2000). In larger cities, such as Newark, New Jersey, Black men are admitted to prison for drug crimes at a rate that is 80% higher than men of other races (Street, 2002). This implies that regardless of individual differences young, poor, minority men are at an extremely high risk of entering the criminal justice system.

In many states, once a man has served federal time, he is barred or severely restricted from receiving social assistance, such as welfare or public housing (Uggen & Manza, 2002). In some cases he may be ineligible to vote or have full restoration of his rights once he is released (Uggen & Manza, 2002). This means that previously incarcerated men may become part of a growing caste of society that is restricted from receiving public assistance, education, and employment — all of which increase the chances that they will return to prison. This trend has large-scale implications, not just for individuals, but their families and communities as well (Alexander, 2012; Travis & Waul, 2003). Due to the alarming inequality present in the distribution of incarcerated individuals, it is urgent that this group of men be better understood so that protective factors can be bolstered, and risk factors lowered.

### **Effects of Incarceration**

Each year nearly 1.4 million incarcerated men will be returning home to their families and communities (Alexander, 2012). They face numerous challenges as a result of their incarceration and the complex, long-standing, socio-historical effects of racism and oppression (Travis & Waul, 2003). The majority of returning prisoners have not completed high school, and

they have limited to no employable job skills (Travis & Waul, 2003). They have housing issues, substance abuse disorders, and various unaddressed health problems (Travis & Waul, 2003). Also, the stigma of incarceration may produce feelings of shame, inadequacy, and anger, leading to a higher risk of psychological disorders (Travis & Waul, 2003). In addition, prison sentences have become harsher over the past 20 years, meaning that many prisoners have served longer sentences and may suffer from the psychological and physiological effects of institutionalization, as well as more severe detachment from their families and communities (National Institute of Justice, 2000). Taken together, the psychological, physical, employment, housing, and financial needs of returning prisoners — in combination with the socio-historical effects of criminal justice policy which has disproportionately targeted young, poor, minority men — the ability to reintegrate into society and avoid returning to prison is a formidable challenge (Travis & Waul, 2003).

For many of these men, incarceration sets into motion an escalating pattern of disadvantages that result in repeated incarcerations and recurrent family and community disruption (Sampson & Laub, 1993). This has been evidenced in the disproportionately high rates of repeated incarceration within already overburdened families, and an observed pattern of multiple generations of incarceration and criminality (Western, Lopoo, & McLanahan, 2004). The effects of this cycle have been catastrophic on many urban minority areas, where men are repeatedly removed from their role as primary care taker, financial provider, and community contributor (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Studies have tried to examine individuals, families, and communities affected by incarceration in an attempt to make sense of these men's lives and gain a better understanding of the effects of incarceration and the process of re-entry (Travis & Waul, 2003). A 3-year

ethnographic study of male prisoners and their families in the Washington, D.C. area found that incarceration places not only extreme stress on the individual, but on what are often already fragile social and economic systems (Braman & Wood, 2003). These overburdened families and communities, affected by large numbers of incarcerations, become trapped in a cycle of recidivism which crosses multiple generations and domains — leading to a pronounced derailment of children's development, family structure, and social and economic functioning (Braman & Wood, 2003). Anderson (1990) identified that the cycle of incarceration dramatically affects a community's stability by decreasing social cohesion and increasing rates of poverty, unemployment, crime, and drug use (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). Because of the close connection between incarceration and family and community disruption, many researchers and advocates in the field, have suggested that individuals, as well as their family contexts and relational experiences, must be examined in order to better understand recidivism pathways and predict potential areas for intervention (Braman & Wood, 2003; Schirmer, Nellis, & Maurer, 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002; Vishner & Travis, 2003).

### **Implications for Positive Re-entry**

There are many pronounced effects of incarceration that can make returning home extremely difficult. According to national statistics, of those who return home, nearly 7 out of 10 will be re-arrested and sent back to prison within 3 years of their release (Travis, Solomon, & Waul, 2001). Clearly, understanding the factors that contribute to an individual's success or failure in staying out of prison would be extremely important in constructing policy and programs to assist these at-risk individuals and communities. However, the majority of recidivism studies have focused on demographic characteristics, largely ignoring the link between re-entry adjustment and family, community, and social support factors (Visher &

Travis, 2003). The few studies that have investigated the relational aspects of re-integration success have largely found that positive re-entry does in fact depend on the confluence or dynamic relationship between individual and social variables (Visher & Travis, 2003).

Correlates to re-entry success have been found to include the interplay of three major areas: an individual's social environment (e.g., family, community, and peer support), their unique personal and situational characteristics (e.g., resilience, individual traits, temperament, environmental supports), and state-level policy (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 2010; Visher & Travis, 2003).

In relation to these three major domains of re-entry outcome, a significant finding that has held stable over the past 45 years, and across diverse offender populations, is the correlation between post-prison success and the maintenance of family relationships (Hairston, 2001b; Petersilia, 2003; Sack & Seidler, 1978; Vishner & Travis, 2003). During the rehabilitation movement of the 1970s a few researchers began to examine this relationship between family ties and recidivism (Holt & Miller, 1972). Studies by Adam and Fisher (1976) and Leclair (1978) analyzed the mean number of visits and letters that prisoners received during incarceration, and they found that higher rates of contact between prisoners and their families was connected to lower rates of recidivism. They also found greater post-release success in prison programs that aimed to facilitate family connection during and after incarceration (Adam & Fisher, 1976; Leclair, 1978). A study by Bazemore and Stinchcomb (2004) found that the emotional attachments prisoners reported to their family had a direct result on the decisions they made upon release, contributing to more positive re-entry outcomes. A study by Henggeler, Smith, and Melton (1992) found that interventions aimed at increasing family cohesion during and after incarceration resulted in fewer re-arrests and parole offenses. Another study conducted by La

Bodega de la Familia, a service center operated by the Vera Institute of Justice in New York City, found that previously incarcerated men with co-occurring substance use disorders who participated in family programs aimed at increasing family cohesion, decreased their substance use from 80% to 42% (Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002). In addition, the men who participated in the family service program obtained medical and social services at substantially higher rates than men who did not participate in the program (Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002). Many of these studies concluded that across most comparison categories, individuals who reported more family contact and connection had the lowest amount of parole failure or return to prison (Adam & Fisher, 1976; Holt & Miller, 1972;; Leclair, 1978).

Although these studies have linked perceived family support and contact with positive post-release outcome, there is still relatively little empirical study aimed at differentiating what specific familial influences affect prisoner re-entry, or what factors within these relationships contribute to stronger familial ties (Vishner & Travis, 2010). In addition, there is relatively little investigation specifically aimed at the recently released prisoner population. Therefore, a better understanding of the specific relationships of previously incarcerated men in relation to recidivism, as well as the factors that influence those relationships, is still needed to gain a better understanding of why family ties are connected to better outcomes and how those ties can be bolstered or facilitated to improve post-release success.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The majority of incarcerated men report being fathers to one or more children (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008), and studies that have explored incarcerated fathers have found that fatherhood, the role and the relationship that it suggests, is an extremely salient factor in these men's lives (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Magaletta & Herbst, 2001; Shannon & Abrams,



2007). A report by Gabel and Johnston (1995) stated that fathers who had lived with their children prior to incarceration were more likely to maintain contact with their children during and after their sentence had been served, and reported lower levels of re-arrest or parole violation. Another study by Hairston (2001b) found that men who experienced high rates of post-release success reported assuming a responsible parenting role upon their release. A study by Petersilia (2003) found that ex-offenders who assumed an active parenting role upon release appeared to have lower recidivism rates than men who were not involved with their children. These results not only suggest that an important familial tie for incarcerated men is their relationship with their children, but that men who report stronger relationships with their children fare better upon release than men who do not report strong relationships — making the quality of the parent-child relationship of recently released men an important area for further examination.

A small number of studies have found that incarcerated fathers report feeling responsible for their children, regardless of being imprisoned and removed from their family (LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). One study showed that incarcerated fathers reported numerous concerns about the well-being of their children, as well as concerns for how their incarceration might affect the parent-child bond (Gabel & Johnston, 1995). The authors of another study with similar findings suggested that the importance of the father identity may be related to post-release success in that it may help prisoners to develop more pro-social identities (Sampson & Laub, 1993). A report by Zamble and Quinsey (1997) stated that one of the highest predictors of recidivism was the presence of interpersonal conflict within primary relationships. This finding suggests that men who consider their role as a father to be significant may be negatively affected by discord within this relationship and positively affected by strong or more secure attachment.

Therefore further exploration of the specific quality of the father-child relationship and its connection to post-release outcome is needed.

A report by Healy, Foley, and Walsh (2000) stated that in some instances, incarceration was linked to increased motivation to resume more responsible parental roles and start over with the parent-child relationship. What specifically contributed to this finding, or why some men were motivated to become more responsible fathers while others were not, is currently unknown (Healy, Foley & Walsh, 2000). Therefore, gaining a better understanding of what social or individual factors may be facilitating a strong father-child bond is also an important area for further examination.

### **Limitations of Previous Studies**

The majority of studies on incarcerated and previously incarcerated fathers have focused on deviance patterns, pathology, or lack of resources in relation to their recidivism risk (van der Knapp, Alberda, Oosterveld, & Born, 2011). There is a paucity of research that has sought to examine what aspects of fatherhood are protective or resilient to the overwhelming amount of disruption that has historically affected this population, placing them at-risk to re-offend.

Although it is clear that family ties are significant in understanding the complex process of reintegration and recidivism, researchers have yet to systematically investigate or explain what specific factors within the father-child relationship may be protective or preventative to future incarceration. By and large, crime studies and investigations on recidivism have focused on individual characteristics and personality variables (McCord, 1979; Vishner & Travis, 2003).

Those that have included potential family contributors have focused on criminal behaviors within the family system or the amount of contact that prisoners receive from family members while incarcerated — not necessarily on the quality of the relationships that prisoners report across the

various stages of the incarceration and re-entry process (Klein, Bartholomew, & Hibbert, 2002; Vishner & Travis, 2003).

More specifically, significant gaps exist in the literature across the multiple fields that have examined recidivism, with regard to already released men and the father-child relationship quality. Whether looking back at prisoners' formative familial connections or looking forward at post-prison family ties, there is little information on what specific factors may be influencing the development of this relationship, and what impact they may have on the post-release success of men who have already returned to their communities (Hairston, 2002; Sack & Seidler, 1978; Vishner & Travis, 2003). Although there have been investigations of the various motivations for criminal and or pro-social behavior patterns, such as strain theory and social bond theory, there has been little investigation into the specific contribution and differentiation of previously incarcerated men's family relationships (Hirschi, 1969; Lilly, Cullen & Ball, 2007). This means that there is little known about the differences in quality or contribution of specific familial relationships, that is, parent, child, sibling, son, and so forth, for men already in the process of re-entry. There are also few studies that have empirically differentiated between familial connection and social support among previously incarcerated men. This means that it is still unknown if the impact of specific family relationships, such as the father-child relationship, is unique or simply a component of overall perceived social support (Vishner & Travis, 2003).

Additionally, relatively little is known about what facilitates the father-child relationship, much less what contributes to the establishment and maintenance of this relationship with incarcerated fathers. It is inarguable that the relationship is disrupted by incarceration, therefore what specific factors may be allowing some incarcerated fathers to maintain the parent-child bond during and after imprisonment, while others fail to do so is unknown. Research on the

mother-child dyad has indicated that paternal sensitivity is highly related to the development of secure attachments (De Wolff & Ijzendoorn, 1997). When maternal care is responsive, warm, and appropriate to the child's needs, a secure and trusting relationship is formed that allows the child to explore their environment and develop other secure and trusting relationships (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978). Unfortunately, the correlation between paternal sensitivity and secure attachment is not as strongly linked in father-child attachment research. In fact, some studies have shown no significant association between father sensitivity and father-child attachment (Volling & Belsky, 1992). This suggests that the relationship between a father and child may be qualitatively different than the mother-child relationship (De Wolff & Ijzendoorn, 1997).

What little research that has been conducted on the father-child dyad has suggested that there may be two important aspects of the relationship associated with secure attachment and strong parent-child relationships: positive father involvement and the quality of the parent-child relationship (Brown, McBride, Shin, & Bost, 2007). Studies have examined a range of fathering behaviors to attempt to isolate what qualities of the relationship are linked to secure father-child attachment, including behaviors such as power assertion (Kochanska, Aksan, & Joy, 2007), control, role reversal (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992; Macfie, McElwain, Houts, & Cox, 2005), affect (Carson & Parke, 1996), intrusiveness, physical/cognitive stimulation (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Kochanska, Aksan, Penny, & Boldt, 2007), and style of play (Cox et al., 1992). By and large these studies found that the quality of the parenting was not a significant predictor of father-child attachment alone. In addition, studies that have focused on father involvement, (i.e., the level of interaction, accessibility, and responsibility a father has to his child), have found that involvement was also an inadequate sole predictor of father-child attachment (Pleck,

1997; Radin, 1994). A study by Brown et al. (2007) found that father quality was mediated by father involvement, therefore requiring both constructs to be present at specific levels for a secure father-child attachment relationship to form. Interestingly, the Brown et al. (2007) study found that children formed secure attachments to their fathers when the father was not highly involved as long as the parenting quality was high (e.g., low intrusiveness, high task orientation, high positive affect). They also found that insecure attachment was more closely linked to father-child dyads with low parenting quality and high parent involvement, indicating that fathers may not need to be as directly involved with their children to develop secure attachments if the quality of their parenting is high (Brown et al., 2007). These findings have important implications for incarcerated fathers who may not be able to interact with their children while they are incarcerated.

Although the Brown et al. (2007) study found that secure attachment was possible when involvement was low, they also found that high involvement coupled with high parenting quality led to healthy father-child attachments. This finding was also noted in a study of American fathers by Cox, Owen, Henderson, and Margand (1992) that found that children with more involved fathers were observed as being more securely attached than those with less involved fathers. This implies that involvement coupled with high parenting quality may be an important component of attachment security for fathers in general (Brown et al., 2007). It also suggests possible reasons why the men who return home to live with their children, or who resume responsible and engaged parental roles when they leave prison, fare better than men who do not (Gabel & Johnston, 1995; Hairston, 2001a). These constructs have not been investigated with previously incarcerated men, therefore, discovering the perceived quality of the relationship, as well as the level of involvement that previously incarcerated men report with their children upon

release could be significant in determining the effect that the parent-child relationship may have on post-release outcome.

Furthermore, little is known about the quality of previously incarcerated men's own experiences of being parented and how those experiences may be related to their roles as a father. Relational and attachment theories suggest that there is an intergenerational transmission of attachment and caregiving constructs and, therefore, the experience of being parented may affect the father-child bond as these men re-enact their own relational experiences and sense of self in relation to others (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Brewer, 1991; Deaux, 1992). A study by Harper and McLanahan (2004) that looked at the impact of the parenting experience, namely the absence of father contact, on the likelihood of becoming incarcerated. They found that foundational experiences within the parent-child relationship do appear to be linked to higher rates of first time incarceration. Further examination is needed to determine what role the experience of being parented plays in the recidivism process of men who have already entered the criminal justice system. It is also unknown how these factors affect previously incarcerated men's ability to parent, form, and maintain healthy father-child bonds.

Additionally, very little research has been conducted regarding what other relationships may affect or bolster the father-child bond, such as the quality of the co-parental relationship. Although survey data has shown that only 23% of incarcerated men report being married (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000), many of these men have partner relationships, and studies have shown that incarceration can drastically deteriorate, challenge, and change these relationships (Roy & Dyson, 2005). Further examination is needed to better understand the complex romantic partnerships at play in these men's lives and how co-parenting influences the father-child bond. Some studies have found a high incidence of role confusion and conflict

between mothers and fathers throughout the process of incarceration (Roy & Dyson, 2005). Specifically, Roy and Dyson (2005) found that nearly 75% of incarcerated men reported being encouraged to take part in their children's lives by their child's mother. How these men perceived this encouragement, despite the relatively low rates of romantic relationships reported during incarceration, is still needed to better understand how co-parenting factors influenced their relationship with their children after prison.

Studies that have investigated the role of co-parental communication and father-child attachment in non-criminal populations have found that supportive and low-conflict co-parenting is significantly linked to stronger father-child attachments (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf & Neff, 2010). Although these particular aspects of co-parental communication have not been extensively examined in the lives of previously incarcerated fathers, the general population results suggest that the nature and quality of co-parental communication for previously incarcerated men may be one aspect of the father-child relationship, and a possible contributor to post-release success.

In addition, survey studies on incarcerated fathers suggest that this group of men may differ significantly from the general population of fathers on several individual and social factors; such as their level of social support, environmental situation and resource availability, their relational and communication skill set, their education level, their violence and criminal history, their level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and potential for self-improvement (Arditti, Lambert-Shute & Joest, 2003; Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; Simourd & Olver, 2011). One significant finding that has been linked to better post-release outcome is the presence of individual-level factors associated with a motivation to change (Visher & Travis, 2003). Just how these individual factors of change or self-improvement are associated with the social

relationships of incarcerated and recently released men is unknown (Visher & Travis, 2003). However, it has been found that stronger association with family and familial roles, such as parents or partners, are associated with higher levels of pro-social attitudes and identity, suggesting that strong family connections may lead to lower criminal attitudes – a construct that has been tied to recidivism rates (Hirschi, 1969; Holsinger, 1999; Uggen, Manza, & Behrens, 2004). It appears that factors such as self-efficacy, denial/minimization of problems, awareness of change demands and resource availability, cognitive approach, social skill set, and so forth, are closely linked to outcome (Simourd & Olver, 2011). Just exactly how these factors are tied to an individual's social environment during transition, or their acceptance or rejection of familial supports and relationships that might tie them to their role as a father has yet to be determined.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Aspects of social bond theory, relational theory, and attachment theory will be used to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the current study. In social bond theory, a widely researched and sometimes controversial view on criminality, deviant behavior is viewed as an innate human quality that is mitigated or controlled by a person's various social bonds (Hirschi, 1969). Therefore, a breakdown in these bonds may lead to a natural expression of selfish or aggressive behaviors, or criminal behavior patterns. In this theory, the bonds that are thought to lead to pro-social values and behaviors include: *attachment* or affection toward pro-social others, such as parents, teachers, etc., *commitment* to the social relationships that a person risks losing if they engage in criminal acts, *involvement* in pro-social or anti-social activity, and the *beliefs* that a person holds that support or reject pro-social values (Hirschi, 1969). While the current study will not attempt to investigate this theory per se or endorse the supposition that all humans are



innately selfish and are only prevented from engaging in criminal behaviors by their pro-social bonds and values, the theory is applicable to the study in that it emphasizes the potential power of social relationships to influence behavior. In this sense the theory was used as a starting point to investigate the potentially protective capacity of social bonds for previously incarcerated fathers, but not to investigate or make any claims about innate criminality or human nature.

