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Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African-American Fathers' Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification

Precious Skinner-Osei

MASS INCARCERATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN FATHERS' STRUGGLE WITH
REENTRY, RECIDIVISM, AND REUNIFICATION

DISSERTATION

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Dedicated to my father James Skinner Jr.

and

My brothers Ivory, Alvin, Jeremy, James IV, and Quincy.

Thank you all for always inspiring me to move forward. More importantly, thank you for willingly sharing your experiences and insights on incarceration and its lifelong consequences.

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Abstract

More than 2.3 million individuals are incarcerated in the United States (Urban Institute, 2015). Of those, more than 1 million are fathers, with about 500,000 being African American (BJA, 2015; Moore, 2015). This study explores the reasons behind why many African-American fathers struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification even after participating in prison reentry programs. This study utilizes a qualitative phenomenological design and includes interviews with 10 fathers who participated in a prison reentry program. The study is framed by the Theory of African American Offending, which posits that the recidivism rate among African-American men is higher because their worldview has been shaped by generations of physical and mental confinement. The data was analyzed by NVIVO qualitative program software. The thematic analysis identified five main themes: (1) trauma; (2) self-identification; (3) reentry; (4) reunification; and (5) recidivism. Descriptive subthemes of abuse, generational abandonment, caregiver relationships, criminalization, institutionalization, parenting, and post-release environmental factors also emerged. The study's findings indicate that criminal justice strategies must take into account chronic trauma and its impact on recidivism as it relates to African-American fathers. In addition, prison reentry program models could be improved by incorporating a trauma-informed approach to preparing these fathers to reenter society and their homes. The emergence of trauma as a main theme indicated that decades of data that focus on housing and employment may be missing a key aspect of the recidivism dilemma. Furthermore, the findings suggest that there are significant implications for the revision of social work practice, policy, and education as they relate to building collaborative social justice based relationships with the criminal justice system.

Keywords: African American fathers, incarceration, reentry, recidivism, reunification

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Researcher Lived Experience

Mass incarceration is not just a burden on society; it is my life story. Although I have never been arrested, I have emotionally served time. Statistics show I am not alone. One out of three African American males born today will go to prison, and children with a parent in prison are six times more likely to go to prison (Kessler, 2015; The Sentencing Project, 2013; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012; Christian, 2009). As a researcher, I question statistics for a living. Sadly, I've lived the truth of these statistics. In my family, more than 60 men, ages 15-63 are convicted felons. One is my father, seven are my brothers, and four are my nephews. All are nonviolent offenders and their charges include traffic violations, probation violations, nonpayment of child support and minor drug offenses.

This study is grounded in phenomenology so it speaks to not only the participants' lived experiences but mine as well. I still remember my mom holding back tears in 1987 as she told us that our father was going to prison. I was just 8 years old and will never forget the immediate hurt, shame and fear. My older brothers kept their composure; however, my youngest brother who was only 3 cried. I maintained a relationship with my father through letters, occasional phone calls and visitation. But I witnessed my brothers' communication lessen until it finally stopped.

My father's three-year sentence dramatically changed our family — emotionally and financially. My oldest brother tried to assume my father's role while my younger brothers suffered through confusion and fear. In addition, the loss of my father's financial support led to new living conditions that not only stripped us of daily comforts but stripped my mother of her

pride. The home phone was one of the first comforts to go. We could not visit him often because my mom did not have transportation or the money to buy seven bus tickets. In an instant, I went from my father tucking me in at night to only seeing him seven times or 21 hours in three years.

My story sadly belongs to more than 2.3 million children who have been impacted by parental incarceration as of 2016. The significance of this study is not just based on my lived experience but my commitment to the profession of social work. The impact of incarceration never goes away. Three decades later, my father is still struggling to rebuild his relationships with most of his children. Unfortunately, my oldest brother, who tried to step into my father's role during his absence, is serving 15 years in prison while my other brothers struggle with recidivism. Over the years, I have suggested reentry programs to my brothers. However, my oldest brother often relays that his participation in prison-based reentry programs has not prepared him to return home to his wife and children. This led me to research the effectiveness of reentry programs. I was shocked to learn that they were effective, just not for African-American men. This study explores why these programs are not as effective for African-American men, particularly fathers.

Incarceration

In the United States, about 2.3 million individuals are incarcerated (Urban Institute, 2015; Hattery & Smith, 2014). The United States prison population is six to 10 times greater than any other industrialized nation (Levy, 2015; Hattery & Smith, 2014; Maley, 2014). The collateral costs and consequences of incarcerating so many have prompted calls for criminal justice reforms. Yet to date, there has been little agreement on revising laws and policies, though incarceration has been one of the few issues that have gained bipartisan support (Martinez, 2015). Tough on crime political figures, including Chuck Grassley (R), John Cornyn (R) and

Lindsey Graham (R), are collaborating with Democrats on new strategies to stop the revolving door of incarceration (Martinez, 2015; Ford, 2015). Together, they have proposed the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 2123) and proposed revisions to the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010. If passed, the Sentencing and Reform Corrections Act would reduce drug penalties, eliminate the three strikes mandatory life sentence and revise the Fair Sentencing Act, which will retroactively reduce offenders' sentences (Martinez, 2015). The proposed reforms aim to allocate resources for offenders pre- and post-release while creating evidenced-based prison programs to assist in societal reentry, recidivism reduction and family reunification. In addition, the reforms would include assigning offenders to employment and education programs, adding the rehabilitative component back to the criminal justice system (Martinez, 2015).

Scholar and civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander is critical of the proposed legislation because of what she sees as a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to address racial inequality in the criminal justice system. Alexander (2012) notes that African-American men have always outnumbered every other race in America's jails and prisons. Currently, there are more than 1 million incarcerated, including 500,000 fathers (Wolfers, Leonhardt & Quealy, 2015; Race and Prison, 2013). More than 50 percent of incarcerated African-American fathers participate in some type of reentry program, yet they are still more likely to suffer from a lifetime of consequences post- release (CJC, 2015). Researchers often attribute these consequences to social factors, such as poverty and oppression (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015; & Alexander, 2012).