Relational and attachment theory were also used to support the current investigation. Theory suggests that all human beings are influenced by their interpersonal relationships with significant others, such as fathers, mothers, or caregivers (Anderson & Chen, 2002). This view suggests that individuals develop their sense of self, self-regulation, and to some degree their personality functioning from their relationships with these figures. Over time, as an individual develops within a family system, their relational repertoire is constructed and their interpersonal patterns of behavior become established. Throughout their life these patterns are experienced and enacted within the groups or social settings that they encounter (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Brewer, 1991; Deaux, 1993). This suggests that the relational experiences of previously incarcerated men may be important in how they develop their overall relational skill set, and later ability to develop and maintain the familial ties and belief systems about the importance of the father-child connection that has been linked to better post-release success. Relational theory suggests that foundational relationships, like those between previously incarcerated men and their parents or caregivers, may be a component of what determines how and why some men maintain strong familial ties while others fail to do so.

Relational theory also suggests that the importance of the paternal relationship on the interpersonal development of previously incarcerated men may not require physical proximity (Baldwin, Carrell & Lopez, 1990). This means that the men's perception of their relationship to

their parental figures, or how they view those relationships symbolically, may be as significant in determining how they develop their sense of self and interpersonal patterns as their actual interactions with that parental figure (Baldwin et al., 1990). This is an area that needs more exploration to determine if previously incarcerated men's lack of physical proximity to their children during their incarceration is related to the potentially protective aspects of the perceived parent-child relationship, or if it is not.

In addition, relational theory suggests that the interpersonal patterns of incarcerated men may be passed down from one generation to the next (Anderson & Chen, 2002). This is complementary to a core supposition in attachment theory: That there is an intergenerational transmission of family dynamics and attachment patterns (Bowlby, 1979, 1988). This implies that incarcerated fathers may possess certain attachment constructs from their perception of being parented that is facilitating their relationship with their child and allowing for the protective effects of a strong parent-child relationship. These relational patterns may also affect romantic relationships, as well as the establishment of peer or social supports (Bowlby, 1979, 1988).

Attachment theory suggests that an individual's relationship with their primary caregivers during the early part of his or her life will effect later development (Bowlby, 1969). How children organize themselves and their development depends largely on their interactions with their attachment figures and their caregiver's sensitive responsiveness, physical proximity, and emotion availability (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Although these interactions may form the cornerstone of how an individual develops their relational self, this attachment relationship is situated within the broader context of family and society (Davies, 1996). Therefore, it is not only important to investigate the primary relationships of previously incarcerated fathers, but

also their connection to other significant relationships in their life, their perception of social support, and the interplay that their unique individual characteristics may have on these various interpersonal relationships.

One construct that has been widely linked to better physical and mental health outcomes is social support (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985). The perception of social support is based primarily on an individual's evaluation of historical and current effective support from friends and family (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In relational regulation theory, it is suggested that the perception of social support is rooted in social interactions that are mediated by both personal and interpersonal factors (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). This suggests that an individual's perception of social support may not be isolated from their individual characteristics (i.e., ability to regulate affect, cognitions, and behaviors), or the expression of those characteristics during shared activities with others (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). In other words, the individual, as well as the individual in relation to others, must be evaluated in order to isolate the potential effects of perceived social support, as well as the potential for coping that allows a person to buffer the negative effects of stress within any given relationship (Lakey & Orehek, 2011).

### **Significance of the Current Study**

Research on incarcerated men, both during and after incarceration, is relatively sparse in comparison with other groups. What research that has been conducted by private researchers and large government agencies, like the Department of Justice, has shown that these men are not only at a disadvantage prior to incarceration, but they increase their disadvantaged state as a result of institutionalization and removal from their families and communities (Travis & Waul, 2003). The primary aim of the current study was to investigate previously incarcerated fathers' perception of the quality of their relationship with their child, and how that relationship is related

to their risk for re-offending. The study also aimed to investigate the contribution that social factors play in facilitating the father-child bond, as well as the contribution that those factors may make in predicting recidivism risk, specifically; the father's own experience of being parented, the quality of communication and support they have with their child's mother, and their perception of social support. In addition, the contribution of individual factors associated with motivation to change was assessed to determine to what extent these characteristics affect the father-child relationship and risk of recidivism. The individual factors associated with motivation to change were explored in the current study because they have been shown in previous research to be most closely related to better post-release outcome; namely due to their relationship with treatment compliance and resource utilization (Simour & Olver, 2011; Visher & Travis, 2003). It was important to evaluate the unique contribution that these individual characteristics might have so that the connections between the men's social relationships and their risk of recidivism could be more accurately assessed and false conclusions avoided.

The current study sought to draw attention to the complexity of previously incarcerated men's lives rather than focusing on demographic characteristics or pathologies alone, and to determine if evidence existed to suggest that familial relationships may be protective against the recidivism. The current study sought to highlight the reality that incarcerated men, and those in the process of re-entry, are not isolated from their social context, but are tied to these systems and may therefore benefit from increased contact and decreased separation from the relationships they value. Furthermore, the inclusion of both social and individual variables allowed for a more thorough exploration of this group of men's relationships and their risk of returning to prison.

### Definition of Terms

*Risk of recidivism.* This variable was defined as the potential that a previously incarcerated individual will commit a crime or violate the terms of his supervision (e.g., work-release, parole, probation) and return to prison (Campbell, French & Gendreau, 2007; Visher & Travis, 2003). For the purposes of the current study, risk of recidivism was operationally defined as total scores for the Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (CSS-M), a valid self-report measure of criminal attitudes and beliefs that has been shown to reliably predict risk of recidivism (Holsinger, 1999; Witte, Placido, Gu, & Wong, 2006).

*Father-child relationship.* This variable was defined as the perceived quality and the level of father directed involvement in the relationship between a father and the child he feels closest to at the time of assessment. Quality of the relationship and father directed involvement are two factors that have been shown to be linked to secure father-child attachments (Brown et al., 2007). For the purposes of the current study, the father-child relationship was operationally defined as the total combined score of two subscales of the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory: Satisfaction with parenting and Involvement (Gerard, 2000). A third scale, Social Desirability, was used as a validity indicator to determine if the results of the assessment were valid, but not as a predictor variable within the inferential analysis of the study.

*Experience of being parented.* This variable was defined as the maternal and paternal contribution of the parent-child bond, as recalled by the adult by their memory of parental attitudes and behaviors prior to the age of 16 (Bogaerts, Vanheule, & Declercq, 2005; Parker, 1990). For the purposes of the current study, the experience of being parented was operationally defined as scores on the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) for both a mother figure and a father figure (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979).

*Co-parental communication.* This variable was defined as the interplay between support and conflict of previously incarcerated fathers and the mother of their child in regards to co-parenting (Brown et al., 2010; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). Supportive communication consists of confirming parental competence, respecting the other parent's contributions, and upholding decisions (Brown et al., 2010), while conflict consists of attempts to discourage or deflect the father's interactions with their child (Roy & Dyson, 2005). For the purposes of the current study, the *co-parental communication* was defined as total scores for the Quality of Coparental Communication Scale, a widely used measure of co-parenting communication and behaviors between separated or non-residential partner relationships (Ahrons, 1981).

*Perceived social support.* This variable was defined as the amount of support a previously incarcerated father perceives he is receiving from his peers and extended family. For the purposes of the current study, the perception of social support was defined as scores on the Social Support subscale of the Self-Improvement Orientation Scheme-Self Report (SOS-SR), a valid self-report instrument of individual and environmental factors associated with offender treatment utilization and recidivism risk (Simourd & Olver, 2011).

*Individual factors associated with lower offender risk.* This variable was defined as the individual factors associated with a motivation to change, a construct that has been linked to lower offender risk and better post-release outcome (Visher & Travis, 2003). These individual factors include Openness (i.e., ability to respond to new ideas), denial (i.e., downplay of past failures), self-appraisal ability (i.e., awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses), self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in ability to achieve goals), cognitive orientation (i.e., thought processes), self-improvement beliefs (i.e., expectancy of change), motivation level (i.e., drive to change), coping skill (i.e., problem solving skill set), and self-esteem (i.e., level of positive

evaluation of self) (Simourd & Olver, 2011). For the purposes of the current study, the individual factors associated with lower offender risk were defined as the total and subscale scores of the Self-Improvement Orientation Scheme-Self Report (SOS-SR) (Simourd & Olver, 2011).

### **Research Questions**

1. What effect does the father-child relationship have on previously incarcerated men's risk of recidivism?
2. Are there other contributing social factors to the father-child relationship; such as the men's experience of being parented, their communication with the child's mother, or their perception of social support?
3. Are there other contributing individual factors to the father-child relationship?
4. Is the father-child relationship a stronger predictor of recidivism risk than the contributing social or individual factors?

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

1. It was hypothesized that the father-child relationship would be negatively correlated with the father's perceived risk of recidivism, such that when the strength of the father-child relationship increases, the perceived risk of recidivism will decrease.
2. It was hypothesized that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with their experience of being parented.
3. It was hypothesized that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with the amount of supportive co-parenting communication with the child's mother.
4. It was hypothesized that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with the amount of perceived social support.

5. It was hypothesized that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with individual factors associated with a motivation to change and lower risk of re-offending.
6. It was hypothesized that the father-child relationship would be more strongly related to predicting recidivism risk than the contributing social or individual factors.

These hypotheses arose from expectations about the sample characteristics, based on previous research on the variables of interest.



## **Chapter II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

To help paint a picture of the study population, the proceeding chapter will provide a more in-depth understanding of the specific factors that define the population in general, as well as the issues facing previously incarcerated men upon re-entry. To better illustrate the importance and significance of the current study, the chapter will also describe the major empirical findings of the effects of incarceration on individuals, their families, and communities. A discussion of the theoretical framework and cultural considerations that were incorporated into the design and methods of the current study, as well as a literature review of the variables of interest, will also be provided.

#### **Population Profile**

Over the past 25 years the U.S. prison population has increased 400% (Beck, Karberg & Harrison, 2002). As incarceration has risen, so has the number of incarcerated parents. The latest data from the 2008 Bureau of Justice Statistics (2008) estimates that the number of incarcerated parents, both mothers and fathers, has increased 79% since 1991. This means that an estimated 809,800 of the 1,518,535 prisoners are parents, and 1,706,600 minor children, roughly 2.3% or one in every 43 children in the general U.S. population, has a parent behind bars (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Of the combined state and federal inmate population that report being parents, 92% are male and nearly half are African American (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). This means that African American children are six and half times (6.7%) more likely than White children to have a father in prison, while Hispanic children are two and half times (2.4%) more likely than White children to have a father in prison (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Approximately 50% of

children with an incarcerated father are under the age of 10 (Schirmer et al., 2009). To determine the average length of time a child with an incarcerated father will be without their parent, the Department of Justice subtracted the amount of time served by each man from their child's age and they found that more than a third of children with an incarcerated father will reach the age of 18 prior to their parent's release (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). This means that an estimated 715,600 children will reach adulthood while their fathers are incarcerated (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

More than half of all incarcerated fathers have never been married (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). For those who were in a committed relationship prior to incarceration, the incidence of divorce or separation during the incarceration period is high (Hairston, 1995). The strain on the partner relationships is often times directly connected to a loss of connection in the father-child relationship, as many incarcerated fathers perceive their relationship with their children as being a package deal with their child's mother (Furstenburg, 1995). In fact, a study by Nurse (2001) found that the amount of father-child contact for incarcerated men was directly connected to their relationships with the children's mothers. At least 48% of fathers reported living with their children in the month prior to their incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). For these men, when the relationship with their child's mother falters during the incarceration period, the overall amount of contact with their children is shown to decrease (Furstenburg, 1995). This finding is also true for kinship caregivers or non-maternal caregivers. In addition, the overall amount of contact during incarceration has been shown to decrease in relation to the amount of time served, meaning that as the amount of time served goes up, contact with the child goes down (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper, & Shear, 2010).

Incarcerated fathers within state institutions are most likely (64%) to be between the ages of 25 and 34, followed by men between the ages of 35 and 44 (58%), and men younger than 24 years of age (44%) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Similarly, men in federal institutions are most likely (74%) to be between the ages of 25 and 34, followed by men between the ages of 35 and 44 (72%), and men younger than 24 (45%) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). As far as level of education, 63% of incarcerated fathers report having a high school diploma or GED (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). This is a slightly higher education level than the 59% of incarcerated men who do not have a child but possess a high school diploma or GED (Coley & Barton, 2006).

Among both federal and state inmates, drug and public order offenses are more likely than violent offenses (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). The numbers range between 60-69% for drug charges and 62-65% for public order or property related charges (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). The amount of recidivism is high for incarcerated fathers, ranging from 50-81% for prior offenses and incarcerations (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Since 1997 the frequency of contact that minor children have with their incarcerated fathers has decreased substantially. Monthly contact has dropped 28%, while the incidence of minor children having no contact with their incarcerated father has increased 17% (Schirmer et al., 2009). As of 2004, both federal and state correctional facilities reported that 59% of state inmates and 45% of federal inmates reported never having received an in-person visit from their children (Schirmer et al., 2009). In addition, the majority of fathers endorsed being held at an institution more than 100 miles from their home or the homes of their children: 62% for state inmates and 84% for federal inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008; Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2005).

Fathers reported that their child's mother was most often the primary care taker (84%), followed by grandparents (18%) and other caregivers (6%) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). More than half (54%) of all incarcerated fathers reported being the primary financial supporters of their children prior to incarceration, and 68% of fathers reported being employed prior to their arrest (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Nearly half (49%) of all fathers in both federal and state prisons reported having a family member who had been incarcerated, and 40% reported receiving some form of public assistance while growing up (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). In addition, more than a third (34%) reported that there was some form of alcohol or drug abuse by their parents or guardians while they were growing up, and 4 out of every 10 fathers reported having an alcohol or drug abuse issue themselves (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Out of the general population of incarcerated fathers, over half (57%) reported attending some kind of self-help or improvement program while in prison (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Additionally, men who lived with their children prior to incarceration were more likely to attend parenting classes than men who did not live with their children prior to incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Compared to incarcerated mothers, fathers were much more likely to serve a longer sentence; 52% serving between 12 and 59 months, and 27% serving sentences longer than 60 months (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

### **The Impact of Incarceration**

#### **Impact on Fathers**

As the rate of incarceration has increased over the past two decades, the prison system has changed, requiring inmates to adapt and react in specific ways in order to survive. These adaptations may have long-lasting and unintended consequences that do not often translate to

positive reintegration (Travis & Waul, 2003). The effects of incarceration have been termed by many researchers as *collateral effects*, or the unintended negative consequences that occur during the conviction and incarceration process (Council on Crime and Justice, 2006). Collateral effects are experienced on multiple levels by both prisoners and their families. These effects are pervasive, persistent, and include psychological, physiological, social, financial, and communal implications (Council on Criminal Justice, 2006).

To begin to address the effects of incarceration on the individual, the prison environment itself must be discussed. One major issue in the prison system is overcrowding, a problem that many penologists have described as a crisis (Haney & Spector, 2001). Overcrowding has drastically affected the living conditions of many prisons, jeopardizing prisoner safety and limiting prisoner access to rehabilitative programs and services (Haney & Spector, 2001). For example, of the three quarters of men requiring substance abuse treatment in prison, only 13% have been given access to programming during their prison term (McCaffrey, 1998). Additionally, the rate of access and participation in pre-release programming has dropped substantially showing that only 12% of the general prison population has participated in these types of activities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003a).

In many cases, the dramatic increase in the prisoner population has not been met with increased funding for the institutions that house these men. Often leading to substandard and sometimes unconstitutional living conditions. For example, several lawsuits have been filed against Texas and California, two states with the largest prison systems in the nation, due to unconstitutional conditions of confinement and the severe psychological and physiological effects reported in their prison populations (Haney & Spector, 2001).

Paralleling the issue of overcrowding is the shift in criminal justice values and policy. In the 1970s there was a rehabilitative movement within the field of corrections which led to many meaningful programs aimed at assisting prisoner re-entry and decreasing recidivism risk (Haney & Spector, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003). In recent years, there has been a shift away from rehabilitation to *containment* or *incapacitation*, where corrections facilities and staff focus only on keeping the criminal away from free society and away from movements within the facility that may cause increased risk of harm to staff or other inmates (Haney & Spector, 2001). This has led to an accepted practice of restricted movement and decreased access to programming or health services (Haney & Spector, 2001). The abandonment of many of the tenants of the rehabilitative movement and emphasis on punitive measures has led to a dramatic increase in isolation practices and so called "super-max" facilities where prisoners are held in separate isolation rooms for up to 23 hours per day (Haney & Spector, 2001). Many researchers have suggested that the increased reliance on punitive measures for control has in fact made prison environments more hostile and dangerous (Haney & Lynch, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 2000). In addition, there has been a stigmatization of correctional facilities within communities, which has moved many facilities further away from populated areas and made visitation and contact more difficult and less frequent (Haney & Spector, 2001; Tonry, 1996).

Multiple studies have concluded that the prison environment is difficult and stressful, leading to the development of numerous adaptive cognitions and behaviors that may be dysfunctional outside of the prison environment (Haney & Spector, 2001, Irwin, 1970; Travis & Waul, 2003). Although not all people are psychologically harmed by the effects of imprisonment, many individuals are impacted in some way and have reported painful, deprived,

and atypical experiences of daily living during and after their incarceration (Haney & Spector, 2001).

Prison environments often force an individual to adhere to a rigid routine that is deprived of privacy and autonomy, while at the same time diminishing an individual's sense of worth and status by assigning numerical identification and forcing sparse and deprived living conditions (Haney & Spector, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003). The longer a person is exposed to an environment like this, the more likely they are to become accustomed to the deprivation and internalize many of the psychological mechanisms that arise as a reaction to this environment (Haney, 1997). This process is called *institutionalization*, and it creates profound changes in the cognitions and behaviors of incarcerated men (Haney & Spector, 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003).

One aspect of institutionalization is a decrease in the expectation of control over oneself and an increased dependence on structure and contingency (Haney & Spector, 2001). The prison environment forces prisoners to relinquish their freedom and autonomy, a process that takes time to adjust to but which inevitably leads to a muting of self-initiative and self-control (Haney & Spector, 2001). Over time, prisoners become overly reliant on the structure and routine of the institution and have greater difficulty making decisions for themselves that are based on personal judgment, but are instead directly linked to the system of punishment and consequences within the facility (Haney & Spector, 2001). This has profound implications for returning prisoners who are being asked to resume adult, autonomous roles that require self-control and the ability to limit behaviors or set boundaries without immediate consequences (Travis & Waul, 2003).

The prison environment is often a stressful, unpleasant, and sometimes dangerous place with potential for personal harm from both guards and other inmates (Haney & Spector, 2001). What is often required of an individual to adjust to this environment and stay aware of potential

threat is hyper-vigilance, paranoia, interpersonal distrust, and aggression (Haney & Spector, 2001). A study by McCorkle (1992) of a maximum security prison in Tennessee found that 40% of prisoners reported avoiding high risk areas of the prison by electing to spend more time isolated in their cells as a precaution against possible harm. The study also found that 75% of prisoners reported being forced to harm other inmates or get tough in an attempt to avoid personal injury, and more than 25% reported keeping a weapon or shank nearby to protect themselves (McCorkle, 1992). This heightened level of vigilance and aggression may be problematic for resuming work and family life, and potentially increase the level of interpersonal conflict of recently released men.