As part of reform efforts, criminal justice practitioners must address ignorance and existing laws and policies that disproportionately affect African-American men (Alexander 2012; The Sentencing Project, 2014). According to Alexander (2012), these laws and policies have

created black holes that consume African-American men, particularly fathers. She says that as part of any reform strategy prison-based reentry programs must address the recidivism gap as it relates to African-American men. Therefore, this study seeks to explore and address why prison-based reentry programs are not as effective for African-American fathers.

Scope of the Problem

A culmination of research suggests that prison-based reentry programs positively impact recidivism and reunification for incarcerated fathers (CJC, 2015; Eddy et al., 2008; Mazza, 2001, 2002, 2008). However, this data is not reflective of African-American fathers and their high recidivism figures. While these fathers are more likely to participate in reentry programs, they experience higher rates of recidivism and less successful reunification (CJC, 2015). Over a three-year period, African-American fathers who participated in prison-based reentry programs report that finding adequate employment and housing remains difficult post-release (CJC, 2015). In contrast, white men with a criminal history are more likely to get a job than African-American men without a criminal history (NAACP, 2014; Alexander, 2012). Research indicates that the employment and housing complexities associated with reentry for African-American men play a significant role in high recidivism and reunification failure (Alexander, 2012).

Background and Significance

Many posit that institutional racism, originating from the era of slavery, is still at work in today's criminal justice laws and policies. These laws and policies have led to the disproportionate incarceration of African-American men (Alexander, 2012). More than 1.1 million African-American men are incarcerated in America and 53 percent are fathers (Pettit & Western, 2010). There are 2.3 million children with an incarcerated parent. One in 9 is African American (The Urban Institute, 2015; Yettick, 2014; Hattery & Smith, 2014; Herman-Stahl et

al., 2008). Throughout American history, African-American men have been the main victims of the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2012). In 1829, the first felon admitted to the Eastern State Penitentiary was described as a Negro born of a degraded and oppressed race that caused him only to experience indifference and harshness (Mauer, 2006). That observation still describes many residing in America's prisons.

African-American men's roles as fathers have repeatedly been compromised by mass incarceration and post-release discrimination. These policies were birthed by slavery with the same intent of delegating social control on the poor and vulnerable (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008). Laws such as the Convict Leasing System, Black Codes, the War on Drugs, and mandatory minimum sentences have contributed to the systematic oppression of African-American men (Douglas-Bowers, 2013; Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008). Furthermore, these laws have contributed to the belittling and, in some instances, the depletion of the role of African-American fathers. Incarceration not only destroys these men's reputations. Their families inherit the burdens of their convictions (Alexander, 2012).

Implications for Social Work Practice

The National Association of Social Workers notes that social workers could help in reducing recidivism and improving reunification (NASW, 2008). According to the NASW, social workers are well-positioned to address recidivism and reunification (NASW, 2008). Social workers already provide housing, employment and other assistance services that would help them to serve the 90 percent of offenders who will be released one day (Friedmann, 2014; Mazza, 2008).

Social Work Education and Research

It is important to understand the history and impact of incarceration on African-American men. The data from this study can help policymakers, practitioners, students, advocates, and researchers understand the issues affecting African-American men. Study data reveals social factors that may assist in developing courses and models that will guide and prepare students for working with this population. NASW has advocated that social work education include criminal justice issues and that practitioners create programs and promote policies that help individuals and families during incarceration and post-release (NASW, 2008).

As it relates to research, there is an increased need for social workers' voices to be grounded in data. This study has contributed qualitative data that is tremendously lacking with this population. This study also will assist researchers in developing new methods for working with the 63 percent of offenders that social workers are in contact with before, during, and/or after incarceration (NASW, 2008).

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Society has stereotyped the structure of the African-American family and the role of the father throughout history. There has always been rhetoric about African-American families seemingly being in a constant state of despair and dysfunction. In 1950, Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a report, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” which argued that the damage and neglect that devastated African-American families was being underestimated by political forces (Coates, 2015). Moynihan predicted that three centuries of mistreatment and racism would plague African-American families for generations (Coates, 2015).

Moynihan suggests that the issues of poverty, unemployment, out-of-wedlock births, and crime in African-American communities immensely damaged the family structure (Coates, 2015). Moynihan further states that these problems are the result of a history of systematic racism (Coates, 2015). The report indicates that the problems not only harmed the African-American community as a whole but had a devastating affect on the men, negatively impacting the entire family structure for generations. Moynihan hypothesized that the history of maltreatment would so severely influence African-American families that only a few would escape (Coates, 2015).

President Johnson agreed, stating that the dysfunction of the African-American family stems from a history of oppression and persecution of African-American men (Coates, 2015). Johnson also concludes that the systemic degradation and discrimination attacked the dignity of African-American men, assaulting their ability to produce for their families (Coates, 2015). A thorough examination of Moynihan’s report reveals that the breakdown of the African-American

family can be directly linked to the rise in incarceration rates. Moynihan argues that the social stressors are the root cause of the breakdown of the family.

History of Incarceration in America

Incarceration is a means of social control with a history of discriminatory practices that continuously prey on disadvantaged individuals (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008). Historically, jails and prisons have been utilized to warehouse the poor, mentally ill, and individuals suffering from substance abuse (Williams, 2015). These people were deemed soulless and meaningless deviants by society (Mauer, 2006). Many advocates and scholars argue this is still the case (Alexander, 2012). Incarceration authorized legalized methods of physical and mental confinement of African Americans after slavery (Alexander, 2012). These methods initially consisted of discriminatory laws, such as convict leasing, Black Codes, and Jim Crow, and later disguised themselves in legislation birthed by the War on Drugs, such as mandatory minimums and three strikes laws. With each of these statutes, the judicial system was granted more power to control more individuals with incarceration (Alexander, 2012). More detrimentally, these laws employed tactics that allowed authorities to choose their victims, overwhelmingly African-American men.