Social withdrawal, isolation, emotional over-control, and psychological distancing are other common behaviors associated with institutionalization (Haney & Spector, 2001). These behaviors often arise out of the need to protect themselves from physical and psychological injury. However, this adaptation requires that the prisoner suppress or restrict their emotions and reactions to painful and often humiliating experiences (Haney & Spector, 2001). Prisoners label this process adopting the prison mask (Haney & Spector, 2001). This mask may protect them from being victimized or exploited in some situations, but it also isolates and alienates them from potentially protective social supports and relationships, both with other inmates and with social supports outside the facility (Haney, 2001). These changes may drastically effect how a father interacts with his child, partner, or family during his incarceration, as well as how he integrates and re-establishes contact with these relationships upon his return home (Day, Acock, Bahr & Arditti, 2005; La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005).

Other aspects of institutionalization include a diminished self-worth and lowered sense of personal value (Haney, 2001). Many prisoners may be denied basic privacy rights as they are



forced to live in small spaces, often no larger than 60 square feet, with other inmates whom they did not choose. They are also asked to conform to the scheduled structure of the institution that directs when they sleep, eat, bathe, and so forth. (Haney & Spector, 2001). These routines may over time become internalized and lead to long-lasting effects. They can also be viewed as infantilizing or degrading and may serve to remind the men of the diminished and stigmatized status they occupy as an incarcerated person (Haney, 2003). Over long periods of time these experiences may impose a belief system on the individual as deserving of degradation and contribute to a lowered sense of self-worth and increased feelings of shame (Haney & Spector, 2001). Low self-worth and shame may negatively affect interpersonal relationships, as well as the motivation to change criminal behaviors or resume potentially supportive relationships upon release.

These psychological adjustments are by-and-large natural adaptations made in response to an abnormal environmental system, and they should not be considered pathological reactions in isolation. However, much like returning soldiers who have experienced prolonged stress and threat of danger, once the prisoner returns home, these natural defenses may become disruptive to interpersonal relationships and the environments of free society, resulting in diagnosable mental disorders (Haney & Spector, 2001). Several studies have linked institutionalization with the development of disorders and symptomatology such as PTSD, substance dependence, depression, self-mutilation, anxiety, panic, intermittent explosive disorder, memory loss, cognitive dysfunction, anhedonia, hallucinations, psychosis, and paranoia (Dutton & Hart, 1992; Haney, 2003; Huff-Corzine, Corzine, & Moore, 1991; McCord, 1991; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

In addition to the numerous psychological issues returning fathers may face, these men are at a much higher risk of returning to their homes with untreated health issues and infectious

diseases that may make it more difficult for them to transition to their previous roles as financial provider or active parent (Day et al., 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003). The rates of incarcerated fathers returning home with diseases such as diabetes, hepatitis C, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS is much higher than the average population, in some instances 20-26% higher (Day et al., 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). In addition, many states have severely restricted access to public assistance programs that might help these returning prisoners gain access to basic health, housing, or employment services (Travis & Waul, 2003). In many areas, felony drug offenders may be barred from receiving federal benefits like food stamps or Supplementary Security Income, making it difficult to maintain the treatment of their health issues or gain employment due to their physical limitations (Legal Action Center, 2000).

Although not all prisoners will suffer long-lasting impairment, the longer they are imprisoned the more likely they are to be effected by the psychological and physiological effects of institutionalization, and the more likely they are to have difficulties with reintegration (Travis & Waul, 2003). In addition, the earlier an individual experiences institutionalization, the more severe and long-lasting the effects may be (Haney & Spector, 2001). Therefore, younger inmates — especially those who have served prison sentences during key developmental stages in their life, and those who have served longer sentences — have a higher risk of developing deeply ingrained institutional norms and more difficult post-prison adjustment (Haney & Spector, 2001).

Furthermore, the most recent national data shows that 53% of state inmates and 66% of federal inmates have served prior sentences in addition to their current incarceration (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). For incarcerated fathers, a third (32%) reported serving three or more sentences (U.S. Department of Justice Special Report, 2008). This implies that many

incarcerated fathers have experienced numerous adult sentences and multiple removals from their children's lives. The data that has evaluated to what degree incarcerated men experience the psychological symptoms of institutionalization when they return home, showed high numbers of physiological and psychological symptomatology post-release; suggesting that many returning fathers will bring home chronic and complex issues that may affect their ability to avoid returning to prison (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Transitioning from the prison environment back to the community poses additional issues for incarcerated fathers specifically. Many of these men face substantial stigma due to their criminal history and find it difficult to resume or obtain work. A study conducted in 1996 found that more than 60% of ex-offenders were unemployed 1 year post-release (Watts & Nightingale, 1996). The National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY) found that incarceration can have an extremely persistent effect on employment potential, showing an association between incarceration and unemployment anywhere from 10 weeks to 8 years post release (Freeman, 1991). Higher unemployment among previously incarcerated fathers has been shown to persist even after controlling for work experience (Western & Beckett, 1999). These studies suggest that the lack of felon friendly employers coupled with the limited job skills of many incarcerated men makes it hard to obtain and maintain employment (Watts & Nightingale, 1996).

Another issue that faces incarcerated fathers, both during and after incarceration, is their loss of family support. Numerous studies have shown that family involvement and connection is not only protective to an individual during incarceration, but it decreases the likelihood that the individual will re-offend (Petersilia, 2003). A study by Hairston (2002) surmised that the sociological theory of labeling might account for the improved outcomes of fathers who reported strong family connection during and after their sentences. This study suggested that familial

involvement for incarcerated fathers may allow for more normal identity functioning and limit the likelihood that the individual will develop an institutionalized or criminal identity (Hairston, 2002). Therefore, when fathers are limited in how much communication or contact they have with their families and children, they may be less able to avoid the negative effects of imprisonment, which can result in poorer post-incarceration outcomes (Hairston, 2002). Out of the percentage of incarcerated fathers who reported living with their children prior to their arrest, only 46% reported having weekly contact with their children in the form of letters, phone calls, or in-person visits (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). As the amount of time expected to serve goes up, the reported contact goes down, with less than 32% of men who expected to serve more than 60 months reporting contact with their children (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Additionally, a study by Adams (1992) found that the primary source for depression among incarcerated fathers was their perceived loss of connection to their family and children.

In addition to limited contact, some studies have found that family members engage in what is called protective communication, wherein they withhold important information from the incarcerated father to prevent hearing potentially distressing news (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001). Although this protective communication is done with good intentions, it has the potential to damage the already fragile relationships of fathers and their families. This is especially so when there is a high likelihood that the incarcerated fathers will be made aware of the filtered information through non-nuclear family members, or other inmates associated with the incarcerated father's family (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001).

Studies on prisoners and their children have found that one major contributor to family connection for incarcerated fathers is their relationship with their child's caregiver (Travis & Waul, 2003). This relationship is often significantly changed while the father is absent, leading

to difficulties in resuming former roles and increased stress and tension between fathers and their child's mother or guardian (Furstenburg, 1995). Several studies have found that incarcerated father's intimate or romantic partners often became more independent and self-sufficient during the incarceration period. They also found that romantic partners often develop new relationships which supplanted the partner, making it difficult to resume the partner / parental role upon release (Furstenburg, 1995; Nurse 2001; Travis & Waul, 2003;). A study by Hairston (1995) found that the disintegration of intimate partner relationships during incarceration made it difficult for fathers to not only re-establish communication with their children upon re-entry, but it also made it hard for fathers to locate their children or find an individual or family member to facilitate their re-connection. These issues within the romantic or partner relationships of incarcerated fathers also impacts the amount and quality of contact that fathers receive from their children during their sentence (Sullivan, 1993). Several studies have indicated that when other family members or new relationships have been formed to replace the provider and paternal role that is left absent during incarceration, children's contact and visitation is often significantly limited or discouraged (Sullivan, 1993). This gatekeeping is most often done by the child's mother as a reaction to the strain of limited communication, infidelity, financial concerns, or resentment at the offender for committing the crime. However, it may also come from familial relations such as the offenders parents or siblings, and may lead to an overall feeling of powerlessness and disenfranchisement (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Roy & Dyson, 2005).

If the co-parental and father-child relationships are supported enough to encourage visitation or contact during incarceration, there are often significant issues with transportation or resources for phone cards and telephone contact (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001). Although the Federal Bureau of Prisons attempts to house inmates close to their families, many incarcerated

fathers are held at facilities that are hundreds, if not thousands of miles from their children and families (Magaletta & Herbst, 2001). This limitation of contact has been found to be particularly evident for African American or Black fathers, and suggests that the lack of financial resources and transportation disproportionately affect the relationships of poor, minority fathers (Sullivan, 1993).

In summary, there are numerous effects on the fathers themselves and their re-entry outcome due to the prison environment. The watershed event of incarceration can disrupt key developmental stages, as well as affect the life course of individuals' mental, physical, and relational health and contribute to the accumulation of disadvantages which may disrupt healthy individual and family functioning (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Further investigation on the social and individual factors that may help to moderate these effects and lead to better post-release outcomes are needed to better understand this complex process.

### **Impact on Families and Communities**

As much as incarceration is destabilizing for a father's development and outcome, it is also detrimental to the families, children, and communities of incarcerated men. Several studies have shown that incarceration has numerous social and financial costs for communities (Moore, 1996; Clear & Cole, 1996; Sharp, Marcus-Mendoza, Bently, Simpson, & Love, 1998). Some studies have found that removing individuals from their community created economic disruption and hardship for remaining residents, as well as increased the likelihood of gang affiliation, crime, and drug use within the community (Moore, 1996; Clear & Cole, 1997). Contrary to the aim of the criminal justice system and law enforcement, communities with high rates of incarceration often see an increase in crime problems, homelessness, and joblessness following the mass incarceration of residents; suggesting that removing offenders from their communities

may in fact do more harm than good (Sharp et al., 1998). These findings are especially clear in minority neighborhoods or those already struggling with high rates of poverty and unemployment (Hagen & Dinovitzer, 1999)

Communities with high rates of incarceration and returning offenders often suffer the effects of stigmatization when new businesses and economic development opportunities are deterred (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001). This stigma affects the health of a community's economy, as well as the ability of the community to control itself socially and politically (Clear et al., 2001). Increased poverty and crime brings increased policing and negative interactions with law enforcement, as well as alienation from surrounding communities where social services may be more readily available (Clear et al., 2001). In addition, an increased removal of men from the community leads to a depletion of role models and financial providers, resulting in not just lower economic capital, but also decreased moral and community self-worth (Clear et al., 2001). Authors of the Community Concern Decline Model argue that increased incarceration is directly linked to community decay, wherein social and economic ties are weakened and resources that contribute to a community's health, such as political power, business growth, and development and education systems become eroded or overly stressed and unable to provide the quality of services needed to maintain a healthy functioning system (Conklin, 1975; Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2004). These factors are important to consider when studying previously incarcerated fathers because these are the communities and environmental situations that many of the men will be returning to.

The consequence of imprisonment on the families of offenders is complex and extremely difficult to examine due to the multifaceted and often transient quality of this group of individuals (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005). Some studies have found that the removal of the

father from the family had positive effects if the individual incarcerated had shown violent or problematic behaviors prior to incarceration (Arditti et al., 2005). This was especially the case when domestic violence was present and the removal of the offender provided a cessation of abusive behaviors (Arditti et al., 2005). Also, in some cases incarceration has been linked to an improvement in family functioning by allowing an opportunity to start over with spousal and parental responsibilities (Healy, Foley, & Walsh, 2000). Some studies have found that prison motivated some fathers to reflect on their relationship with their children and families, and to renew their commitment to becoming socially responsible caretakers upon their release (Healy et al., 2000). These findings have significant implications for further investigation about why some fathers see prison as an opportunity to start over and others do not. These findings also suggest that incarcerated fathers who value their role as a father may engage in behaviors during and after their incarceration that strengthens their relationship to their child and decreases their risk of returning to prison.

Although removal of fathers from their families may have some positive outcomes, there is much more documentation to support the likelihood that parental incarceration will have a negative impact on families and relationships (Healy et al., 2000). In many cases, the income of the family is significantly affected when the father is incarcerated (Hairston, 2002). This impact is often pervasive even after the father returns home due to fines or fees accrued during the court process and the stigma of criminal histories on employment options (Hairston, 2002). Several studies have found that the partners of incarcerated men had significant difficulty meeting the needs of the family while their partner was in prison, including; basic needs, food, clothing, housing, and transportation (Sharp et al., 1997). One study found that partners of inmates reported feeling imprisoned themselves by the responsibilities and pressures placed on them by



the absence of their partner, such as increased parenting duties and difficulty with discipline, as well as the demeaning treatment by prison personnel during visitations (Fishman, 1990). In addition, the stigma of paternal incarceration may affect the families and partners thereby leading to increased isolation from school, work, or social ties (Fishman, 1990). The Council on Crime and Justice (2006) found that in some cases landlords refused to renew leases of families of incarcerated men, and many children reported feeling isolated from teachers and classmates after having their father removed from the home by law enforcement officials. These negative effects are not restricted to members of the immediate family, but also to members of the extended family (Moore, 1996). This is especially true for African American and Latino men who report a high prevalence for extended family networks within one household (Moore, 1996).

Although it is difficult to establish a clear causal connection between children's outcomes and their parents' incarceration due to the numerous conditions of a child's environment, such as; parent-child separation, experience of parental arrest, general instability or poverty, and inadequate resources. Several studies have concluded that parental incarceration does have a negative effect on children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002; Wright & Seymour, 2002). Travis and Waul (2003), noted researchers on the impact of incarceration on families and children, have stated that the children of incarcerated parents are already at high risk along several dimensions due to the high rate of poverty and community instability within high incarceration populations. Removal of a parent diminishes this already limited support system (Travis & Waul, 2003). Several studies have noted that children of incarcerated fathers appear to be at-risk for many adverse effects, as the removal of a parent can dramatically impact their development, increase their problematic behaviors, and impact their experience of stigma and

social isolation (Edin et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Furthermore, 1 out of 5 children of an incarcerated parent witness their father being taken away by the authorities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). It has been reported that many of these children experience the removal as a trauma that could potentially interrupt developmental tasks and lead to cognitive and behavioral dysfunction (Gaudin & Sutpen, 1993; Rickel & Becker, 1997; Wright & Seymour, 2002). A study by Kampfer (1995) found that children of incarcerated parents experience post-traumatic stress symptoms similar to children who have lost a parent to a sudden death. They may withdraw from school and social situations, as well as report diminished cognitive abilities, depression, shame, guilt, and hypervigilance (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). A study by Wright and Seymour (2002) reported that children of incarcerated fathers may identify with the incarcerated parent and experience the associated social stigma and shame, as well as intrusive thoughts about their parent and fear about the future. They also found that children reported experiencing feelings of abandonment, loneliness, sadness, anger, and resentment toward the parent, and some developed sleeping or eating disorders, or antisocial behavior patterns (Wright & Seymour, 2002). All of these possible reactions may affect the father-child relationship and hinder the father's ability to maintain or resume his connection upon release.

Studies have also linked the effects of paternal incarceration to a range of other issues for children, such as poor school performance, aggressive behavior, increased drug use, risk of juvenile delinquency, and emotional problems like depression and anxiety (Messner & Rosenfield, 1993). Over 59% of school-age children with an incarcerated parent showed a drop in their school performance after the removal of their parent, and 16% reported experiencing a

school phobia which resulted in their refusing to attend school for up to 6 weeks after their parents' incarceration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

For younger children between the ages of 2 and 6, removal of a father has been linked to higher rates of insecure attachment; a construct that can dramatically affect a child's development, peer and social relationships, and overall outcome (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). One study by Kandel et al. (1988) found that boys with an incarcerated father were 39% more likely to receive a prison sentence themselves before the age of 34. Another study by Kinner, Alati, Najman, and Williams (2007) found higher rates of internalizing problems and antisocial behaviors in children with incarcerated parents than in the general population. In addition, a study by Murray, Janson and Farrington (2007) found a much higher risk of criminal behavior and juvenile offense for children of incarcerated parents than children of non-incarcerated fathers. Furthermore, a study by Wilbur et al. (2007) found that the antisocial problems of children with an incarcerated father were strongly linked to their parents' imprisonments, even after controlling for confounding effects, such as the child's age, gender, or drug exposure.

Another issue for children of incarcerated fathers is the increased risk of being placed in an alternative living arrangement, such as the foster care system (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Sobel, 1982). A study by the National Council on Crime Delinquency (as cited in Bloom & Steinhart, 1993) found that being placed in an alternative care arrangement increased the likelihood of negative outcomes for children, as they were more likely to be separated from their siblings or be placed in an environment with caretakers who may not have the ability or resources to cope effectively with the psychological or physical needs of the child. The Center

for Children of Incarcerated Parents has estimated that at least 33% of the children in foster care have a father in prison (2000).

Furthermore, in 1997 the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was created, increasing the push for children in the foster care system to be adopted and for parental rights to be terminated when the child has been in foster care for 15 months (Schirmer, Nellis, & Mauer, 2009). Although this act may benefit many children who would fare better by being adopted by loving families, this act disproportionately affects incarcerated parents given that the average length of incarceration for fathers is 6 1/2 years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). In addition, most child welfare agencies do not classify children of incarcerated parents differently from children who have been separated from their parents for other reasons, therefore the probability that a father's parental rights will be terminated without special dispensation is high (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). In fact, it is estimated that the termination of parental rights for incarcerated individuals has increased 250% since 1997, after the establishment of the ASFA (Schirmer, Nellis, & Mauer, 2009). Therefore, if the father is the primary caretaker prior to incarceration, he may not only expect to be moved a considerable distance from his child and have limited contact during his incarceration, he may also expect to have his parental rights severed and connection with his child permanently lost.

### **Cultural Considerations**

The impact of incarceration on families and individuals, as well as the factors that contribute to the maintenance of family relationships and risk of returning to prison, must be understood within a cultural context. Mass incarceration is most highly concentrated in minority communities and therefore the impact that racism and environmental factors may play in the lives of incarcerated men is important to consider (Payne, 2011). Additionally, gender and male

socialization should be considered within a culturally specific framework, as these constructs may vary between groups, impacting the quality and perception of fatherhood and father involvement during and after incarceration (Dyer, 2005; Hairston, 1995). It is also important to consider the culturally specific values and beliefs associated with family, and the structure and organization of the various interpersonal relationships at play in the lives of previously incarcerated men.

The majority of previously incarcerated fathers are African American. These men may have different experiences, values, beliefs, and behaviors than men from other ethnic or racial backgrounds (Payne, 2011). It is necessary to include an understanding of African American family and community paradigms to avoid misperceptions of deviance through the application of Eurocentric models to this specific population (Gibbs, 1988). In the early years of criminal justice research there was a failure to assess for potential cultural or contextual corollaries to crime, leading to conclusions that criminal behavior was biologically linked (Hirschi, 1969). Other studies drew connections between socialized behavior and criminality with parental care and poor home environments, leaving out the possible contributions of institutionalized racism, discrimination, and the inequitable distribution of resources within the U.S. (McCord, 1991). These factors should be contextualized so that faulty conclusions about the population are not drawn, and the insidiousness of institutionalized racism continued through the interpretation of results without a consideration of social and historical influences.

Historically, African American men have reported high levels of demoralization, prejudice, and perceived fear from others (Gibbs, 1999; Hutchinson, 1996). As far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century Black men have been unfairly portrayed in both scientific literature and the majority culture as criminally prone, violent, hypersexual, lazy, and intellectually limited (Anderson,

1990; Gibbs, 1988; Hutchinson, 1996; Payne, 2011). The African American or Black family has also been unfairly conceptualized by researchers over the years as implicitly pathological, socially deviant, and poor in providing adequate attachments (McCord, 1991; Moynihan, 1965; Payne, 2011). Not only do these negative stereotypes impact research findings or so-called objective examinations of predominately African American populations, but they also impact the lives of the individuals being described through internalized racism, lower self-worth, and self-efficacy (Payne, 2011). This means that the actual experiences of incarcerated and previously incarcerated men and their families may be inextricably tied to the historical and contemporary incidences of racism and prejudice. In addition, previously used constructions of masculinity and fatherhood should be carefully evaluated within the context of these men's cultural values and belief systems so that divergent father-child relationships are not viewed as unhealthy or atypical, but as culturally bound constructions that may function similarly to the father-child dyads of other populations.

For instance, the ideology or experience of *street life*, which is the phenomenological orientation or movement toward the legal and illegal activities of the street for personal and economic survival, is one culturally specific area that should be considered when evaluating the lived experiences of fatherhood for previously incarcerated men. This ideology has been historically portrayed as innately deviant, but may in fact hold important implications for the identity structure and development of incarcerated men (Brown, Payne, Dressner, & Green, 2010; Payne & Gibson, 2010). Although this term may not apply to all previously incarcerated fathers, it may describe the orientation of many minority, inner-city men whose value set and ideology revolve around a code of ethics, networking, and bonding that is centered on the streets and not necessarily on the values of the majority culture (Brown et al., 2010).

Street life ranges from legal activities such as playing sports, performing art or music, organizing and participating in community events, street vending, or participating in political events and outreach, to illegal activities like interpersonal violence, drug distribution, gambling, or burglary (Payne, 2011). The degree of one's street identity is thought to be determined by the intersection of an individual's race, participation in street activity, socioeconomic class, gender, geographic region, and developmental stage (Payne, 2011). This identity is important to consider as it may function to varying degrees in a father's motivation to change, what behaviors are the focus of change, his engagement in criminal activity post-release, his perception of pro-social roles, and his engagement in quality interactions with family and children. In other words, the role of the father may be affected by the degree to which an individual internalizes the street identity, and which aspects of the street they have incorporated, (i.e. the pro-social values of caretaker, provider, community leader, or the antisocial values associated with taking advantage of others for personal gain).

It is also important to consider that the street life identity is not necessarily linked to criminal behavior and may in fact be a source of resilience for men who organize their meaning, and develop their sense of self-efficacy and worth, in relation to adverse structural and environmental conditions (Payne, 2011). Despite numerous conclusions that street life orientations are deviant and linked to violent behaviors, gang activity, or drug use and distribution, the personal experience of street life for Black men in the inner-city may be one of resilience and coping in the face of significant issues of race, social class, and inequality (Payne, 2011). In other words, being oriented toward the street is not necessarily in direct conflict with the values of family, pursuing and providing social support, and positive interpersonal connections, as well as participation in pro-social activities and organizations (Payne, 2011). In

fact, street orientation may be a source of strength for these men and should be considered within the overall dynamic of previously incarcerated father's roles and relationships.

Within a developmental context, adolescence and young adulthood is marked by a period of identity development and social complexity. For male identity development in general, not including the experiences of male minority or street life-oriented men, the concept of a man and father is often associated with the role of protector, provider, contributor, and leader (Brown et al., 2010; Payne, 2011). Studies of inner-city Black men in particular have found that the developmental demands of adulthood begin as early as young adolescence (Burton, Obeidalla, & Allison, 1996). This means that the adoption of adult male roles and identities may occur earlier in African American men in poor, urban areas than in other adolescent populations. Therefore the likelihood of participating in criminal activity as a means of exploring those adult roles is higher (Payne, 2011). In other words, social and ideological pressures coupled with the environmental stressors of poverty, unemployment, substance dependence, and caregiver absence may place significant weight on young men to choose between the larger social value set of abstaining from criminal activity, and providing for their loved ones by any means necessary (Payne, 2011). An interview with a young Black man from Paterson, New Jersey illustrates this conflict:

It's kids that's like thirteen or fourteen years old that got to be the man of their house, because their mother's on crack or whatever. So they got to pay the bills and stuff like that. So they ain't got no choice but to go into the game because they can't get no real job at fourteen, fifteen years old. (Payne, 2011)

This process may be a source of personal and interpersonal conflict, as well as pose risk for social critique and evaluation, but it may also provide areas in which incarcerated men feel they



have fulfilled their obligation as a provider, and successfully parented their children (Franklin, 2004; Parker & Kleiner, 1977). This is an important component of understanding the impact that the father-child relationship may have on recidivism risk as closer relationships may not necessarily encourage a father to avoid criminal activity if he perceives it as his only option for providing financial assistance to his child.

Along these same lines, the social constructionist perspective suggests that identity is an active process and therefore the beliefs that a man or father be self-reliant, strong, tough, and capable of providing for his family may perpetuate or contribute to the perception of successful criminal actions that lead to economic security (Courtenay, 2000). In other words, the experience of incarceration may have many negative effects and may exacerbate or highlight personal limitations such as lower academic achievement, limited employment options, and increased financial burden. However, those effects may not outweigh the gender role stereotype of the provider and increase the motivation to change criminal behaviors. To add to this, is the general social stereotype of *doing* as a father, rather than *being* as a father (Courtenay, 2000). This implies that unless the father is actively providing for his child he may in fact feel powerless and lack a perceived agency within the relationship. A study by Hairston (1995) supports this theory with its finding that 50% of incarcerated fathers were unable to identify what they did for their children outside of discipline and providing financial security. This suggests that making money may be one of the primary values associated with the role of fatherhood for previously incarcerated men. Therefore, the substantial restrictions for employment placed on men with a criminal history may limit these men's options and exacerbate the conflict between being in their child's life (i.e., avoiding a return to prison) or providing for their children (i.e.,

continuing to participate in criminal activity as a means to support themselves and their families).

Awareness of this conflict is supported by a qualitative study by Shannon and Abrams (2007) that looked more closely at the perception of fatherhood within a delinquent population. The study found that contrary to popular notions of incarcerated fathers, young men reported considerable insight about their role as a father, their awareness of the responsibility of parenthood, and their need to deter from criminal activity to maintain an active role in their children's lives (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). The fathers in the study were predominately African American and under the age of 19, and analysis of their interviews revealed that the fathers considered their role as a father very seriously, and they considered this role a primary motivator in ceasing their criminal behaviors upon release (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). A notable result found in the study was the fathers' perceptions of the parent-child relationship as one that provided them with high self-confidence, implying that the fathers felt better about themselves when they felt good about their identities as fathers (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). In addition, the fathers articulated many environmental, financial, and relational obstacles to sustaining their relationships with their children; one of which was their relationship to the child's mother (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). These results imply that previously incarcerated fathers are aware of the need to cease their criminal behavior to maintain their role as a father. This study also suggests that although there may be significant pulls to continue with criminal activity, there is an awareness that parent-child contact is an important component of fatherhood and is in direct conflict with a criminal lifestyle.

A study by Uggen and Manza (2002) found that African American fathers in particular were more likely to participate in parenting programs if they reported experiencing high self-

worth and the ability to make a positive contribution to their child. What these findings imply for the father-child relationship during and after incarceration, as well as what they imply for the impact that the parent-child relationship may have on recidivism risk, has yet to be discovered. Further exploration of how the role of fatherhood impacts criminal behaviors is needed to determine if the pull to provide financial security can be met in pro-social forms or if there is a sense that continuing criminal activities is acceptable despite the potential disruption of the parent-child relationship.

Contextualizing the relational experiences of incarcerated men, specifically African American men, is very important to avoid drawing faulty conclusions about healthy father-child relationships or factors that facilitate these dyads. For example, a study by Gohel, Diamond, and Chambers (1997) found that contrary to findings on young parenthood in general, the intergenerational practices of African American parents who have children at a younger age than non-minority fathers, may allow them to perceive the act of parenthood as normal and not an impediment to their career or educational goals. Nelson (2004) found that the normalization of young parenthood within this group of men might actually mean that they are more suited to the role of fatherhood than previous research has indicated. In addition, ethnographic studies on the dynamic structure of disadvantaged African American families, suggest that the historical employment of adaptive strategies may allow these families to adapt to the strains of parental and partner incarceration at higher rates than families of other racial or socio-economic status populations (Jarrett & Burton, 1999). These findings support the premise that the father-child relationship is an important and salient relationship for previously incarcerated fathers and one that may be significantly linked to better post-release outcomes.

Studies on African American men and fatherhood in general have found that the construction of the parental role is often a flexible definition that allows for the interchangeability of the biological father with other male figures in the family network, such as uncles, grandfathers, god-fathers, cousins, and religious leaders (Walker & McGraw, 2000). Some studies have found that single mothers in low-income areas actively recruit non-residential father figures to help provide financial assistance and caregiving (Walker & McGraw, 2000). This implies that the role of the provider may not only be salient to biological fathers, but also to men who assume a parental role in the life of a child regardless of their biological relationship. This also implies that, for non-biological fathers, the parent-child relationship may prove protective to the risk of returning to prison. In addition, the flexible role of the father figure may impact the incarcerated father's experience of being parented; meaning that non-biological father figures may have influenced their parental values and attachment patterns. The possible influence of non-biological father figures within the biological father-child relationship also holds implications for the role that perceived social support might play in fostering strong parent-child bonds during and after the incarceration process. In other words, if an incarcerated father believes that other male figures are available to assist with financial and emotional support during his incarceration period, he may experience less disruption within the parent-child relationship and feel more confident in returning to a primary caregiver role after his release. Continued investigation on this particular process is needed to discover if perceived social support does in fact bolster the father-child relationship during a period of incarceration.

Despite studies that have shown that there is some degree of interchangeability in father figure roles within the African American community, there is some evidence to suggest that a biological father does have a significant effect on the outcomes of his children. A study by

Howard, Burke, Borkowski, and Whitman (2006) found a significant connection between criminal or antisocial behaviors such as violence, aggressiveness, destruction of property, and the perceived closeness between the biological father and child. Furthermore, the perceived closeness of the biological father was more significant than the child's perceived closeness to supplementary father-figures (Howard et al., 2006). This implies that the role that a biological father plays in the pro-social behaviors of his children may be quite significant and may not be as interchangeable with a non-biological father figures as previously thought. This finding is important in conceptualizing what impact the experience of being parented may have on previously incarcerated men's risk of recidivism, as their experience of their biological father versus a father figure may differ. Further investigation of this potential difference is needed to better understand the degree to which the experience of being fathered is impacting post-release outcome.

For incarcerated fathers, the contemporary two-parent family may not be a representative model, as only 23% of these men have reported being married, and 47% have reported never having been married (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). In addition, many fathers report parenting children with more than one partner and providing different nurturing roles to the different children they father based on their relationship to the child's mother, the age of the child at the time of arrest, and the father's perception of the relationship (Hairston, 1995). Also, fathers report varying degrees of association to biological and non-biological children depending on the living arrangement of the child and their association with the child's mother (Hairston, 2001a). For instance, some men will consider their children to be family, but not the mothers of their children unless they are currently in a romantic relationship (Hairston, 2001a). They may also consider the non-biological children of their romantic partner to be family and

report taking an active parenting role in the lives of these non-biological children, in addition to their own children (Hairston, 2001b). This implies that the family networks of these men are extremely complicated. Blended family structures, as well as single-parent households, should be considered when examining the father-child relationship, as well as the co-parental relationship and the father's own experience of being parented.

A study by Newland, Coyle, and Freeman (2008) found that three things were associated with the father-child attachment security of men whose fathering context was associated with non-residential status or restricted involvement. These mediating factors were social support, romantic or partner relationships, and the father's own working model of attachment from his relationship with parental figures (Newland et al., 2008). Predictive modeling showed that men who utilized the contextual variable of social support and had secure attachment to their parental figures, expressed higher quality parenting and co-parenting behaviors, which in turn were predictive of child attachment security (Newland et al., 2008). These findings suggest that for incarcerated and previously incarcerated men, having social support from others in the family or community during their absence may bolster their ability to parent effectively, strengthening the parent-child relationship.

Furthermore, survey data on prisoners has suggested that one of the most salient relationships for incarcerated and previously incarcerated men is their relationship to their mother. This finding has been supported by sociological studies on traditional African American families in general, which have found the mother as the central role in providing support (Martin & Martin, 1995). In fact, prisoners' mothers are the most frequent visitors and financial supporters during their sons' periods of incarceration, and it has been suggested by social scientists that this relationship may be crucial to understanding African American family

structure and functioning (Hairston, 2001b; Martin & Martin, 1995). Therefore, it is important to incorporate the current relationship that a previously incarcerated father may have with his mother into the understanding of social support networks facilitating the father-child relationship and recidivism risk. It is also important to consider the men's experiences of being parented by their mothers to have a fuller understanding of how these potentially important relationships may be affecting recidivism trajectories, as well as the intergenerational transmission of parenting constructs.

There has been some concern that the high rates of incarceration within minority communities will lead to a normalization of criminal behavior and the prison experience (McCord, 1979). The concern has stemmed from the parental role model factor, which emphasizes that a child will replicate the behaviors and attitudes of the parent (McCord, 1979). A study that investigated the role that the parental relationship and role modeling had on criminality found that higher levels of perceived warmth from the father did not correspond with higher levels of criminality. In fact, the only association between relationship and criminality was found when fathers were perceived as rejecting, suggesting that stronger parent-child relationships may adversely affect the likelihood of criminal behavior, regardless of the fathers modeling of criminality (McCord, 1979). In addition, a recent study from the Council on Crime and Criminal Justice (2006) suggests that a higher rate of crime and incarceration within certain populations does not lead to a normalization of the behavior. By in large, families and children of incarcerated fathers experience a heightened awareness of the stigma of incarceration and the associated social isolation, which leads to an association with the trauma of incarceration and not a normalization of the process (Council on Crime and Criminal Justice, 2006). This is important to consider when examining the parent-child relationship of previously incarcerated men, as well

as their internal working models, to prevent drawing faulty associations between the experience of criminal behaviors within the family system, and the repetition of those behaviors.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

#### **Father-Child Attachment**

There is a relatively small body of literature investigating the father-child attachment relationship, and an even smaller body of work associated with the potential disruption of the attachment process during incarceration (Arditti et al., 2005; Murray & Murray, 2010). What has been determined by these few studies is that the removal of the father does in fact appear to disrupt the attachment process, creating some potentially serious concerns for children's development (Pattilo, Weiman & Western, 2004). Because children learn how to build and maintain relationships through their interactions with and observations of their parents or caretakers, their overall attachment security is impacted by their attachment to their father (Bowlby, 1969). For children who are more securely attached, there is a higher likelihood that they will be more socially competent and better able to control their impulses and emotions, leading to more success in the various domains of life that require regulation and impulse control (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996). This process is not only important to consider with recidivism risk (i.e., the father's own attachment style based on his relationship to his parents), but also in considering how attachment security between the previously incarcerated fathers and their children may impact the perceptions of the relationship, as well as the motivation to engage in this relationship after release.

From a conceptual framework, it is important to note that the attachment security of the father-child relationship for incarcerated and previously incarcerated men may be influenced by the fathers' own working models of attachment to their caregivers. This intergenerational



transmission of attachment constructs is one of the most robust findings within the attachment literature, and researchers have routinely found a correlation between a parent's attachment security and their attachment relationship with their child (Bernier & Miljkovitch, 2009). This finding has been illustrated in a range of parent-child dyads, including fathers and individuals from lower social economic status populations (Bus & Van IJzendoor, 1992). Additionally, a study by Hanson, Henggeler, Haefele, and Rodrick (1984) found that cold or distant parental relationships were significant predictors of law violation and criminal behaviors. This suggests that the experience of being parented may not only be important in understanding the father-child relationship of previously incarcerated fathers, but also important in predicting their risk of returning to prison.

Research on attachment theory suggests that the father-child relationship is qualitatively different than the mother-child relationship (Bowlby, 1969; Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1996). In mother-child dyads, paternal sensitivity has been associated with child attachment security, but father sensitivity has failed to significantly predict child attachment (Belsky, 1996). Recent studies on father-child relationships have shown that the father's role may be more closely tied to the emotional socialization of the child which occurs at a later stage of development and complements the mother-child relationship, rather than simply adding to maternal attachment (Grossman, Grossman, Kindler, Scheuerer-Englisch, & Zimmerman, 2002).

In addition, research that has investigated what specific aspects of the father-child relationship may be associated with more secure attachments have found that the parental quality and parental involvement together create a significant predictor (Brown et al., 2007). Studies examining a range of fathering behaviors, from power assertion (Kochanska, Aksan & Joy, 2007), control, role reversal (Macfie et al., 2005), affect (Carson & Parke, 1996), intrusiveness,

physical/cognitive stimulation (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Kochanska, Aksan, Penny, & Boldt, 2007), to style of play (Macfie et al., 2005) have found that the quality of parenting was only significant if involvement was also present (Brown et al., 2007). Therefore both constructs may need to be present for a secure father-child attachment relationship to form. An interesting finding that holds significant implications for incarcerated fathers is the presence of secure attachments when the father is not highly involved, as long as the parenting quality is high (e.g., low intrusiveness, high task orientation, high positive affect), suggesting that secure father-child attachment may be possible even while the father is separated from the child if he is able to convey high quality parenting while he is incarcerated (Brown et al., 2007). These constructs have not been investigated with previously incarcerated men, therefore discovering the perceived quality of the relationship, as well as the level of involvement that these men report with their children upon release could be significant in determining the effect that the parent-child relationship may have on post-release outcome.

Understanding the influence that incarceration has on the attachment security of children is difficult. Studies suggest that the effects may vary according to the developmental stage at which the father is absent, as well as the attachment relationship prior to the father's removal (Cassidy, Poehlmann & Shaver, 2010). Statistically, the range of children under the age of 4 years with an incarcerated father is between 16 and 22% (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). This suggests that many of the children of incarcerated fathers are in the process of forming primary attachments at the time in which the father is absent from the relationship. Attachment research in general suggests that this lack of ongoing contact and interaction between father and child may disrupt the attachment process and lead to poorer social and emotional functioning (Thompson, 2008). This finding is important to understanding the

contribution that incarceration of multiple family members may have on family dynamics, and the potential of the prison experience to influence these relationships across generations.

Another important contributor to father-child attachment is the presence of supportive co-parenting (Brown et al., 2010). This association has been found in several studies and supports the family systems perspective that states, functional families often have high quality and involvement within the parental dyadic relationship (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999). A study by Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, and Neff (2010), reported that supportive co-parenting — which includes confirming the other parent's competence, respecting their contribution and authority, and engaging in cooperative strategies — was associated with greater father-child attachment security, even after parental sensitivity was accounted for. A study by Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1999) also found that supportive communication between co-parents was associated with higher levels of father involvement, and the father's attitudes and beliefs about parenting. A Qualitative exploration of incarcerated fathers and their relationships to their child's mother by Roy and Dyson (2005) found that the mothers play a key role in either encouraging involvement and contact between fathers and their children, or discouraging and restricting that relationship. Not only did the Roy and Dyson (2005) study find that the mother played an important role in the father-child relationship, but that mothers also facilitated positive re-entry by providing a supportive relationship and a stable contact to soften the impact of re-entry (Ekland-Olson, Supancic, Campbell & Lenihan, 1983). These findings suggest that the quality of co-parental communication for incarcerated and previously incarcerated fathers is an important factor in the establishment and maintenance of the father-child attachment relationship.