Convict Leasing

After the passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments secured the ideology of newly freed slaves being treated equally, some viewed this as a threat to social control (Douglas-Bower, 2013; Alexander, 2012). Convict leasing gave slave owners a legal way to keep freed slaves within their grasp. The system, based on many of the same principles as slavery (Douglas-Bower, 2013; Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008), was established in eight states, allowing prisoners to be hired out to plantation owners and private companies for little or no pay

(Douglas-Bower, 2013; Alexander, 2012). In turn, the criminal justice system implemented stringent laws and harsher punishments to maintain a sufficient convict workforce. The landmark Supreme Court decision *Ruffin v. Commonwealth* declares that once an individual is incarcerated, he forfeits his liberty and personal rights and becomes a slave of the state as a form of penal servitude (Alexander, 2012).

Convict leasing eventually subsided; however, it set the stage for new forms of criminal justice exploitation that have affected generations of African Americans. Once labeled a convict, individuals are entangled in a lifelong system of oppressive servitude (Alexander, 2012). Scholars Michelle Alexander and Marc Mauer argue that this oppressive servitude remains today (The Sentencing Project, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006).

Black Codes

Black Codes were stringent laws passed with the purpose of limiting former slaves' freedom (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015; Douglas-Bowers, 2013; Alexander, 2012, p. 47; Sage, 2006). Additionally, Black Codes were notorious for the power they granted the judicial system to create and enforce vagrancy laws. Vagrancy laws essentially declared that any African American who was not under the supervision of a white person could be arrested (Douglas-Bowers, 2013). Vagrancy laws also made unemployment a crime for African Americans, forcing them into dirt cheap labor to avoid jail (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2015; Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008; Sage, 2006). If an individual refused to work or could not work, they were fined. If they could not afford to pay the fines, they were imprisoned (Douglas-Bowers, 2013; Blackmon, 2008). These fines are equivalent to probation fines today.

Jim Crow Laws

Under the guise of law and order, discriminatory laws continued to evolve, taking the new approach of separate but equal (Alexander, 2012). Discontinued Black Codes resurfaced as Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow, a system of segregation near to slavery, was regarded as the final settlement, return to sanity, and the permanent system (Alexander, 2012). These laws mandated segregation in all public spaces, including schools, the military, and federal workplaces (PBS.org, 2015). Politicians and segregationists supported Jim Crow laws, citing myths of rising crime and the need for more severe punishment (Alexander, 2012). In the 1950s and 1960s, segregationists insisted that integration would cause crime to rise (Alexander, 2012). Segregationists also argued that granting civil rights would impede social control, which would lead to an increase in crime (Alexander, 2012). In the 1960s, crime did steadily rise (Alexander, 2012). However, this rise was a result of the baby boom, which caused a spike in the number of people ages 15-24, who were responsible for most crimes (Alexander, 2012).

War on Drugs

In 1982, President Reagan began this campaign. The drug war has contributed to the United States incarceration rate being six to 10 times greater than any other industrialized nation (Maley, 2014; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006, 2011). In her analysis, “The New Jim Crow” (2012), Michelle Alexander posits that the war was not a response to the increase of drugs (less than 2 percent of the American public viewed drugs as a significant issue) but a new avenue of institutional racism. Research has shown that drug offense convictions caused a dramatic rise in incarceration (Alexander, 2012). Drug arrests have tripled since 1980, with more than 31 million people arrested (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2011). Furthermore, the federal prison population rose two-thirds from 1985-2000 due to drug convictions (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2011). The war proved popular among white voters who

were resentful of black progress, civil rights enforcement, and affirmative action. This led reform advocates to view it as a racist conspiracy to put African Americans back in their place (Alexander, 2012). In her analysis (2012), Alexander reviewed sentencing and found it to be overwhelmingly discriminatory. For instance, selling crack, the cheaper version of cocaine used more frequently by African Americans, had a harsher sentence than selling cocaine (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006, 2011). The mandatory sentence of five years is the same for selling 500g powder cocaine or 5g crack (Alexander, 2012). Due to the misconception that the majority of drug dealers are black or brown, society was misled by proponents and the media to believe that the drug crusade was a response to the crisis caused by crack cocaine in poor inner city black neighborhoods (The Sentencing Project, 2014; Alexander, 2012). This directly contributed to the racial disparities in drug convictions, which in turn caused the prison population to explode even though illegal drug use was on the decline. Alexander found that more people are incarcerated today for drug offenses than for all crimes combined in 1980.

The War on Drugs used state power to incarcerate hundreds of thousands of young, poor black males (Alexander, 2012). This supports Alexander's theory that the war is not against drugs, but rather targets minorities, in particular, African Americans in poor communities. Data has shown that African Americans represent 14 percent of regular drug users but are 37 percent of those arrested for drug offenses (NAACP, 2014; Kerby, 2012). From 1980-2007, one in three of the 25.4 million arrested for drugs was African American, resulting in the mass criminalization of people of color more than preventing drug abuse and drug sales (Short, 2014; Kerby, 2012; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006). Eighty to 90 percent of drug offenders in prison are African-American men, though research has shown that the majority of drug users are white (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006). Likewise, African Americans are convicted more often and

receive longer sentences when compared to whites for the same drug offense (The Sentencing Project, 2014; Mauer, 2011). These disparities even exist for drugs that are now legalized in some states (Short, 2014). Thousands of African-American men are in prison for marijuana convictions while corporate America is legally being enriched by growing and selling the same substance (Alexander, 2014; Short, 2014). In Colorado, marijuana sales brought in \$185 million in tax revenue within the first year (Short, 2014). Even though marijuana is now legal in Colorado and has proven to be a profitable business, the 210,000 individuals jailed for marijuana possession are still serving their sentences (Short, 2014).