### **Individual Characteristics Linked to Positive Re-entry**

Many studies over the years have looked at factors associated with recidivism risk and have found that one of the most important predictors of parole and release behavior is the presence of family conflict or problems (Larzelere & Patterson, 1990). This suggests that the relational experiences of recently released men are vital to their re-entry outcome. As individuals functioning within social systems, there is of course individual variability for the characteristics that influence the quality of social interaction, support, and perception of conflict. It is therefore important to consider what individual characteristics may be independent predictors of risk for returning to prison, as well as how these individual characteristics are impacting social relationships. Previous research has suggested that younger commitment age, lower IQ, and substance dependence are all potential independent predictors of re-entry outcome (Fendrich, 1991). Additionally, one of the clearest indicators across various meta-analytic studies on recidivism is the correlation between participation in rehabilitative treatments or programs (Andrew, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990). Whether this relationship is due to the treatments themselves or the motivational orientation of the offenders has yet to be clearly differentiated. However, several studies have outlined some specific personal factors associated with higher participation in treatment programs and better outcome. The report of a study by Robbers (2009) outlines a treatment program that was aimed at facilitating father involvement with young minority fathers. In the study, Robbers found that utilizing a motivational change framework was well suited to increasing father involvement (2009). Similarly, a meta-analytic review of recidivism and treatment retention found a positive relationship between an individual's motivation to change and outcome (Shtuerman, Simourd, Haghbin, & Rudaleva, 2005; Simourd & Olver, 2011). Furthermore, the relationship between

motivation and outcome was similar to the findings of general psychotherapy patients, suggesting that motivation to change may be highly linked to outcome (Simourd & Olver, 2011). This suggests that some of the key individual characteristics that may be associated with better engagement and involvement with treatment programs, and better post-release outcome, may be those that are most closely associated with a motivation to change construct.

In studies on motivation and potential for behavior change in general, the specific characteristics of openness to new ideas, minimization of failures, awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses, self-efficacy, mental orientation, belief in formal treatments, belief in potential for change, drive to change, problem solving ability, and self-esteem have been most closely associated with change potential (Simourd & Olver, 2011). These specific characteristics have also been shown to predict recidivism risk and participation in treatment programs (Simourd & Olver, 2011). Therefore, these specific individual characteristics should be considered in an examination of previously incarcerated fathers to determine what contribution the father's motivation for change may be making to the father-child relationship, his relationship to the child's mother, his perception of social support, and his risk of returning to prison.

### **Summary**

Studies have found that the father-child relationship is a significant relationship that may have an impact on incarcerated men's post-prison success and recidivism risk (Boddy, Smith, & Simon, 2005). A study by Hairston (2001) found that men who experienced high rates of post-release success reported assuming a responsible parenting role upon their release. Studies by Petersilia (2003) and Howard (2000) also found that ex-offenders who assume an active parenting role upon release appeared to have lower recidivism rates than men who are not

involved with their children. In addition, a longitudinal study by Kerr, Capaldi, Owen, Wiesner, and Pears (2011) found that men's crime trajectories and substance use behaviors were directly linked to their experience of fatherhood, with lower rates of criminal behavior and incarceration after first-time fatherhood. Suggesting that fatherhood effects criminal behavior in at-risk groups even before entering the criminal justice system.

Unfortunately, there are many barriers to maintaining the father-child relationship during incarceration and upon re-entry. According to the Safer Foundation (2011), an organization dedicated to reducing recidivism and supporting the successful re-entry of incarcerated men back into their communities and families, the significant barriers to the father-child relationship include: a decrease in the reported quality of the relationship to the child and the child's mother or primary caregiver during the incarceration period, the psychological changes that occur as a result of incarceration, a decreased likelihood of residing with the child post-release, issues surrounding child support, and difficulties earning a living wage upon re-entry. In addition, the Safer Foundation reported that the distance between the child and the prison facility is a significant barrier to in-prison visits and the maintenance of the parent-child relationship (2011). As is the prison policies that make visitation difficult and restricted. Therefore, it is inarguable that incarceration impacts the parent-child relationship.

In areas where visitation is possible, fathers can maintain contact with their children by in-person visits. This is commonly thought to be one of the most important methods for maintaining the father-child relationship, as visits can support the attachment relationship and dispel fears that the child may have about the father's well-being and investment in their lives (Cassidy et al., 2010). However, many fathers opt not to allow their children to visit them in prison due to safety concerns for the child, and the potential psychological implications of

exposing a child to the prison environment. It is not clear to what degree concern for the child's well-being may balance the lack of contact during incarceration, thereby maintaining the relationship despite decreased in-person contact. Therefore there is a need to understand more than father-child contact during the incarceration process when investigating the father-child relationship of previously incarcerated men. The current study aimed to address this discrepancy by investigating not only the amount of contact during incarceration, but also the father's perceived quality of the relationship and his perception of involvement in the child's life.

A small number of studies have found that incarcerated fathers reported feeling responsible for their children, regardless of being imprisoned and removed from their family (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks & Castro, 2005). One study showed that incarcerated fathers reported numerous concerns about the well-being of their children, as well as concerns for how their incarceration might affect the parent-child bond (Gabel & Johnston, 1995). This suggests that previously incarcerated fathers are aware of the impact that their incarceration may have on their relationship with their children, and may therefore be inclined to take steps to re-establish or renew this relationship upon release.

A study by Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005) explored the experiences of incarcerated fathering and found that several of the men reported feeling close to their children despite the physical distance, and a renewed hope and desire to be a part of their children's lives and be a good father. A study by La Vigne et al. (2005) found that the quality of family relationships, including the father-child relationship, remained relatively stable over time and appeared to be immune to the strains of separation and the barriers of incarceration. The study also found that while contact during incarceration was not a predictor of relationship quality, it was a factor in previously incarcerated fathers reported attachments and involvement with their children upon

release (La Vigne et al., 2005). What is currently unknown is how incarceration affects the quality of this relationship after release, and what role the father's relational world and unique characteristics may play in influencing the quality of this relationship.

In summary, several studies have clearly identified the father-child relationship as an important relationship to consider in previously incarcerated men's post-release outcome. However, these studies have not specifically looked at the connection between previously incarcerated men's perceptions of the father-child relationship and their risk of recidivism. In addition, these previous studies have not taken into consideration the possible contributing effects of the father's relationship to the child's mother, their own experience of being parenting, their perception of social support, or their individual characteristics related to motivation for change. It was hypothesized that these additional social and individual factors must be assessed to determine to what degree the father-child relationship affects recidivism risk, and if this relationship is in fact a stronger predictor than other social relationships. Furthermore, the current study aimed to mirror the current demographic make-up of incarcerated men nation-wide so that results of the study could be more readily generalizable to the majority of recently incarcerated fathers. Therefore, data sampling was conducted in areas where predominately African-American men of similar age and education level to those of the majority of currently incarcerated men could be found.

Overall, the current investigation aimed to investigate the quality of father-child relationship, as well as the potential contributing factors of parental attachment, co-parenting communication, social support and individual factors linked to motivation for change. This was done to better understand re-entry trajectories, and contribute to the development of potential interventions aimed at benefitting this severely at-risk population of men.



### Chapter III

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology of the study including; a description of the participants and study procedures, and an overview of all instruments and their psychometric properties. This chapter also discusses the hypotheses of the study, and defines the independent and dependent variables, as well as the statistical analyses used to test the hypotheses.

### Design

The study used a cross-sectional research design. The dependent variable of the study was the *risk of recidivism*, as measured by the Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (Simourd, 1997; Simourd & Van de Ven, 1999); a valid and reliable self-report measure of criminal attitudes that has been shown to reliably correlate with standard clinical and actuarial assessments of risk (Bonta, Harmon, Hann & Cornier, 1996; Simourd, 2006). The independent variables of the study were the *father-child relationship*; as measured by selected subscales of the Parent-child Relationship Inventory (Gerard, 2000), the *experience of being parented*; as measured by total and individual parent scores on the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al, 1979), the *co-parental relationship*; as measured by the total score on the Coparental Communication Scale (Ahrons, 1981), *social support*; as measured by the social support subscale of the Self-Improvement Orientation Scheme Self-Report (Simourd & Olver, 2011), and *individual self-improvement factors associated with lower offender risk*; as measured by the total scale score of the Self-Improvement Orientation Scheme Self-Report (Simourd & Olver, 2011).

## **Participants**

A sample of 102 self-identified previously incarcerated fathers was recruited in-person from multiple locations across the northern New Jersey metropolitan area. All participants were over the age of 18, literate, English-speaking men of varying racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants may or may not have been on parole or probation at the time of data collection.

## **Procedure**

### **Method of Recruitment**

Of the combined state and federal inmate population that have reported being a parent, 92% were male and nearly half were African American (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Furthermore, incarcerated fathers within state institutions are most likely to be between the ages of 25 and 34, followed by men between the ages of 35 and 44 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Although no race or age restrictions were applied to participant recruitment, participants were recruited from community aftercare programs in the northern New Jersey area and therefore, the recruitment pool consisted primarily of African American men between the ages of 25 and 44.

Approval to recruit participants was granted by the directors of community aftercare programs in the northern New Jersey area. These programs were specifically designed to assist previously incarcerated men with re-entry support. The director at each aftercare community program was contacted and given an explanation of the study. A letter of solicitation was sent to the program director, and written agreement for participation was obtained. In addition, participants were recruited from county resource facilities within the northern New Jersey area by approaching individuals waiting in line for resource referrals.

### **Data Collection**

The method for collecting participant data included sampling two types of resource locations – community aftercare program meetings and county resource offices – across multiple time points.

For the community aftercare program recruitment, coordinators of the participating programs were asked to announce to attendees the opportunity to participate in the study and pass out a flyer indicating the purpose of the study, as well its voluntary and anonymous nature. The flyer provided the potential participants with the date, time, location, and length of participation required to participate in the study. The attendees were notified that if they chose to participate they would be asked to fill out a data collection packet at their next scheduled meeting. This was done so as not to place unnecessary transportation fees or additional time requirements on the participants. Data collection was conducted in a separate room so that neither program staff nor the primary investigator (PI) knew who participated. A large clearly labeled drop box was placed in the room for the participants to place their completed data packets in so that the anonymity of the study could be maintained. Once participants placed their packet in the drop box, they were given a nominal incentive (\$20.00) by the research assistant to thank them for their participation. All participants received the nominal incentive, regardless of their completion of the instrument packet, to prevent any potential for coercion.

For the county resource office recruitment, the PI and research assistant traveled to Essex county community resource centers and spoke to individuals waiting in line. The purpose and nature of the study was explained, at which time participants were recruited. It was made clear to the participants that the study was completely voluntary and anonymous, and that withdrawal from the study was possible at any time. All participants were provided with written informed

consent. Data collection was conducted by dispersing the data packets to any interested participants while they were at the resource location and informing them of the location of the drop box in which to place their completed packets. The drop box was placed in a visible and easily accessible location at the resource center and monitored by the research assistant. This was done to maintain the anonymity of the study and prevent the PI from knowing who participated. Once participants placed their packet in the drop box, they were given a nominal incentive (\$20.00) for their participation by the research assistant. Again, all participants received the incentive regardless of their completion of the instrument packet.

At both locations, the researchers provided each interested participant with an informed consent sheet that contained a brief description of the study, and the assurance that all data was both anonymous and confidential. The informed consent sheet served as the consent form if the individual choose to participate in the study. The potential participants were informed verbally that they could choose not to participate at any time and that this decision was free from any consequences. They were informed that they could decline to participate by turning in a blank or incomplete instrument packet to the research assistant rather than turning it in to the drop box.

At both locations the PI was not present during data collection, so as to insure the anonymity and confidentiality of the data. A research assistant with no affiliation to the established sites and no personal interest in the study was used to hand-out the instrument packets and answer any related data-collection questions that might arise before, during, and after participants filled out their instrument packets. The research assistant was trained in the study protocol by the PI and was capable of answering any data collection related questions. The research assistant was certified to conduct human-subjects research. In addition, the research assistant had no contact with the instrument packets once they were turned in to the drop box to

maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the study participants. These measures were employed to assure that the PI did not know who participated and who did not.

Upon agreement to participate, a confidential instrument packet that had been counter-balanced was distributed. This packet included a demographic questionnaire, the Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified, subscales of the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory, the Parental Bonding Instrument (mother and father versions), the Quality of Coparental Communication Scale, and the Self-Improvement Orientation Scheme Self-Report. Participants were given as much time as they needed to finish all of the instruments in the packet. Upon completion of the packet, participants were asked to turn them in to the drop box.

The introduction of the research project and the distribution and explanation of informed consent took approximately 10-15 minutes. The average time to complete the instrument packet was 20-40 minutes. A phone number and email address that did not require participants to identify themselves was provided so that they could talk about any reactions, questions, or concerns that might arise after answering the questionnaires, should they chose. In addition, a list of counseling referrals and social service agencies was also made available to the study participants.

Collected instrument packets were kept in a secure location that was accessible only to the Primary Investigator and the study research advisor, Dr. Laura Palmer, Ph.D. All data was stored electronically on a password-protected USB memory key that was kept in a locked file cabinet to which only the PI and Dr. Laura Palmer had access.

## Measures

### Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was used to assess for the age, race/ethnicity, level of education, partner status, employment status, most recent charge, amount of time since discharge, number of total incarcerations, length of most recent incarceration, and age at first incarceration. The demographic questionnaire also collected the following child-oriented questions: number and age of all children, and living arrangement of children before, during, and after incarceration. The demographic questionnaire was used to determine the descriptive statistics of the population prior to inferential statistical analysis.

### Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified

The CSS-M (Simourd, 1997; Simourd & Van de Ven, 1999) is a modified version of the Criminal Sentiments Scale (Gendreau, Grant, Leipziger & Collins, 1979). It is a self-report measure of antisocial values, attitudes, and beliefs thought to be directly linked to criminal activity and continued risk of recidivism. The CSS-M consists of 41 items that yield a total score as well as three subscale scores: Attitudes toward Law-Court-Police (ALCP), Tolerance for Law Violations (TLV), and Identification with Criminal Others (ICO) (Simourd, 1997). The ALCP evaluates an individual's respect for the law and criminal justice system, the TLV evaluates an individual's thoughts or rationalizations for their criminal behavior, and the ICO assesses an individual's general opinion of law violators (Simourd, 1997). Each item is scored on a 3-point likert scale where they are asked to *agree*, *disagree*, or are *undecided*. The endorsement of antisocial statements, or rejection of pro-social statements, results in a 2 point score for each item. For undecided responses, 1 point is given, and 0 points are obtained with the endorsement of pro-social statements. Higher scores reflect a tendency toward more criminal attitudes and

higher risk of recidivism (Simourd, 1997; Simourd & Van de Ven, 1999). This measure is hand-scored with scores ranging from 0 to 82.

Clinical assessments utilize a combination of structured interviews, criminal record reviews, and psychopathology measures, while actuarial assessments are often combined demographic and criminal history checklists (Campbell, French & Gendreau, 2007). Both clinical and actuarial assessments are administered and scored by mental health professionals or criminal justice personnel and are not available in self-report form (Campbell, French, & Gendreau, 2007). The CSS-M has been used in numerous studies on adult and juvenile offender populations across a range of demographic criteria, and it has been found to be a reliable and valid self-report measure of criminal attitudes and recidivism risk (Simourd, 1997, 2006; Simourd & Van de Ven, 1999). The CSS-M has shown positive and consistent correlations with established clinical and actuarial risk assessments, such as the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), one of the most widely used actuarial risk assessment measures (Simourd, 2006), as well as the General Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale (GSIR) (Bonta et al., 1996), and the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) (Hare, 1991). In addition, the CSS-M has been shown to be a valid self-report measure of risk assessment in several meta-analytic studies comparing the various types of risk assessment. One study found that anti-social attitudes alone can be used to predict risk of future offense when compared to six major correlates of risk: Lower socioeconomic status, psychopathology, education level, parental/family factors, temperament/personality, and anti-social associations (Holsinger, 1999). The CSS-M has also been found to be a viable alternative to clinical and actuarial risk assessments in predicting both past and future risk of offending for violent as well as non-violent offenders (Simourd & Van de Ven, 1999).

The CSS-M has good split-half internal consistency at .88-.93, with good overall internal consistency at .91. The CSS-M has demonstrated both convergent and divergent validity, but with low test-retest reliabilities at .20-.68. Studies suggest that the low test-retest reliability is due to changes in scores overtime, which reflect the measures ability to capture valid attitude change (Simourd, 1997). The CSS-M total score was used in the current study as the measure of the dependent variable, risk of recidivism.

### **Parent-Child Relationship Inventory**

The PCRI is a 78-item self-report measure that assesses a parent's attitudes toward parenting their child (Gerard, 2000). If the parent has multiple children, the PCRI asks the parent to select only one child to think about when responding to the items. The PCRI yields a total score as well as individual scores for seven content scales: Parental Support (9 items on the level of emotional and social support a parent receives), Satisfaction with Parenting (10 items concerning the amount of pleasure derived from parenting), Involvement (14 items about the level of a parent's interaction with and knowledge of his or her child), Communication (9 items on the effectiveness of parental communication with the child), Limit Setting (12 items regarding parental discipline of the child), Autonomy (10 items concerning the ability to promote the child's independence), and Role Orientation (9 items concerning attitudes about gender roles in parenting). In addition, the PCRI contains two validity indicators to measure the parent's social desirability (5 items) and inconsistency (10 pairs of highly correlated items) (Gerard, 2000).

The PCRI is normed for both mothers and fathers and has been used with a wide range of individuals (Gerard, 2000). The PCRI uses a 4-point likert type scale; ranging from *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree* to *strongly disagree*. Items are written at a fourth grade reading level (Gerard, 2000). Scaled scores (T-scores and percentiles) are available for the PCRI and are



based on a sample of 1,139 parents with higher scores on each scale indicating a better parent-child relationship. Scores falling one standard deviation below the mean are indicative of possible problems in the relationship, and scores falling two standard deviations below the mean are indicative of potentially serious problems (Gerard, 2000).

The instrument may be scored manually or by using computer software provided by the developer (Gerard, 2000). A sample of 240 individuals stratified by race and education were also used to approximate the U.S. population and examine the effects of race and education for the PCRI. Internal consistency is adequate, ranging from .70 on the Parental Support scale to .88 on the Limit Setting scale (Gerard, 2000). The median value alpha is .80. The test-retest reliabilities range from .68 on the Communication scale to .93 on the Limit Setting scale (Gerard, 2000). The author used a variety of construct validation procedures that ranged from internal consistency, to an analysis of inter-scale relationships, to the cross validation of confirmatory factor analysis models which were used to assess for potential gender or cultural bias in the inventory. The results of these analyses suggested that the PCRI is relatively free of gender and cultural bias, and this makes it an appropriate measure of the parent-child relationship for most populations (Gerard, 2000). In addition, the PCRI has been used in multiple studies of parents undergoing personal crisis; from divorce to custody dispute to potential child abuse and domestic violence (Gerard, 2000).