Alexander (2012) thinks the war is here to stay based on President Obama's revival of the Byrne grant program, which claims to make communities safer by creating more antidrug task forces. In 2009, President Obama granted Byrne \$2 billion in funding from the Economic Recovery Act, which went uncontested (Alexander, 2012). However, it is of note that President Obama enacted some changes to the law, including increasing the amount of crack individuals needed to have in their possession to garner the mandatory five-year minimum sentence (Alexander, 2012; FAMM, 2010). Yet the disparities remain in spite of the revisions because it still takes 500g cocaine to get a mandatory five-year minimum sentence (Alexander, 2012).

War on Drugs Sentencing Legislation

The War on Drugs led to the incarceration of millions of poor and vulnerable individuals through its discriminatory sentencing laws, such as the Anti-Abuse Drug Act, mandatory minimums, and three strikes laws (Alexander, 2012; 2014; Mauer & King, 2007). In 1986, as part of the War on Drugs, Congress implemented the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which included harsher penalties intended to be more punitive than rehabilitative (Alexander, 2012; Warren, 2007). The new legislation was as flawed as the policies preceding it due to loopholes that allow

room for political interpretation (Blackmon, 2008). The legislation also was punitive even after an offender served his time because of the civil penalties for drug offenders (Alexander, 2012). Since the War on Drugs, prison sentences quadrupled from 300,000 to 2 million between 1980 to 2000 (Alexander, 2012). Research indicates that the increase in the prison population is linked to and explained by the changes in sentencing policies (Lowery, 2015; Alexander, 2012).

In 1984, the Sentencing Commission was born as a part of the crime control bill within the War on Drugs. The commission is an independent agency that consists of four bipartisan members and three federal judges, all appointed by the president (The Marshall Project, 2015). Before the commission, the criminal justice system used intermediate sentencing for a wider range of punishment for certain crimes (Krajicek, 2015; Warren, 2007). In 1987, the commission narrowed the range of punishment, which resulted in longer prison sentences due to mandatory minimums and weakened judges' sentencing discretion (Krajicek, 2015). The Sentencing Commission's focus was to guarantee that offenders would be incarcerated longer (Warren, 2007). In the United States, the majority of offenders are incarcerated for addiction or possession of a small amount of drugs without the intent to sell (Alexander, 2012). Drug crime sentences are harsher than what many other countries impose on convicted murderers (Alexander, 2012).

Furthermore, the new sentencing legislation allowed civil penalties, which are often referred to as legalized discrimination (Alexander, 2012). These civil penalties include landlords' right to evict and/or deny tenancy and/or the government denying federal benefits, such as student loans, for individuals convicted, or sometimes just suspected, of being involved in drug activity (Alexander, 2012; Mauer & King, 2007; Mauer, 2006). The Anti-Abuse Act was amended in 1988 to include more stringent contingencies, such as giving public housing agencies the authority to evict any tenant, household member or guest engaged in any criminal activity on

or near public housing premises (Alexander, 2012). Additionally, this legislation expanded the use of the death penalty for drug-related crimes (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006). The change in sentencing as part of the War on Drugs legislation has contributed to rampant incarceration, fueled by the mandatory minimum sentences it imposed on drug and first-time offenders (Alexander, 2012; Mauer & King 2007; Mauer, 2006).

Mandatory Minimums

In 1987, Congress passed a law that allowed mandatory minimum sentences to override less severe sentences that could be imposed by judges. Krajicek (2015) posits that the passing of this law allowed elected officials to play the roles of judges, which proved to be detrimental. Many elected officials used this law to build a tough on crime persona with voters under the guise that longer sentences would enhance public safety (Alexander, 2012; Warren; 2007; Mauer, 2006, 2007). Mandatory minimum sentencing is known for its harsh punishments for cocaine and crack possession (Alexander, 2012; Mauer & King, 2007) even with no intent to sell, meaning drug addicts were sent to prison instead of treatment centers (Alexander, 2012).

Mandatory minimums ensured more people would be incarcerated for longer periods (Alexander, 2012; Warren, 2007). Particularly, African-American men were adversely affected because crack possession drew harsher sentences (Alexander, 2012; Mauer & King, 2007). When the law was enacted, about 93 percent of convicted crack offenders were African American (Alexander, 2012). A widely cited example of discriminatory sentencing was Georgia's two strikes drug provision, which allowed district attorneys to seek life in prison for those with two drug offenses (Alexander, 2012). The law was challenged in 1995 after it was revealed that it was used against 16 percent of blacks compared to 1 percent of whites, which translated into 98.4 percent of African Americans serving life sentences (Alexander, 2012).

Although mandatory minimum sentences remain, many judges oppose them, primarily because it limits their ability to take other factors into account when imposing sentences. Some federal judges have abandoned the bench due to federal drug laws and sentencing guidelines. The most publicized instance is that of Judge Lawrence Irving appointed by President Reagan; he left the bench because he disagreed with the mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines (Alexander, 2012).

Three Strikes

Three strikes laws stemmed from the War on Drugs during the Clinton Administration. President Clinton was quoted as saying he would be tougher than any Republican on crime (Alexander, 2012). To prove his toughness, he attended the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, who was mentally impaired and had no understanding of his execution (Alexander, 2012). The three strike policies forged longer mandatory minimum sentences on repeat offenders and caused the number of life sentences to increase in a short period (Krajicek, 2015). The law was a \$30 billion crime bill that mandated life sentences for some three-time offenders and allocated \$16 billion in grants for state prisons and police forces (Alexander, 2012). It also created new federal capital crimes and removed funding for education within prisons (Krajicek, 2015; Alexander, 2012). More than 24 states adopted the three strikes laws, with California and Washington leading the way (Krajicek, 2015). In California, three strikes are counted by the number of charges versus the number of cases, meaning individuals can reach three strikes with one arrest (Alexander, 2012). Additionally, it does not matter how minor the offense or how far apart. Under these circumstances, more African-American men were more likely to be incarcerated due to nonviolent drug arrests (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010).