The current study utilized only the subscales of Satisfaction with Parenting (10 items concerning the amount of pleasure derived from parenting) and Involvement (14 items about the level of a parent's interaction with and knowledge of his or her child), as these constructs have been shown in previous literature to approximate the quality of the relationship between fathers and their children (Brown et al., 2007). One validity indicator (5 items to measure the parent's

social desirability) was administered as a validity check for the data, but not as part of the inferential analyses. Only valid subscales were used in the analyses. The two subscale scores of the PCRI, Satisfaction with Parenting and Involvement, were used in the current study as the measure of the independent variable, father-child relationship.

### **Parental Bonding Instrument**

The PBI (Parker et al., 1979) is a 25-item self-report measure of the parental contribution to bonding as an adult recounts their parents' behaviors and attitudes within their first 16 years of life. The instrument must be filled out twice to rate a total score and separate scale scores for the mother's contribution and the father's contribution. Each item is scored on a 4-point likert-type scale that ranges from *my mother/father was not at all like that* = 1, to *my mother/father was like that* = 4 (Parker et al., 1979). Two dimensions of parental bonding are measured in the PBI, care and overprotection. The care scale measures the extent to which warmth was experienced in the relationship and the overprotection scale measures the extent to which autonomy was experienced (Parker et al., 1979). For mothers, a care score is considered high if it is above 27.0, while an overprotection score is considered low if it is below 13.5. For fathers, a care score is considered high if it is above 24.0, while an overprotection score is considered low if it is below 12.5 (Parker et al., 1979). In addition to scale scores for both care and overprotection, the experience of being parented can be assigned to one of four possible quadrants that reflect the variations of both dimensions. These four categorical types or quadrants are: high care, high overprotection = affectionate constraint; high care, low overprotection = optimal parenting; high overprotection, low care = affectionless control; low care, low overprotection = neglectful parenting. (Parker et al., 1979).

Both care and overprotection are constructs that have been linked to the development of psychopathology and insecure adult attachment styles (Bogaerts et al., 2005). The scale constructs were based on factor analytic studies of interpersonal relationships, which consistently found the two principle dimensions of care and overprotection to be integral to child development and secure attachment (Parker, 1990). The factorial structure of the PBI has been confirmed in both non-clinical and clinical populations, and it has been supported by correlations with independent two factor models of parenting (Parker, 1990). Internal reliability for the PBI is good, ranging from .87 to .94. Test-retest reliability is high and shows moderate consistency over extended periods of time and up to 10 years (Parker, 1990).

In addition, the PBI has shown that scores are not influenced by the mood state of the responder, nor does there seem to be much evidence to suggest that there is significant difference between the perceived parental characteristics measured by the PBI and actual parenting, as evidenced by several studies comparing the corroborative reports of siblings and parents (Parker, 1989). The PBI has been used to assess the parental relationship of a wide range of individuals, as well as with incarcerated populations and those with criminal histories (Bogaerts et al., 2005). The PBI total score (both the mother and father scores) and the separate subscale scores for each parent were used in the current study as the measure of the independent variable, experience of being parented.

### **Quality of Coparental Communication Scale**

The QCCS (Ahrns, 1981) is a 10-item self-report measure in which non-married or separated partners can indicate the frequency with which they agree with their former partner on parenting issues. Each item is rated on a 5-point likert-type scale, ranging from *never* to *always*. The measure is composed of two subscales: Coparental Conflict (4 items reflecting conflict,

hostility, tension, and disagreements) and Coparental Support (6 items reflecting accommodation, helpfulness, and resourcefulness). The Conflict subscale (reversed) and the Support subscale are combined to represent the parent's perceptions of the quality of the co-parenting relationship, with higher scores indicating low conflict and high support (Ahrns, 1981).

The QCCS has adequate internal consistency of .88 for the Conflict scale and .74 for the Support scale (Ahrns, 1981). Validity of the measure has been shown in numerous studies, and it has been found to have a correlation of about .5 with clinician ratings of inter-parental conflict and support, as well as correlations with the parallel subscales of McHale's (1997) self-report co-parenting scale (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003b). The QCCS has been used with divorced or separated fathers to measure the extent to which men perceive partner communication and partner parent-child involvement (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000).

The QCCS was selected for the current study to measure the previously incarcerated fathers' perceptions of support in co-parenting due to population statistics which suggest that the majority of previously incarcerated fathers are unmarried or reside in blended step-family systems (Kerr et al., 2011). In addition, the experience of incarceration, even for brief periods, has been shown to be highly disruptive to partner relationships and the parenting process, suggesting that a measure specific to the factors of conflict and support may be more informative than a measure of spousal or cohabitating communication (Kerr et al, 2011; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000; Swisher & Waller, 2008). The QCCS total score was used in the current study as the measure of the independent variable, co-parental communication.

### **Self-improvement Orientation Scheme-Self Report**

The SOS-SR is a 72-item self-report measure of multiple motivations and self-improvement constructs for incarcerated offenders, and the level to which an individual may be amenable to change due to individual and environmental factors (Simourd & Olver, 2011). The SOS-SR utilizes a 5-point likert-type scale that ranges from negative to positive rating values: *Strongly disagree = -2, agree = -1, undecided = 0, agree = +1, and strongly agree = +2* (Simourd & Olver, 2011). High scores on any of the subscales indicate strengths in the corresponding domains, with the exception of the Life Potential Denial/Minimization subscale, where higher scores indicate less denial/minimization and greater potential for positive change (Simourd & Olver, 2011).

The SOS-SR is composed of 12 subscales and is capable of yielding a total score in addition to each subscale score. The subscales include: Openness (9 items related to self-reflection and receptiveness to new ideas), Life Potential Denial/Minimization (8 items related to downplaying failed accomplishments), Self-Appraisal Skills (7 items related to awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses), Self-Efficacy/Willpower (8 items related to confidence in achieving goals), Cognitive Perspective (6 items related to mental orientation), Structured Treatment Expectancy (6 items related to belief in formal interventions), Self-Improvement Expectancy (7 items related to belief in change potential), Social Support (5 items related to perceived social network), Motivation Level (4 items related to a drive to change), Coping Skills (5 items related to problem solving skill set), Self-Esteem (4 items related to views of the self), Environmental Support (3 items related to contextual support) (Simourd & Olver, 2011).

The psychometric properties and construct validity of the SOS-SR have been validated on multiple samples of state prison inmates (Simourd & Olver, 2011). Internal consistency for the

SOS-SR is adequate, ranging from .48 to .79 across the 12 subscales, and .86 for overall SOS-SR total score. The SOS-SR was compared to the widely used LSI-R risk assessment to determine the abilities of the scales to predict the recidivism risk of incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals (Simourd & Olver, 2011). Correlations between the SOS-SR total score and the LSI-R total score was  $r = -.31$ , and found to be statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) (Simourd & Olver, 2011). In addition, the SOS-SR and LSI-R were compared using multiple regression analyses to determine the predictive ability of the SOS-SR with criminal risk or risk of returning to prison, and it was found that the SOS-SR total score made a significant independent contribution (Simourd & Olver, 2011). This suggests that the measure can be used to predict outcome independent of criminal risk assessments. Therefore higher total scores on this measure may indicate individuals with lower overall offender risk, regardless of actuarial risk, due to individual and environmental characteristics (Simourd & Olver, 2011). The current study selected the SOS-SR as a measure of individual factors. The total score and individual subscale scores were used to determine the individual, environmental and social factors that may be contributing to recidivism risk and/or the father-child relationship. The SOS-SR subscale score for social support was used to measure the independent variable, social support. The SOS-SR total score was used in the current study as the measure of the independent variable, individual self-improvement factors associated with lower offender risk. This allowed the current study to control for the possible spurious effects of individual characteristics on risk of recidivism as well as the correlations between risk recidivism and the father-child relationship.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The statistical analysis plan provides an *a priori* methodology for describing how the study variables were prepared and subsequently examined through descriptive and inferential statistics.

#### **Data Preparation**

Data obtained from participants was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 21.0. The data exploration function was employed to examine the database for missing data, out of range values and outliers, and/or any other data anomalies that might impact analysis and interpretation of the data. Appropriate imputation and transformation methodologies were employed, as appropriate, to prepare the database for analysis.

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

Prior to conducting inferential analyses to investigate the study hypotheses, descriptive statistics were generated using Analysis capabilities within SPSS to generate frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations. In addition, basic assumptions for parametric statistical testing (e.g., normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance) were examined by generating measures to describe the distribution of continuous variables (e.g., Skewness, Kurtosis). These analyses were conducted for each of the primary study outcome measures and relevant subscales in order to fully describe participant performance on these instruments.

#### **Power Analysis**

Prior to conducting inferential statistical analysis to examine the study hypotheses, data was verified to ensure that appropriate assumptions were met for the use of parametric statistics (e.g., homogeneity of variance, normality, and linearity). Based on a power analysis using Cohen methodology and G-power computer software, participants ( $n = 98$ ) were sought for the

protocol sample. Estimating six predictors for inclusion in the model, the conventional parameters for calculation were assumed (alpha = 0.05; effect size = moderate, 0.15, power = 0.80).

### **Inferential Statistics**

The present investigation involved testing four research questions with six hypotheses by analyzing a sample made up of men from a range of demographic criteria from the target population of previously incarcerated fathers. As assumptions for parametric assessments were met, the principal statistic for analysis of study hypotheses was a Least Squares, Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA), with standard entry of study variables.

In each of the analyses, the regression model was deemed predictive if an analysis of variance (ANOVA), comparing regression to residual variance, yielded a significant  $F$  test statistic. Assuming a significant model, regression coefficients including  $R$ ,  $R^2$ , beta, and partial correlations were produced and interpreted to understand potential predictive relationships. For all inferential analyses, alpha was set at the conventional  $p < 0.05$  criterion to reject the null hypotheses.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter provides data validation information, descriptive statistics of participant demographics and study variables, and inferential statistical results for the study hypotheses. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 21).

#### Data Validation

The data exploration function was employed to examine the database for missing data, out of range values and outliers, and/or any other data anomalies that might impact analysis and interpretation of the data. Out of 102 total participants, 100% of study measures were completed, except for the Parental Bonding Instrument, for which 84.3% ( $n = 86$ ) completed both the mother and father measures. This showed that 16 father Parental Bonding Instruments were left blank, indicating that no father figure was identified by the participant. This was not significant enough to warrant any changes to the inferential statistical analysis plan as proposed. Taking into account the standard range for skewness and kurtosis of  $\pm 2$ , all values fell within the ranges of  $-.142$  to  $.719$  for skewness and within the ranges of  $-.967$  to  $.514$  for kurtosis (SAS Institute Inc., 1990). Therefore, normality of the dataset was confirmed for each variable of interest, indicating that the scores on the study measures were normally distributed and appropriate for further analysis. In addition, using the Durbin Watson test for assumption of error variance, all study variables fell within the standard 1.5 to 2.5 value, with a range from 1.9 to 2.1 (Montgomery, Peck, & Vining, 2001).

#### Descriptive Statistics

The present study examined 102 previously incarcerated male participants. Demographic characteristics are summarized in Tables 1 to 3. Ages ranged from 19 to 70 with a mean age of

42.3 years ( $SD = 9.9$ ). The majority of study participants were African American or Black ( $n = 92$ , 90.2%), with other ethnic categories under-represented among the remaining 10 participants. The recruited sample had 53.9% ( $n = 55$ ) of participants reporting a high school diploma or GED, while 11.7% ( $n = 12$ ) reported achieving junior high school education or less. In terms of college, 30.4% ( $n = 31$ ) reported at least some undergraduate college education, and 2.9% ( $n = 3$ ) reported completing a college education. The majority of participants reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual, 97.1% ( $n = 99$ ), but 3% reported homosexuality or other ( $n = 3$ ). In terms of religious preference, 50% ( $n = 51$ ) selected Christian, 28.4% ( $n = 29$ ) selected Muslim or Islam, 7.8% ( $n = 8$ ) selected non-denominational / spiritual, and 13.7% ( $n = 14$ ) selected no religion. The majority of participants, 58.8% ( $n = 60$ ) were unemployed, while 25.5% ( $n = 26$ ) reported full-time employment and 15.7% ( $n = 16$ ) reported part-time employment. The largest proportion of participants reported being in a romantic relationship ( $n = 67$ , 65.7%), while 34.3% ( $n = 35$ ) reported not being in a relationship. Of those who reported being in a relationship, 17.6% ( $n = 18$ ) reported being married, while 27.5% ( $n = 28$ ) reported being divorced and the majority, 54.9% ( $n = 56$ ) reported having never been married. Only 27.5% ( $n = 28$ ) reported living alone. Of the 72.5% who reported living with someone, 43.3% ( $n = 39$ ) reported living with their romantic partner, and 35.6% ( $n = 32$ ) reported living with at least one child.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics (n = 102)*

	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>f (%)</i>
Age (years)	42.3 (9.9)	19 6 70	
Ethnicity			
Black/African American			92 (90.2)
White/Caucasian			2 (2.0)
Hispanic/Latin American			5 (4.9)
Bi-Racial			2 (2.0)
Other			1 (1.0)
Education			
High School / GED			55 (53.9)
Some College			31 (30.4)
Junior High			9 (8.8)
Elementary			3 (2.9)
College Graduate			3 (2.9)
Post Graduate			1 (1.0)
Religion			
Christian			51 (50.0)
Muslim / Islam			29 (28.4)
Not Religious			14 (13.7)
Spiritual			8 (7.8)
Not Religious			14 (13.7)
Employment Status			
Unemployed			60 (58.8)
Full-time			26 (25.5)
Part-time			16 (15.7)
Relationship Status			
In a relationship			67 (65.7)
Never Married			56 (54.9)
Divorced			28 (27.5)
Married			18 (17.6)
Living Situation			
Alone			28 (27.5)
Partner			39 (43.3)
Child(ren)			32 (35.6)
Extended Family			7 (7.8)
Sibling			7 (7.8)
Roommate			5 (5.6)

Participant's incarceration characteristics are summarized in Table 2. The majority of participants reported that their most recent incarceration charge was a non-violent felony 53.9% ( $n = 55$ ), and was served in a state institution 57.8% ( $n = 59$ ). Participants reported serving between 1 and 36 adult sentences with a mean of 6.3 ( $SD = 7.5$ ) total adult bids, and between 0 and 30 juvenile sentences with a mean of 2.2 ( $SD = 4.9$ ) total juvenile bids. The range of months served for most recent incarceration was between 1 and 540 months with a mean sentence of 53.4 ( $SD = 70.1$ ) total months served. The participant's age of first adult incarceration ranged from 18 to 49 with a mean age of 23.1 years ( $SD = 6.7$ ) for first time sentenced as an adult. The participant's age of first juvenile incarceration ranged from 11 to 19 with a mean age of 14.5 years ( $SD = 2.7$ ) for first time sentenced as a juvenile.

Table 2

*Incarceration Characteristics (n = 102)*

	<u>M (SD)</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>f (%)</u>
Age (years) First Adult Bid	23.1 (6.7)	18 ó 49	
Age (years) First Juvenile Bid	14.5 (2.7)	11 ó 19	
Total Adult Incarcerations	6.3 (7.5)	1 ó 36	
Total Juvenile Incarcerations	2.2 (4.9)	0 ó 30	
Length of Recent Bid (months)	53.4 (70.1)	1 ó 540	
Recent Charge			
Non-violent Felony			55 (53.9)
Violent Felony			25 (24.5)
Misdemeanor			16 (15.7)
Parole / Probation Violation			6 (5.9)
Institution of Recent Charge			
State Prison			59 (57.8)
County Jail / Prison			38 (37.3)
Federal Prison			5 (4.9)

Participant's parental relationship characteristics are summarized in Table 3. The majority of participants reported having between 1 and 4 biological children 90.2% ( $n = 92$ ), with

a range from 1 to 10 and a mean of 2.56 ( $SD = 1.6$ ). The average number of non-biological or step-children was 1 ( $SD = 1.6$ ) with a range from 0 to 8. A majority, 55.9% ( $n = 57$ ), reported having no step or non-biological children. The ages of the participants' children ranged from less than 1 year to 35 years of age, with the majority falling below 10 years of age 52.3% ( $n = 140$ ). Participants who reported that they lived with one or more of their children was 35.6% ( $n = 32$ ). Of the participants who lived with their children, biological or step, 23.5% ( $n = 24$ ) lived with one child, 12.7% lived with two children, and 5.9% ( $n = 6$ ) lived with three children, while the majority lived with none of their children 56.9% ( $n = 58$ ). Of the percentage of participants whose children did not live with them, 63.1% ( $n = 70$ ) of the children lived with the mother, while 2.7% ( $n = 3$ ) lived with extended family, 1.8% ( $n = 2$ ) lived with a foster family, 1.8% ( $n = 2$ ) lived in a group home, and .9% ( $n = 1$ ) lived with a grandparent. During their most recent incarceration, the majority of participants (ranging from 53.9% to 68.6% depending on type of contact) reported having had no contact with their children at all. Of those that reported contact, the mean number of letters received per month was 3.15 ( $SD = 6.6$ ), the mean number of phone calls received per month was 5.69 ( $SD = 11.4$ ), and the number of in-person visits per month was 1.74 ( $SD = 4.2$ ).