The rapid and drastic increase in more stringent laws gave birth to mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Warren, 2007; Mauer & King, 2007). Over the decades, many have tried to justify the continuing disparities; however, crime is declining, and violent crimes are at a historic low while incarceration rates are steadily climbing (Alexander, 2012). In federal prison, the rate for homicide offenders has contributed to 0.4 percent of its population compared to 61 percent for drug offenders (Alexander, 2012). In 2009, only 7.9 percent of individuals in federal prisons were convicted of a violent crime (Alexander, 2012). In total, just a quarter of felony defendants in the major urban counties were charged with a violent offense (Alexander, 2012). These statistics support that low-level and nonviolent offenders have unequivocally contributed to mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012).

Mass Incarceration

In the early 1990s, incarceration levels were at an all-time high due to previously cited legislation (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006). The soaring rates and stringent laws prompted Alexander, Mauer, Former Attorney General Eric Holder, Jeremy Travis and a multitude of others, referred to as intellectual freedom fighters by Cornel West, to call this epidemic mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012).

Mass incarceration refers not only to the criminal justice system but to the larger web of laws, rules, policies and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012). Alexander and Mauer are credited with changing how Americans perceive and interpret crime, race, and poverty (Ford, 2015). Furthermore, these intellectual freedom fighters have compiled data that reflects the multilevel devastation that incarceration has imposed on society — financially and emotionally. They have revealed the victims of mass incarceration and exposed the various disparities that allow the criminal justice

system to operate (Ford, 2015). The substantial amount of compiled data, research, and analyses has yielded results that overwhelmingly confirm that African-American men, in particular, have consistently been targets and victims of the criminal justice system (Moore, 2015; Mauer, 2014; Kerby, 2012; Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008).

There are more than 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States (Bureau of Justice Assistant, 2015; Urban Institute, 2015; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Flock, 2013; Mauer, 2006). Over the past 30 years, the prison population has exploded from 300,000 to more than 2 million (Lowery, 2015; Alexander, 2012; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, even when compared to highly repressive regimes such as Russia, China and Iran (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Maley, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Murray, Farrington & Sekol; 2012; Kiczkowski, 2011; Warren, 2007). Furthermore, about 65 million people have criminal records, including individuals who were arrested but never convicted (Alexander, 2012).

The dramatic rise in incarceration impacts the lives of most Americans (Alexander, 2012). Many think that the prison population rose in response to crime. That is a fallacy because the drop in crime did not result in a correlating drop in incarceration (Eisen, L., Roeder, O., Bowling, J., Stiglitz, J. E., & Chettiar, I., 2015; Baker, 2015). A report from the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals detailed that prison does not deter crime, contradicting decades of manipulated data (Alexander, 2012). The report also yielded evidence that prisons and jails create crime rather than prevent it (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012, p.27; Warren, 2007). The failure of the system and spike in incarcerations has been linked to the more stringent laws and harsher punishments (Alexander,

2012). These laws were created to incarcerate more people under the illusion of enhancing public safety (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006).

Mass Incarceration and African-American Men

People of color are about 30 percent of the United States population; however, they account for 60 percent of those who are incarcerated (Tonn, 2014; Race & Prison, 2013; Kerby, 2012). At the turn of the 21st century, 90 percent of the 2 million prisoners were African American or Latino (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015; Alexander, 2012; Mauer & King, 2007; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997). Alexander (2012) notes that no other country in the world imprisons more of its racial or ethnic minorities, noting that the United States incarcerates a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. She posits that mass incarceration in America operates as an extensive system that locks people behind steel bars and virtual bars. The system functions nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did, segregating African Americans into a permanent second-class citizenship (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012).

For centuries, forms of institutionalization, prejudice, and racial discrimination have plagued African-American men. Institutionalization creates profound changes in the cognition and behaviors of incarcerated men (Travis & Waul, 2003). From slavery to today, laws and policies have been created with the sole intention of policing African Americans, particularly men (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008). There are about 19 million African-American males in the United States (Antonio Moore, 2015). More than 1 million are incarcerated and another 1.2 million are on probation (Antonio Moore, 2015; Wolfers, Leonhardt & Quealy, 2015; Hattery, 2014; The U.S. Census, 2013; Marschak & Parks, 2012). There are more African-American men incarcerated than the total prison populations of India, Argentina, Canada, Lebanon, Japan,

Germany, Finland, Israel, and England (Moore, 2015). In 2010, African-American men were six times as likely as white men to be incarcerated (Gao, 2014; Pew Research, 2013). Alexander (2012) hypothesized that African-American men are incarcerated at higher rates because whiteness mitigates crime while blackness defines the criminal. Researchers estimate that three of four young black men in Washington D.C. can expect to serve time in prison (Alexander, 2012). Outside of Washington D.C., one of nine will face incarceration in their lifetime (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2009). The astonishingly high rate of incarcerated African-American men has led scholars to theorize that incarceration has claimed so many African-American men that not enough of them are left to be fathers (Wolfers, Leonhardt & Quealy, 2015). Nearly 92 percent of parents in prisons are fathers, and African-American fathers represent nearly 500,000 (Sanders, 2014; Race and Prison, 2013; Kiczkowski, 2011). About 12 percent of incarcerated African-American fathers are 25-29 years old (Modecki & Wilson, 2009). Research indicates that the majority of incarcerated fathers did not grow up with their fathers. Often, their father's absence was due to incarceration (Sanders, 2014; Kiczkowski, 2011).

According to Alexander (2012), African-American men's historical battle with poverty also has contributed to high incarceration rates. Convict leasing, Black Codes, Jim Crow, and numerous other laws have subjected African Americans to poverty and criminalization, she notes. Thus, mass incarceration is an assault on the poor and vulnerable, who are often people of color. At the peak of the Civil Rights movement, African Americans began to make the connection between discrimination and poverty (Alexander, 2012). The Poor People's Campaign sprung from the Civil Rights movement with the goal of addressing economic inequality for blacks and whites.

The War on Poverty was born of the notion that social stressors and poor living conditions heightened crime rates (Alexander, 2012). During the Clinton Administration, the proposed reform initiatives were connected to the penal system, like the policies that had preceded it. The administration used funds designated for welfare to fund prison construction (Alexander, 2012). In 1996, the penal budget was double the amount allocated for food stamps (Alexander, 2012). Also, President Clinton signed into law the Personal and Responsibility and Opportunity Reconciliation Act and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). These policies imposed a five-year lifetime limit on welfare assistance and a permanent lifetime ban on welfare and food stamps for individuals convicted of a felony drug offense, including simple possession of marijuana (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006), banning many people who needed assistance from receiving it.