Table 3

*Parental Relationship Characteristics (n = 102)*

	<u>M (SD)</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>f (%)</u>
Biological Children	2.56 (1.6)	1 ó 10	
Non-biological Children	1.05 (1.6)	1 ó 8	
Father / Child Living Apart			58 (56.9)
Father / Child Living Together			44 (42.6)
Childs Age (years)	6.2 (3.4)	<1 ó 35	
Childs Living Situation*			
Mother			70 (63.1)
Extended Family			3 (2.7)
Foster			2 (1.8)
Group Home			2 (1.8)
Grandparent			1 (0.9)
Men with no Child Contact			
Letters (monthly)			62 (60.8)
Phone Calls (monthly)			55 (53.9)
Visits (monthly)			70 (68.6)
Contact with Child			
Letters (monthly)	3.15 (6.5)	0 ó 40	
Phone Calls (monthly)	5.69 (11.4)	0 ó 80	
Visits (monthly)	1.74 (4.1)	0 ó 25	

Study variables of interest were measured by five self-report measures and results are reported in table 4. The variable risk of recidivism was measured by the Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (CSS-M). All 102 participants completed this instrument with scores ranging from 0 to 74 and a mean score of 32 ( $SD = 22.8$ ). Scores above 60 indicate a high risk for recidivism and of the 102 participants, 27 scored within the high risk range (60-74). The variable father-child relationship was measured by the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) Satisfaction and Involvement subscales. All 102 participants completed the instrument with valid scores ranging from 48 to 96 and a mean score of 75.2 ( $SD = 11.8$ ). Higher scores indicate a better parent-child relationship. The variable experience of being parented was measured by the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), mother and father versions. All 102 participants completed the mother version of the PBI but only 86 completed the father version,

reporting no significant father figure. The combined mother and father scores ranged from 45 to 108 with a mean of 77 ( $SD = 12$ ). Each parent version can be broken into two subscale scores, care and overprotection. For mothers, a care score is considered high if it is above 27.0, while an overprotection score is considered low if it is below 13.5. For fathers, a care score is considered high if it is above 24.0, while an overprotection score is considered low if it is below 12.5 (Parker et al., 1979). The combination of care and overprotection lead to four categorical types (high care, high overprotection = affectionate constraint; high care, low overprotection = optimal parenting; high overprotection, low care = affectionless control; low care, low overprotection = neglectful parenting). The mean care subscale score for the Mother scale was 7.88 ( $SD = 3.88$ ), and the mean overprotection subscale score for the Mother scale was 11.86 ( $SD = 3.67$ ). The mean care subscale score for the Father scale was 10.17 ( $SD = 4.44$ ), and the mean overprotection subscale score for the Father scale was 9.56 ( $SD = 3.95$ ). According to these results, this places the mean combined, as well as individual parental subscale scores for the participants in the neglectful parenting category, with low care and low overprotection scores for both parents. The variable co-parental relationship was measured by the Quality of Coparental Communication Scale (QCCS). All 102 participants completed the instrument with total scores (support scaled score minus conflict scaled score) ranging from 4 to 20 with an average score of 12 ( $SD = 3.6$ ). When the support subscale of the QCCS was looked at separately, scores ranged from 6 to 30 with an average score of 16.9 ( $SD = 5.5$ ). When the conflict subscale score was looked at, scores ranged from 4 to 20 with a mean score of 12.14 ( $SD = 3.70$ ). Higher total scores, as well as higher support scores indicate better co-parental communication, while higher conflict scores and lower total scores indicate poorer co-parental communication. The variable social support was measured by the Social Support subscale of the

Self-Improvement Orientation Scheme Self Report (SOS-SR). All 102 participants completed the instrument and scores ranged from -5 to 10 with a mean score of 4.76 ( $SD = 3.5$ ). Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived social support. The variable of individual self-improvement factors was measured by the total score of the SOS-SR and scores ranged from -28 to 110 with a mean total score of 48.8 ( $SD = 32.2$ ). High scores on any of the subscales indicate strengths in the corresponding domains, with the exception of the Life Potential Denial/Minimization subscale where higher scores indicate less denial/minimization, hence greater potential for positive change (Simourd & Olver, 2011). Subscale scores for the SOS-SR are reported below in Table 4.



Table 4

Scores for Variables of Interest ( $n = 102$ ,  $n = 86$  for PBI)

	<u>M (SD)</u>	<u>Range</u>
Recidivism Risk (CSSM)	32 (22.8)	0 - 74
Father/Child Relationship (PCRI)	75.1 (12)	48 - 96
Satisfaction	31.4 (5.1)	19 - 40
Involvement	43.8 (7.8)	24 - 56
Experience Being Parented (PBI)	77.2 (12)	45 - 108
Mother total	40.6 (7.4)	18 - 60
Care	7.88 (3.88)	0-18
Overprotection	11.86 (3.67)	0-18
Father Total	36.8 (8.4)	17 - 54
Care	10.17 (4.44)	0-18
Overprotection	9.56 (3.95)	0-18
Coparenting Relationship (QCCS)	4.86 (6.20)	-11 - 26
Conflict	12 (3.68)	4 - 20
Support	16.9 (5.50)	6 - 30
Social Support (SOS-SR)	4.76 (3.50)	-5 - 10
Individual Change (SOS-SR total)	48.9 (32.1)	-28 - 110
Openness	1.4 (4.8)	-14 - 12
Denial / Minimization	4.29 (4.8)	-8 - 14
Self-Appraisal	7.75 (5)	-7 - 14
Willpower	5.5 (5.5)	-10 - 16
Cognitive Perspective	2.55 (4.1)	-10 - 12
Treatment Expectancy	3.63 (4.2)	-6 - 12
Self-Improvement	6.75 (4.6)	-5 - 14
Motivation	3.1 (3.1)	-4 - 8
Coping Skills	4.2 (3.5)	-8 - 10
Self-esteem	2.9 (3.0)	-5 - 8

### Inferential Statistics

#### Study Hypotheses

Table 5 summarizes the correlations among predictor and criterion variables. Risk of recidivism was negatively correlated with the father-child relationship ( $r = -.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as well as social support ( $r = -.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and individual self-improvement factors ( $r = -.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The father-child relationship was positively correlated with social support ( $r = .41$ ,  $p <$

.001) and individual self-improvement factors ( $r = .57, p < .001$ ), and these criterion variables were positively correlated with each other.

The standard deviation for Risk of Recidivism and Individual Self-improvement Factors were noted to be high. This was considered to be due to the inclusion of participants who scored in both the upper and lower extremes on each measure. Although these individuals were not representative of normative samples, they were not excluded from the current analyses as their extreme scores did not impact the normality of the sample distribution.

Table 5

*Intercorrelations Among Predictor and Criterion Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Risk of Recidivism		-.55**	-.13	-.08	-.33**	-.34**	32.00	22.79
2. Father-child Relationship			.09	-.08	.41**	.57**	75.16	11.84
3. Being parented				-.16	.06	.05	77.17	12.06
4. Co-parental					-.107	-.08	4.86	6.24
5. Social Support						.80**	4.76	3.51
6. Individual Factors						–	48.89	32.18

*Note.* A single asterisk indicates correlation is significant at .05 level; double asterisk indicates correlation is significant at .01 level. *Note:* Being Parented = Experience of being parented; Co- parental = co-parental communication; Individual Factors = Individual self-improvement factors

Table 6 summarizes the results of the multiple regression analyses and the study hypotheses. The results of these analyses revealed significant models for all study hypotheses except hypothesis 3: that the father-child relationship will be positively correlated with the amount of co-parenting support, and negatively correlated with the amount of co-parenting conflict with the child's mother.

For hypothesis 1, the father-child relationship will be negatively correlated with the father's risk of recidivism, an inverse relationship was found with the father-child relationship showing significant predictive power ( $F(1,100) = 42.93, p < .001$ ). For hypothesis 2, the father-

child relationship will be positively correlated with their experience of being parented, no significant relationship was found between the PBI combined mother and father total and the father-child relationship. However, when looking at the individual subscales of care and overprotection, significant relationships did emerge with an inverse relationship for mother care ( $F(1,100) = 7.86, p < .01$ ), a positive relationship for mother overprotection ( $F(1,100) = 4.94, p < .05$ ), and a positive relationship for father care ( $F(1,86) = 5.59, p < .05$ ). For hypothesis 4, the father-child relationship will be positively correlated with the amount of perceived social support, a positive relationship was found for perceived social support ( $F(1,100) = 20.11, p < .001$ ). For hypothesis 5, the father-child relationship will be positively correlated with individual factors associated with motivation to change and lower risk of offending (i.e., individual self-improvement factors), a positive relationship was found for individual self-improvement factors ( $F(1,100) = 47.56, p < .001$ ). The highest percentage of variance, 28%, was accounted for by the Self-esteem subscale ( $t = 6.17, p < .001$ ). For hypothesis 6, the father-child relationship will be more strongly related to predicting recidivism risk than the contributing social or individual factors, the father-child relationship ( $F(1,100) = 42.93, p = .000$ ) showed a greater effect size and higher level of significance than either perceived social support ( $F(1,100) = 12.10, p = .001$ ) or individual self-improvement factors ( $F(1,100) = 12.62, p = .001$ ), confirming that the father-child relationship was the most powerful predictor of recidivism risk.

Table 6

*Results of Multiple Regression Analyses*

Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta (Std.)	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Partial
<b>I. Risk of Recidivism</b>							
(Constant)	--	111.27	12.25	--	9.09	.000	--
Father-child	42.93	-1.05	.16	-.55	-6.55	.000**	.30
Satisfaction	49.99	-2.56	.36	-.57	-7.01	.000**	.33
Involvement	25.45	-1.31	.26	-.45	-5.04	.000**	.20
Social Support	12.10	-2.13	.61	-.33	-3.45	.001**	.11
Indiv. Change	12.62	-.24	.07	-.34	-3.55	.001**	.12
<b>II. Father-child</b>							
(Constant)	--	68.99	8.15	--	8.46	.000	--
Being Parented	.72	.09	.10	.09	.85	.398	.01
Mother	.001	.005	.16	.003	.03	.974	.00
Care	7.86	-.36	.13	-.27	-2.80	.006**	.07
Overprotection	4.94	.30	.14	.27	2.22	.028*	.05
Father	.84	.13	.15	.09	.91	.363	.01
Care	5.59	.29	.12	.25	2.37	.020*	.06
Overprotection	.05	.03	.14	.03	.23	.818	.001
<b>III. Father-child</b>							
(Constant)	--	75.92	1.49	--	50.92	.000	--
Co-parental	.69	-.16	.19	-.08	-.83	.410	.01
<b>IV. Father-child</b>							
(Constant)	--	68.59	1.82	--	37.74	.000	--
Social Support	20.11	1.38	.31	.41	4.48	.000**	.17
<b>V. Father-child</b>							
(Constant)	--	64.94	1.77	--	36.69	.000	--
Indiv. Factors	47.56	.21	.03	.57	6.90	.000**	.32
Self-esteem	38.03	2.05	.33	.53	6.17	.000	.28
Enviro. Sup.	31.59	2.08	.37	.49	5.56	.000	.24
Self-app	28.22	1.11	.21	.47	5.31	.000	.22
Willpower	27.09	.98	.19	.46	5.21	.000	.21
Motivation	25.71	1.69	.33	.45	5.07	.000	.21
Coping skills	20.14	1.37	.30	.41	4.49	.000	.17
Cog. Pers.	12.23	.95	.27	.33	3.49	.001	.11
Tx Expect.	8.19	.76	.27	.28	2.86	.005	.08
Denial	8.03	.67	.24	.27	2.83	.006	.07
Self-improve	6.08	.61	.25	.24	2.47	.015	.06
Openness	5.31	.55	.24	.22	2.30	.023	.05

*Note.* A single asterisk indicates correlation is significant at .05 level; double asterisk indicates correlation is significant at .01 level. *Note.* Father-child = father-child relationship; Indiv. Factors = individual self-improvement factors; Co- parental = co- parental communication; Self-app = self-appraisal; Cog. Pers. = cognitive perspective; Tx Expect. = treatment expectancy; Self-improve = self-improvement; Enviro. Sup. = environmental support.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Overview

The current study's primary aim was to investigate previously incarcerated fathers' perceptions of the quality of their relationships with their children, and how those relationships are related to their risk for re-offending. Secondly, the study aimed to investigate the contribution that social and individual factors play in facilitating the father-child bond, as well as the contribution that those factors may make in predicting recidivism risk. Specifically; the father's own experience of being parented, the quality of communication and support he has with his child's mother, his perception of social support, and his level of individual self-improvement factors associated with motivation to change.

Previous studies have clearly identified the father-child relationship as an important relationship to consider in previously incarcerated men's post-release outcome (Hairston, 2001b; Petersilia, 2003; Sack & Seidler, 1978; Vishner & Travis, 2003). However, these studies have not specifically looked at the connection between previously incarcerated men's perceptions of the father-child relationship and their risk of recidivism. In addition, these previous studies have not taken into consideration the possible contributing effects of the father's relationship to the child's mother, their own experience of being parenting, their perception of social support, or their individual characteristics related to motivation for change. These additional social and individual factors were assessed to determine to what degree the father-child relationship affects recidivism risk, and if this relationship is in fact a strong, if not stronger predictor of recidivism than other social support or individual factors. By better understanding the relationship between the father-child bond and recidivism risk, the current study hoped to shed light on this

underrepresented and severely at-risk population so that future research can more clearly investigate re-entry trajectories, and develop or maintain effective interventions aimed at bolstering the father-child bond before, during, and after incarceration.

### **Discussion of the Hypotheses**

It was hypothesized that the results of the study would provide evidence that the father-child relationship is an important familial tie that can be correlated with a lower risk of returning to prison. In addition, it was hypothesized that the results of the study would provide evidence that the father-child relationship may be used as a significant predictor of recidivism risk over that of individual characteristics, intergenerational influences, co-parental communication, and social support. The results of the study showed several significant findings to support the study hypotheses and confirm the importance of the father-child relationship in regards to recidivism risk.

Hypothesis 1, which supposed the father-child relationship would be negatively correlated with the father's risk of recidivism was supported. The results of the analyses showed that the participants' perception of their relationship with their child was significantly inversely related to their risk of returning to prison, and that the father child bond accounted for 30% of the total variance between the two variables. Such that when the strength of the father-child relationship increased, the risk of recidivism decreased. When looking at the two subscales of the father-child relationship measure (Satisfaction and Involvement), Satisfaction accounted for 33% of the variance; slightly more than the total combined score. This suggests that the perceived satisfaction with parenting construct may be more predictive of recidivism risk than actual involvement with the child. This result is consistent with the finding that the participants'

mean number of months spent in their most recent incarceration was 53.4 months, or just over 4 years.

Although results of the study also found that perceived social support and individual self-improvement factors were inversely correlated with risk of recidivism, the suppositions of hypothesis 6, which suggested that the father-child relationship would be more strongly related to predicting recidivism risk than the contributing social or individual factors, was supported. When comparing the strength of the correlations it was clear that the father-child relationship was more strongly correlated, and with a larger effect size, than the other two contributing factors. This is quantifiable support that the father-child relationship is potentially a more powerful predictor of a man's risk of returning to prison than his level of perceived social support, or of individual self-improvement factors that have previously been linked to lower risk of recidivism.

Hypothesis 2 supposed that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with the men's experience of being parented. Although initially, this appeared to be a non-significant relationship in that analyses conducted using the Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI) total combined score, and total scores for each parent showed no significant correlation to the father-child relationship. Further exploration using the measures individual subscales of care and overprotection showed that there was in fact a significant relationship between the men's experience of being parented and their perceived relationship with their child.

All of the study participants rated their perception of being parented by both their mother and father as low in care and low in overprotection. The highest rating for either parent on the care subscale was 18 and the cut off for mothers is 27, while the cut off for fathers is 24. Therefore, using the theory of the measure, all study participants reported having *neglectful*

*parenting*, in that they felt low levels of warmth and affection from both parents and low levels of overprotection or control from both parents. Although both fell within the low criteria, when comparing the ratings of care and overprotection between the mother and father scales, the participants rated their experience with their mother as considerably more caring and more controlling than their experience of their father.

Interestingly, when comparing the father-child relationship (i.e., the participants' perceived satisfaction with being a parent) to the individual subscale scores of care and overprotection, several significant relationships emerged. There was a significant positive relationship between mother overprotection and the father-child relationship, suggesting the men who experienced less controlling mothering while growing up, also reported higher levels of satisfaction with being a parent. There was no significant relationship between the men's experiences of father overprotection and their relationships with their child. Converse to what was hypothesized; there was an inverse relationship between care from the mother and the father-child relationship, but a positive relationship between care from the father and the father-child relationship. This suggests that the more care the men reported they felt from their mother growing up, the lower satisfaction they reported in being a parent themselves. However, the more care they felt from their father growing up, the more satisfaction they reported in being a parent. The positive relationships between mother overprotection and father care support the study hypothesis that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with their experience of being parented.

Much more information is needed to make an accurate interpretation of the inverse relationship to mother care, but one possible explanation for this result may lie in the high number of single-mother households within this population. A recent report found that more



than 71% of boys born in lower income, urban households are born to single mothers (ETS, 2011). Although the current study did not record whether the participants were raised solely by their mothers or by both parents, the demographics of the population suggest that there is a high likelihood that many of the participants were raised primarily by their mothers. This assumption is somewhat supported by significantly lower scores on the father overprotection subscale, suggesting that the questions targeting control and involvement were less applicable due to less contact with a father figure. Overall, the unexpected result of higher levels of care from the mother being inversely related to a more positive father-child relationship is an interesting finding that warrants further investigation.

For hypothesis 3, which supposed that the father-child relationship will be positively correlated with the amount of co-parenting support, and negatively correlated with the amount of co-parenting conflict with the child's mother, there was no significant relationship. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, the measure used to quantify the co-parental relationship was not normed on the study population, and therefore may not have accurately captured the quality of support or conflict the father's perceived from their child's mother. Secondly, the study participants reported multiple children and multiple past or current romantic partnerships, and the limitations of the study were so that it was not possible to determine if the child they were reporting to be closest to at the time of the measures administration was also the child of their current romantic relationship. Therefore, the varying degrees of relationship complexity and the study's insensitivity to that complexity could have confounded the results, showing no significant relationship between the father-child bond and the father's report of co-parental support or conflict. Finally, the non-significant finding could in fact be a true result, in that the fathers did not experience any significant change in their satisfaction with being a parent

in relation to the quality of communication they had with their child's mother. As this would be converse to previous studies on parental satisfaction and co-parental communication (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf & Neff, 2010), further exploration of this result is warranted to gain a better understanding of why there appeared to be no relationship between these two constructs.

Hypothesis 4 supposed that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with the amount of perceived social support, and this was supported by the results of the study. The participants' rating of perceived social support was significantly related to their perceived relationship with their child. This was predicted based on previous studies that have linked perceived social support to other forms of social and familial bonds (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Similarly, hypothesis 5, which supposed that the father-child relationship would be positively correlated with individual self-improvement factors associated with motivation to change and lower risk of offending, was also supported by the results of the study. There was a significant relationship between the men's level of self-improvement factors and their reported relationship to their child. Although this result was hypothesized based on other studies that have shown self-improvement factors linked to better outcomes, this result supports the premise that men who possess higher levels of motivation to change may also possess the individual factors needed to facilitate and maintain a stronger father-child bond.

Finally, hypothesis 6, which supposed that the father-child relationship would be more strongly related to predicting recidivism risk than the contributing social or individual factors, was supported by the results of the study. In both level of significance and percentage of variance, the father-child relationship was more strongly related to recidivism risk than either perceived social support or individual self-improvement factors. Although the methods for

analyses of the study were not sophisticated enough to isolate these variables from each other thereby ruling out any potential overlap of contributing effect the strength of the correlations suggests that the father-child relationship, specifically the amount of satisfaction the father feels as a parent, may be a better predictor of recidivism risk than either perception of social support or individual factors linked to motivation for change.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Unfortunately there are several limitations of the current study due to the difficulty of sampling an incarcerated population post-release and the limitations of investigating relational patterns in general (Day, Acock, Bahr & Arditti, 2005). Therefore, the results of the study should be interpreted cautiously and may not be generalizable to all previously incarcerated fathers, but to those most closely resembling the sample population.

Limitations of the study include the reliance on self-report measures. These measures limit the interpretability of the findings as all self-report measures are subject to inherent vulnerabilities, such as testing fatigue, verbal or cognitive restrictions, misinterpretation of items, attention and impulsivity thresholds, as well as malingering or false responding (Farrington, Loeber & Van Kammen, 1990). An attempt to correct for this limitation was made in the selection of reliable and valid self-report measures for the variables of interest, including the use of a validity indicator for the measurement of the father-child relationship.

The study is also limited in its inability to collect data at multiple time points or track the men longitudinally. This restricts the interpretability of the results as they will only be captions of one moment in time and therefore not generalizable to the scope or quality of these men's relationships across different developmental time points. Although an attempt to correct for this limitation was made in the selection of measures with good test-retest reliability and consistency

overtime, the results will only reflect how these men feel about their relationships and their risk of recidivism at the time at which they were sampled. These results may be subject to the effects of their child's age and development, as well as the previously incarcerated men's age and stage of development, and not necessarily generalizable to previously incarcerated fathers outside of the sample group.