Poverty is at the root of many social stressors that plague African-American communities (Alexander, 2012; Maldonado, 2006). The child poverty rate today is higher than it was in 1968 (Alexander, 2012). The War on Drugs turned into a war on the poor, with the media perpetuating the stereotype of African-American communities as crack-infested dens of crime (Short, 2014; Alexander, 2012). The government-funded media campaign gave the police more power to target African Americans and their communities with impunity. If police were to raid white suburban neighborhoods in the same ways as their black urban counterparts, the political backlash would be disastrous (Alexander, 2012).

Citizens, black and white, backed the war under the impression that the increase in arrests was making society safer (Alexander, 2012). Civil rights leaders argued that targeting African-American communities was racial profiling while political forces argued that the high arrest rates were attributed to people in the ghetto conducting drug deals outside versus people in the

suburbs who do business inside. However, research found that the high arrest rate of African Americans could not be explained by rates of offending, open-air drug markets, citizen complaints, crime rates, or drug-related violence (Alexander, 2012).

Cost of Incarceration

With increased incarceration came increased prison costs (Warren, 2007). Corrections is the second-fastest growing state budget category (RTI, 2013). Taxpayers spend \$70 to \$80 billion a year on issues associated with criminal justice (Lowery, 2015; NAACP, 2015). Federal prisons are nearly 30 percent overcapacity, which requires about \$7 billion a year to operate (The Marshall Project, 2015). The United States spends more money on inmates than education, social services, rehabilitation, and the salaries of prison staff (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2011; Warren, 2007). In 2006, a report by the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau Statistics revealed that \$200 billion was spent on public safety and the costs of jails and prisons consumed a huge portion (NAACP, 2015; Alexander, 2012). In 2014, Rikers Island spent about \$100,000 annually on each inmate, nearly three times the salary of a corrections officer (Ford, 2015).

Not only do taxpayers carry the financial burden but so do the prisoners' families (The Washington Post, 2015; Council on Crime and Justice, 2006; Alexander, 2012). In a study conducted by Research Action Design, 79 percent of the 700 participants said they were in debt because of their loved one's conviction (Lowery, 2015). Another study by Research Action Design with 1,500 released offenders revealed that 65 percent of families with an incarcerated family member struggle to meet their basic needs pre- and post-release (Hattery & Smith; Lowery, 2015). Often, families are still dealing with debt and fees long after their family member is released (Lowery, 2015; Alexander, 2012). Released offenders can end up in modern-day debtor's prisons because of failure to pay bail, public defender fees, presentence report costs,

probation fees, and child support fees (Lowery, 2015; Alexander, 2012; Levinson & Turetsky, 2007).

Child support fees continue to accrue during incarceration (Griswold & Pearson, 2003). Child support can be up to 65 percent of a father's income and probation fees can be up to 35 percent (Alexander, 2012; Maldonado, 2006). For some released offenders, these fees may top what little income they have (Griswold & Pearson, 2003). Fathers who were employed before incarceration reported an average salary of \$12,000 a year (Alexander, 2012; Kjellstrand, Cearley, Eddy, Foney & Martinez, 2012). Now visualize the impact of these fines post-release when many of these men are deemed less employable (Lowery, 2015). Furthermore, since the majority of incarcerated offenders are men, their female counterparts, who often earn less, have to take care of the family (Wolfers, Leonhardt & Quealy, 2015; Jones, 2013 & Lawrence and Victor, 2006; Bobo & Thompson, 2006). The additional cost of having an incarcerated family member and being the head of household often pushes women into more financial distress (Lowery, 2015; Murray, 2005).

Proponents of the criminal justice system argue the system is fine because of the prison economy (Mauer, 2006). Technically, prisoners are commodities. The most outspoken proponents are the two largest private prison providers — Corrections Corporation of America and GEO. Both companies bring in tens of millions every year (Southern Coalition for Social Justice, 2015). They argue that releasing offenders and shutting prisons down will cost 1 million people their jobs (Alexander, 2012). However, the actual motive appears to be rooted in economics rather than concern for workers. For example, Vice President Cheney invested millions in private prisons, which likely explains his interest in building more prisons, which requires more prisoners (Alexander, 2012). Prison companies are guaranteed occupancy rates,

fulfilled by states, cities, and political figures. Sixty-five percent of private prison contracts require a guarantee that the rate of prisoners will be met, and 90 percent of these rates are met. When a state or city fails to incarcerate enough people to satisfy the terms of the contract, the remaining tab falls to the taxpayers. For example, Colorado taxpayers have been assessed a low-crime tax because their crime rate has fallen about one-third over the past 10 years (Southern Coalition for Social Justice, 2015).

Vice President Cheney is not the only politician who has profited from the privatization of the prison system. According to the Southern Coalition for Social Justice (2015) in 2013-14 the following candidates received contributions from private prison companies: Lamar Alexander (R-TN); Chuck Fleischmann (R-TN); Steve Fincher (R-TN); Sherrod Brown (D-OH); Rob Portman (R-OH); Henry Cuellar (D-TX); Mary L. Landrieu (D-LA); Joe Garcia (D-FL); Mark Begich (D-AK); Pete Gallego (D-TX); and Hillary Clinton (D), who vows not to accept any more funds because she now supports prison reform. The constant influx of prisoners is politicized as dollars and cents instead of humans.