Furthermore, although it may be informative to understand this group of men's perceptions, the study is limited in its ability to confirm the data collected with secondary sources. Confirmatory data was not collected from criminal records, children, partners, family or peers. This limits the interpretability of the results in that they may not reflect the actual reality of the men's risk for returning to prison or their relationships. Only the perception of these relationships can be reported as they are relayed by the previously incarcerated men's self-report. Along the same lines, the men's previous incarceration histories were collected by self-report, and no attempt was made to consult criminal records. Therefore the actual criminal history may not have been ascertained, and the results should be interpreted cautiously as the men may have under or over reported these behaviors. Furthermore, as these were self-report measures there is the potential for social desirability or assessment bias in which the participants may have attempted to answer the questions in a socially desirable manner. Although a validity measure was utilized to minimize the potential impact of social desirability on the results, and all data within the study appeared to be normally distributed, the methods applied may not have been sensitive enough to detect a potential response bias. Future studies should include additional validity indicators to offset the potential for this bias.

In addition, the study did not collect information on the family of origin, co-parent, or child's problem behaviors and is therefore unable to control or investigate what impact these

problematic behaviors may have on the father-child relationship or recidivism risk. This is a significant limitation of the study in terms of assessing the level of substance use or criminal activity that co-parents, parents/caregivers, or children may display within the various relationships being assessed, and how these behaviors may be affecting the men's risk of returning to prison. Furthermore, the study did not collect information on the men's access or utilization of treatment resources while incarcerated. This is a potentially confounding variable as men who had access to and utilization of self-improvement resources while in prison may have also increased their sense of self-efficacy within the parent-child relationship, their ability to pursue pro-social activities upon release, and therefore their risk of returning to prison. Further exploration of the primary variables of interest with the inclusion of treatment access and utilization may potentially strengthen or weaken the study findings; therefore the lack of this information in the current investigations analyses is a significant limitation.

Finally, the homogeneous ethnicity and geographic location of the sample may decrease the generalizability of the results. Although the study sample reflected the overall demographic make-up of incarcerated men within the US, the results may not be generalizable to all previously incarcerated fathers from non-African American racial backgrounds, or less urban regions of the US. In other words, the impact that race, poverty, or urban environmental factors may have had on the study results may be inextricably linked and therefore less applicable to the perceptions of fatherhood and recidivism risk for fathers from divergent ex-offender populations. Furthermore, no conclusions can be drawn from this study to determine if African American familial systems differ significantly from other ethnic groups, and therefore no cultural implications for increasing positive re-entry outcomes can be drawn from the results of the study.

### **Clinical Relevance and Relevance to Counseling Psychology**

Previously incarcerated men are a severely at-risk group. In many states, once a man has served time he may be barred from many forms of assistance, education, and employment — all of which increase the chances that he will return to prison. This has large-scale implications, not just for the individuals being released, but for their families and communities as well (Alexander, 2012; Travis & Waul, 2003). The current study sought to better understand this group of men and identify potentially protective factors so that policy and program development geared toward decreasing recidivism can be bolstered.

Clearly, understanding the factors that contribute to an individual's success or failure in staying out of prison is extremely important. However, the majority of recidivism studies have focused on demographic characteristics or social-control theories, largely ignoring the link between re-entry adjustment and family, community, and social support factors (Sampson & Laub, 1990; Visher & Travis, 2003). The few studies that have investigated the protective capacity of relational supports and re-integration success have largely found that positive re-entry does in fact depend on a confluence between individual and social variables (Visher & Travis, 2003). Previous studies have found that re-entry success may be linked to an individual's social environment (e.g., family, community, and peer support), their unique personal and situational characteristics (e.g., resilience, individual traits, temperament, environmental supports), and state-level policy (Poehlmann, Dallaire, Loper & Shear, 2010; Visher & Travis, 2003).

Although the current study did not investigate the social control constructs in social bond theory, nor the environmental and policy level variables that have been hypothesized to contribute to recidivism risk (Sampson & Laub, 1990; Visher & Travis, 2003), the current study

did find empirical support to suggest that the perceptions of certain primary relationships and higher levels of motivation for change may be connected to lower offender risk. The father-child relationship, perceived social support, and individual self-improvement factors all showed significant positive relationships with offender risk. Suggesting that individuals higher in these three areas may fare better post-release. This has significant implications for correctional settings and communities, suggesting that policy and programs geared toward bolstering the father-child relationship, social support, and motivation for change may impact recidivism. In addition, the finding that the father-child relationship was the strongest predictor of recidivism risk out of the three possible criteria, suggests that this unique familial relationship may be particularly salient and one that programmatic development and intervention may focus on in the future to tackle the significant problem of recidivism.

### **Generalizability of the Current Study**

Over the past 25 years the U.S. prison population has increased 400% (Beck, Karberg & Harrison, 2002). As incarceration has risen, so has the number of incarcerated parents. The latest data from the 2008 Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that the number of incarcerated parents has increased 79% since 1991 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Of the combined state and federal inmate population that report being a parent, 92% are male and nearly half are African American (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Furthermore, incarcerated fathers within state and federal institutions are most likely to be between the ages of 25 and 34, followed by men between the ages of 35 and 44 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Among both federal and state inmates, drug and public order offenses are more likely than violent offenses (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). The demographic frequencies of the current study mirror these U.S.

statistics, suggesting that the results of the study may be generalizable to previously incarcerated fathers nationwide.

### **Saliency of Interpersonal Relationships**

The majority of studies on incarcerated and previously incarcerated fathers have focused on deviance patterns, pathology, social control, or lack of resources in relation to their recidivism risk (van der Knapp, Alberda, Oosterveld & Born, 2011; Sampson & Laub, 1990). There is a paucity of research that has sought to examine what aspects of recently-released men's lives may be protective to the overwhelming amount of disruption that has historically affected this population. The current study sought to address this lack of research by investigating the potentially protective interpersonal relationship factors of perceived satisfaction and level of involvement with a child of their choice, as well as the impact of previous parenting, current co-parental communication, and perceived social support. The current study found that the perception of satisfaction with parenting was the most salient predictor of lower offender risk. In fact, satisfaction with parenting was found to be more predictive of lower offender risk than actual involvement with the child. This finding was consistent with previous studies on non-incarcerated fathers that found involvement to be an inadequate sole predictor of a strong father-child attachment (Pleck, 1997; Radin, 1994). This result has important clinical implications for decreasing the recidivism risk of previously incarcerated fathers in that previously incarcerated men may not be able to interact with their children while they are incarcerated, yet they may still be able to experience high levels of satisfaction with being a parent. This also suggests that increasing the amount of contact and involvement with the child during or after incarceration may not be as important as increasing the man's own perception of his ability to parent, and satisfaction with being a parent. This has important implications in terms of developing



parenting and self-efficacy programs for incarcerated men, in addition or in replace of programs aimed at increasing father-child contact.

Significant gaps exist in the literature that has examined recidivism in regards to what factors may be influencing father-child relationship quality. Furthermore, the literature makes little differentiation between the various familial relationships that are connected to post-release success. The current study looked at three specific relationships that previous research has suggested may impact the father-child bond: the fathers' experience of being parented, the fathers' relationship with the child's mother, and the father's perception of social support.

### **Experience of Being Parented**

Relational and attachment theories suggest that there is an intergenerational transmission of attachment and care giving constructs, and therefore the experience of being parented may affect the father-child bond as these men re-enact their own relational experiences and sense of self in relation to others (Anderson & Chen, 2002; Brewer, 1991; Deaux, 1993). The current study found supportive evidence that the experience of being parented, as measured by the constructs of care and overprotection, may be linked to the fathers' relationship satisfaction with their children. Although all participants in the study rated their experience of being parented as *neglectful* and low in care and overprotection, higher levels of care from a father figure and lower levels of overprotection by a mother figure appeared to be connected to higher parental satisfaction for the previously incarcerated fathers. An interesting and unexpected finding was the link between higher levels of care from a mother figure and lower levels of parental satisfaction for the previously incarcerated fathers. Conversely, an inverse relationship between higher levels of maternal care and lower levels of parental satisfaction for the previously incarcerated fathers was found. These findings suggest that further exploration of previously

incarcerated fathers' attachment constructs and previous experiences of being parented may hold important clinical implications for reducing recidivism risk.

### **Co-parental Relationship**

Studies that have investigated the role of co-parental communication and father-child attachment in non-criminal populations have found that supportive and low-conflict co-parenting is significantly linked to stronger father-child attachments (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf & Neff, 2010). The current study investigated this relationship but found no significant correlation between the men's co-parental levels of conflict or support and their satisfaction with parenting. This finding was unexpected based on previous literature on non-incarcerated fathers; however, it may be related to the significant impact that incarceration can have on the romantic relationships of incarcerated men. In this vein, although the current study did not find support that co-parental communication had a significant impact on the father-child relationship, additional study in this area may lead to different conclusions with implications for clinical and community intervention based on increasing the amount of positive co-parental support and decreasing co-parental conflict.

### **Perceived Social Support**

The perception of social support is a construct that has been widely linked to better physical and mental health outcomes (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985). The perception of social support is based primarily on an individual's evaluation of historical and current effective support from friends and family (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In relational regulation theory, it is suggested that the perception of social support is rooted in social interactions that are mediated by both personal and interpersonal factors (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). This suggests that an individual's perception of social support may not be isolated from their individual characteristics

(i.e., ability to regulate affect, cognitions, and behaviors) or the expression of those characteristics during shared activities with others (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). In other words, the individual, as well as the individual in relation to others, may be difficult to isolate and determine the potential sole contribution that perceived social support may make to lower recidivism risk. That is why the current study explored both perceived social support and individual self-improvement factors to determine if there was a significant difference between each ones contribution to lower recidivism risk and the father-child relationship. The results of the current study suggest that both factors are related to lower recidivism risk but one does not make a significantly different contribution than the other. Further exploration is needed to better differentiate this complex relationship, but clinical implications of the results would suggest that programs or policy aimed at increasing social support may result in lowering previously incarcerated fathers' risk of returning to prison.

### **Individual Self-Improvement Factors**

One significant finding that has been linked to better post-release outcome is the presence of individual level factors associated with a motivation to change (Visher & Travis, 2003). The current study found that self-improvement factors were in fact significantly related to lower recidivism risk, as well as a better father-child relationship. Of the 11 self-improvement factors that were measured, self-esteem accounted for the highest percentage of variance within the relationship, supporting previous findings that endorse the importance of self-esteem and the father-child relationship (Uggen & Manza, 2002). Other factors that contributed meaningfully to a lower risk of recidivism and a positive father-child relationship was a sense of environmental support, positive self-appraisal, high levels of willpower, and motivation to change unhealthy or harmful behaviors. These results are in line with a 2002 study by Uggen and Manza that found

that African American fathers were more likely to feel that they could contribute meaningfully to their child's life if they also reported experiencing high self-worth. These findings have clinical significance because research on incarceration has shown that institutionalization can diminish a person's self-worth and lower their sense of personal value (Haney, 2001). Furthermore, research has shown that low self-worth and shame may negatively affect interpersonal relationships, the motivation to change criminal behaviors, or resume potentially supportive relationships upon release. Programs aimed at decreasing institutionalization and its impact on self-worth and personal value, such as therapeutic community models, may not only help the individual and their interpersonal connections, but also decrease the likelihood that they will return to prison. In addition, these two constructs may be interwoven such that increasing one may increase the other. A study of incarcerated men conducted by Shannon and Abrams (2007) found that the fathers' perception of the parent-child relationship provided them with high self-confidence, such that when they felt better about their identity as a father, they felt better about themselves. The results of the current study may also be interpreted in this light, suggesting that programs geared toward increasing either a man's positive perception of himself or his perception of being a good parent may impact the other domain and lead to lower risk of returning to prison.

### **Summary**

Social and ideological pressures coupled with the environmental stressors of poverty, unemployment, and caregiver absence may place significant weight on young men to choose between the larger social value set of abstaining from criminal activity, and providing for their loved ones by any means necessary (Payne, 2011). This means that there are many factors contributing to a previously incarcerated man's risk of returning to prison, and few protective

factors in place at an institutional level to decrease that risk. The results of this study suggest that fathers recently released from prison consider their role as a father very seriously, and that this role is a primary motivator in helping them to take the steps necessary to cease their criminal behaviors upon release. Therefore this relationship holds significant potential for future intervention.

### **Future Directions**

The current study found no relationship between the amount of contact the men had with their children during their incarceration and their perception of satisfaction with the father-child relationship. However, the study did not look at the amount of contact the fathers had with their children after release. This may be an area to explore further as the amount of involvement a father reports after his release may imply the level at which he was able to reintegrate into his social support network and re-establish his role as a father. Additional studies should explore this area to determine if perceptions of satisfaction with parenting is in fact enough to adequately predict recidivism risk, or if involvement with their children post-release may increase or supersede satisfaction alone.

On a similar note, the fathers in the study were asked to select only one child to refer to in answering the questions in the study measures. By asking each father to choose only the child that he felt closest to at the time of data collection, qualitative analysis of these men's relationship patterns was somewhat simplified. However, the complexity of their actual parental roles were not captured, opening up an area for further exploration. Further study should be done to explore how and why these men selected the child they did (i.e., felt closest to at the time), as well as what differences there may be if these questions were asked in relation to their other children. In addition, further exploration of the complex intersection of the multiple roles

and/or specific personal and/or relationship factors should be explored to shed more clarity on the variables that may be contributing to the significant correlation between the father-child relationship and lower recidivism risk (i.e., perceived closeness, child's age, biological versus non-biological, father's age, etc.). The complexity of these men's multiple child relationships should be explored in order to better understand the correlation between recidivism risk and the father-child bond so that interventions can be tailored and made more effective.

Similarly, the current study attempted to explore the broader interpersonal lives of previously incarcerated fathers. However, it was clear that the men in this study have very complex and non-traditional familial relationships. Future studies should aim for a clearer analysis of these complex relationships by more thoroughly examining each specific relationship and their unique contribution to previously incarcerated men's sense of self-worth, and satisfaction with parenting. As the men in this study had multiple children from multiple mothers, multiple romantic partners, as well as biological and non-biological parental figures, it is unclear at this time what specific romantic relationships or parental relationships held the most significance or accounted for the variance within the relationships examined. Therefore, future studies should be designed to better isolate and link these relationships to determine which ones hold more saliency and are, therefore, better targets for intervention. For instance, the non-significant finding of co-parental communication and the unusual finding of higher levels of maternal care linked with lower levels of father-child relationship satisfaction, are two results of the current study that may have been better explained by a more thorough examination of the exact relationships involved (i.e., biological vs. non-biological maternal figure, single mother vs. dual parent households, current romantic partner as child's mother vs. past romantic partner as child's mother, etc.)

In addition, one limitation of the study was its homogeneous sample. Although representative of the U.S. prison population in general, the sample did not allow for any conclusions to be drawn about potential racial or cultural differences. Therefore, future studies should compare different racial and ethnic groups to determine if particular cultural differences exist to impede or bolster positive re-entry outcomes, as well as interpersonal and individual factor differences. Studies looking at similar variables of interest could utilize a stratified sampling procedure to look at between-group differences, and inform the field as to the potential need of more culturally specific interventions for increasing the father-child relationship and decreasing recidivism risk.

One potentially confounding variable that the current study failed to consider was treatment utilization and availability during incarceration. Future studies should include this information as it may impact all of the relationships of interest, and point out areas where current programs can be bolstered or improved. Along these same lines, further exploration of the specific social support relationships for this population of men should be pursued. The current study did not determine what specific relationships the men felt contributed to their perception of social support (i.e., friends, immediate family, extended family, biological versus non-biological, etc.). Future studies should look at these various relationships, as well as the variables that contribute to the perception of support (i.e., warmth, financial support, contact, emotional support, etc.).

Another area for future exploration is in studying the father-child relationship and its impact on recidivism risk longitudinally. The current study focused on men who were recently released (i.e., within 12 months from their last incarceration). Although this may not have been a limitation per se, it does pose the question as to whether the significance or effect size would be

sustainable for longer periods of time. Future studies should aim to follow a cohort of fathers for multiple years post-release to determine if the father-child relationship has the same positive impact on recidivism risk over-time.

Finally, the complexity and richness of these men's lives suggests that future studies include qualitative investigations on the relational aspects that appear to be most salient. The quality of the father-child relationship, as well as the men's experience of being parented and their relationships to their child's mother could all be explored using qualitative methods. Future studies could shed more light on what stands out as being most satisfying about being a parent, what do they consider to be good, healthy, close parent-child relationships, what do they think about their own experience of being parented, and what have they modeled or rejected from their parents as adults, as well as what role their child's mother plays in their relationship with their child, and how important actual involvement (i.e., physical proximity) is in their perception of what it means to be a father. Furthermore, qualitative studies could explore more fully their idea of being a good father in relation to the demands of providing for their children with multiple environmental restrictions and impediments. As well as how they integrate their identity of being a good father with their street life identity, and factors that are important in terms of their own perception of resiliency and/or ability to abstain from returning to criminal behaviors and prison.

Anecdotally, during data collection for the study, several of the participants spoke with the primary investigator after completing the instrument packet and expressed that they thought that the packets did not thoroughly capture their interpersonal relationships and the importance of their relationship to their child. They reported that the study captured, in essence, the vital role that their children play in their life choices and their desire to stay out of prison, but it was



unable to capture the subtlety of their lives and should a follow-up to the study be conducted, they would happily volunteer to be interviewed on the topic and share what fatherhood means and has meant to them. These admissions suggest that not only is a qualitative study desirable for the purpose of science but it is desirable to the sample population as well. It would help to illustrate that those in a position to investigate this at-risk population are listening to the requests of the participants and helping provide a platform in which they can speak about this very important relationship, as well as potentially help support the programs that aid recently released fathers stay out of prison.

In conclusion, the current study placed an emphasis on the protective capacity that familial relationships hold for previously incarcerated men. Overall, the study hoped to draw attention to the complexity of these men's lives, rather than focus on demographic characteristics or pathology as previous recidivism research has done. Family relationships are often overwhelmingly complex. The current study aimed to focus on one narrow slice of complicated family dynamics, the father-child relationship. Furthermore, the current study chose to look at the relationship that these men had with only one of their children. Therefore, the positive findings from this study are only a beginning to what is potentially a rich area for further exploration and study. As the results of this study provide evidence that the father-child relationship may be used as a more significant predictor of recidivism risk than individual characteristics, intergenerational influences, co-parental communication, or social support alone, further study into other familial relationships holds the potential to better understand and aid this population. Overall, this investigation illustrates that previously incarcerated men in the process of re-entry are not isolated from their social context, but are tied to these systems and may therefore benefit from programs and policies that aim to bolster the relationships they value;

specifically the relationships they have with their children. It is hoped that the results of this study will aid this high-risk group of men and support the efforts of community release programs, rehabilitative correctional programs, and fatherhood initiatives who have worked, and who continue to work, to create positive social change and prevent the destructive cycle of recidivism and its impact on individuals, families, and communities.

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