Talk of reducing crime often elicits protests behind closed doors because incarceration has been a profitable business. In 2005, the Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison operator in the United States stated in a report to the Securities and Exchange Commission that if laws were amended to reduce incarceration the demand for their services and facilities would be severely affected. Therefore, the laws should remain the same so that the number of people arrested, convicted, and sentenced continues to increase (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, President of the American Correctional Association Gwendolyn Chunn feared that if the prison boom slowed the prison market would collapse. Chunn's fears were unsubstantiated because in the years following the prison population was at an all-time high and the Correction

Corporation of America net income increased by 14 percent (Alexander, 2012). The beneficiaries of the profits generated from the prison economy include more entities than politicians, lawyers, and bankers. This comradery of profiteers includes telephone companies that prisoners are forced to utilize, gun manufacturers that supply law enforcement and guards with weapons, private health care providers for prisoners, the military who use prisoners to build equipment, and construction companies that build prisons (Alexander, 2012).

The privatization of prisons has come under increasing scrutiny, at times from policymakers who originally advocated privatization. Both Bernie Sanders (D) and Hillary Clinton (D) have stated that they are no longer a necessity. Moreover, in 2008, President Obama made the issue of mass incarceration a priority, seeking to reduce the incarceration rate, reform mandatory minimums and end prison privatization. President Obama is the first sitting president to visit a federal prison and has commuted more prison sentences than the nine presidents who preceded him combined (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). In 2016, the administration has reduced incarceration rates, in particular, for nonviolent African-American men who received harsh sentences during the height of the War on Drugs. However, more significant were policy reforms, such as the Second Chance Act, which allowed for thousands of inmates to be released, reducing the need for private prisons (Lantigua-Williams, 2016).

In August 2016, the Department of Justice announced that it will phase out its contracts with the three private prison corporations — GEO Group, Corrections Corporation of America, and Management and Training Corporation — over the next five years (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). As of 2016, there are 22,104 federal inmates in private prisons compared to 94,365 in 2010 (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). The sharp decrease in private prison inmates further highlights the need to close existing private prisons. Two decades ago, the government contracted with

private prisons to house the massive number of nonviolent drug offenders (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). Research has shown that private prisons are not effective in reducing recidivism. Yates, as cited in Lantigua-Williams (2016), states that private prisons do not maintain the same level of safety as state prisons. Research by the Department's Office of Inspector General has shown that the rate of violence in private prisons is significantly higher (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). In addition, there is no significant difference in costs (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). The majority of private prisons also lack reentry programs and other rehabilitative resources.

Since 2014, political pundits have repeatedly questioned the post-incarceration plan for the massive number of newly released offenders. Analysts note that it will be years before the full impact of revised laws and depletion of private prisons can be seen as it relates to public safety and recidivism (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). Additionally, the Department of Justice is now working to address the underlying issues fueling mass incarceration. Prevention is now the department's focus as it turns to housing first policies, probation, and rehabilitative alternatives to jail time (Lantigua-Williams, 2016). When the criminal justice system relied on prevention and rehabilitation decades ago, crime decreased (Alexander, 2012).

Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration

Incarceration imposes a lifetime of consequences that impact offenders and their families for generations (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2003, 2006, 2009). Such consequences include stigma for the offenders and their families, intergenerational incarceration, housing and employment discrimination, and the loss of voting rights and access to educational opportunities (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Hattery & Smith, 2014; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2003, 2009). All of these repercussions are birthed from the most damning consequence of being labeled a felon (Alexander, 2012). Released offenders state that being labeled a felon is

worse than being in prison (CJC, 2015). The cause of the stigma is not the incarceration itself but the felon label that follows them (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012). Once an offender is labeled a felon, it ensures legalized discrimination and second-class citizenship (Alexander, 2012).

The associated stigma is apparent when released offenders are asked to identify their status by checking a box on a job application. Furthermore, convicted felons are ineligible for food stamps, and, in some cases, denied licenses for many professions, including child care and financial services (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012). The term “felon” gives society the impression that the individual has done something unforgiving and disgraceful despite the fact that the majority of felons are low-level, nonviolent offenders (Alexander, 2012). Most felons are not sentenced to prison but serve probation or parole due to frequently coerced plea deals (Alexander, 2012). However, people who are on probation or parole are in virtual prisons. It is astounding that more than 2 million people are in jail or prison. Yet the incarceration figure pales in comparison to the 7.7 million individuals who are on probation or parole (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Short, 2014; Race and Prison, 2013; Alexander, 2012). The stigma that is associated with being a felon makes successful reintegration difficult and leaves a gaping hole for recidivism. The stigma associated with incarceration is a form of civic death because it often imposes a lifetime of shame and humiliation (Alexander, 2012). Therefore, the call for the reduction of prison sentences merely accentuates the problems associated with the lifelong consequences of being labeled a felon.

Stigma

Stigma is one of the most damning consequences of incarceration. (Kiczkowski, 2011). Ethnographic researcher David Braman found that stigma associated with incarceration creates

silence within families and communities (Alexander, 2012). Braman suggests that silence is linked to the feeling of failure by family members and, in some instances, feelings of protecting other loved ones such as children (Alexander, 2012). All offenders face stigma; however, it is more detrimental for African-American men because they already face the stigma of being seen as criminals because of their race (Alexander, 2012). Stigma is worse for African Americans because mass incarceration has transformed their neighborhoods into a silent and shameful culture. This silence was institutionally created and “results in a repression of public thought and a collective denial of lived experiences” (Alexander, 2012, p. 189).

Not only are African-American men stigmatized post-release, they often are considered angry and unstable (Alexander, 2012). Braman found that these men also are returning to hostile environments that isolate and alienate them and that these men face stigmatization from family, neighbors and teachers. The most significant revelation of Braman’s research was the silence incarceration creates in African-American communities (Alexander, 2012). Although this is common in their communities, they feel as if it is only happening to them (Alexander, 2012). Braman stated that African Americans do not share their experiences of incarceration with each other or at church, which is often the root of the community (Alexander, 2012).

Impact on Children

More than 2.3 million children in the United States have an incarcerated parent (The Urban Institute, 2015; Yettick, 2014). Nearly 91 percent of children who are impacted by incarceration have a father in jail or prison (Race & Prison, 2013; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012). These children are referred to as orphans of justice (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Murray, 2005). This phenomenon has proven to be so severe that having an incarcerated parent is now considered an adverse childhood experience (Sanders, 2014). The impact of having an

incarcerated parent is compounded by trauma, stigma, and shame. Furthermore, parental incarceration has been shown to inflict emotional trauma because of separation (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Poehlman & Shlafer-Nealy, 2010; Rose & Clear, 2001). Related research indicates that children who experience parental incarceration may suffer with increased anger, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and a disregard for authority (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Rose & Clear, 2001). Murray, Farrington, and Sekol (2012) estimated that one in five children experiences internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression. Also, one in three children experiences clinically significant externalizing problems that increased their chances of becoming offenders themselves, such as aggression, antisocial behaviors, persistent lying, and deceit compared to one in 10 children in the general population. Related research by Zeibert (2006) found that the trauma of parental incarceration is thought to lead to long-term reactive behaviors, coping patterns, and possible criminal activity (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Kjellstrand, Cearley, Eddy, Foney & Martinez, 2012; Rose & Clear, 2001; Simmons, 2000). There are about 15,000 children incarcerated and the majority of them have or had a parent in jail or prison (Wagner & Sakala, 2014; Race and Prison, 2013).

Scholars suggest that age and gender are significant in determining the severity of the impact. However, there is little empirical data to support this. Researchers have implied that unlike older children and adolescents, young children, and infants cannot comprehend the facts associated with a parent's incarceration because they possess fewer emotional and cognitive capacities (Shlafer-Nealy, Gerrity, Ruhland & Wheeler, 2013). The majority of children with an incarcerated parent are age 9 or younger. Another 32 percent are age 10-14 and 16 percent are age 15-17 (Christian, 2009). Murray and Farrington (2008) found that nearly half of boys who

experienced parental incarceration before age 10 were convicted of a crime as an adult. Additionally, Korstad (2012) found that boys are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, such as violence, while girls are more likely to internalize problems, such as anxiety and depression.

African-American children are impacted by paternal incarceration more than any other race (The Sentencing Project, 2014; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Robertson, 2012; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010; Murray, 2002; Mazza, 2002). About 767,400 African-American children have an incarcerated parent compared to 484,100 non-Hispanic whites and 362,800 Hispanics (Christian, 2009). African-American boys with an incarcerated father are negatively impacted in a myriad of ways when compared to non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics. African-American boys are more likely to drop out of school, become substance abusers, experience intergenerational incarceration, and commit violent crimes (Pew Charitable Trust, 2010). African-American girls with an incarcerated parent are more likely to face higher rates of teenage pregnancy, prostitution, homelessness, and elevated school dropout rates (NAACP, 2014).

Intergenerational Incarceration

There are 1.2 million parents in jail or prison. The majority are African-American men who have inherited incarceration from their fathers (Pettit & Western, 2010). Children with a parent in jail or prison are five to six times more likely to become offenders (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Multiple studies have indicated that an African-American boy with an incarcerated father is more likely to offend himself (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Prison and Race, 2013). One of the reasons is that the expectation is ingrained in these children through family, teachers, and the media (Alexander, 2012). Many children have stated that they have been told they are going to

end up in jail like their father (Alexander, 2012). The actuality of this happening is overwhelmingly accurate, leading some to believe that it is an inherited genetic trait (Alexander, 2012). In the Cambridge study of 400 boys, 62 percent who had a father convicted also were convicted compared to 30 percent of boys who did not have a father convicted of a crime (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015).

This data concludes that incarceration creates significant obstacles in the relationship between fathers and their children (Swisher, 2008). Some scholars have stated that the imprisonment of a parent contributes to the increase of crime by creating single-parent homes, which further increases a child's risk of becoming an offender (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015; Carpenter, 2015; Cadet, 2014; Sanders, 2014; Kiczkowski, 2011; The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010; Bobo & Thompson, 2006). This argument is supported by the destruction of social networks and the creation of unemployable individuals who are not able to contribute to their families (Alexander, 2012; Kickowski, 2011).

Housing

Released offenders often cite the lack of available housing as their biggest obstacle (Lowery, 2015). The high cost of renting and the lack of employment opportunities are critical factors (Lowery, 2015; Hattery & Smith, 2014). Once individuals are labeled felons, they are discriminated against by private landlords and barred from public housing (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2003). This form of legalized discrimination is backed by policies enacted by numerous administrations (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2003). The policies were concocted to evict felons, and, in some cases, individuals merely convicted of misdemeanors. The Clinton Administration introduced the One Strike initiative for public housing and slashed \$17 billion from the construction of public housing to reinvest into prison construction (Alexander, 2012). The

initiative was touted as HUD's toughest admission and eviction policy (Alexander, 2012). If you commit a drug-related crime, you're out. The legislation ensured drug offenders would be excluded from public housing (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2003). President Clinton stated that if you broke the law, you forfeited public housing (Alexander, 2012). Along with the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998, which authorized agencies to deny applicants who were believed to be using illegal drugs or alcohol, whether they had been convicted of a drug crime or not (Alexander, 2012), the initiative was a one-two punch to African-American men who depended on public housing (Mauer, 2003). In a study with 700 released offenders, 79 percent reported being ineligible for or denied housing (Lowery, 2015). Today, the effects of these policies still linger, particularly for African-American men since 30 percent have been convicted of a felony (Alexander, 2012).

Employment

Even before incarceration, employment was a struggle for many offenders and, in some ways, contributed to their delinquent behavior (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015; Alexander, 2012; Pettit & Western, 2004). Although research by the Vera Institute showed that released offenders are preoccupied with finding employment, many still identified it as their biggest obstacle after housing (Lowery, 2015; Short, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Wheelock, Uggen & Hlvaka, 2011). The same policies that make finding housing hard also make the search for employment difficult.

Post-release results show that when released offenders are employed they develop a healthy self-image as well as a positive image in the community, helping them to not revert to illegal behaviors (Alexander, 2012). Despite these findings, the policies that impede them from gaining meaningful employment still exist (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Mauer,

2006). Many say they feel anxiety when having to disclose their criminal history on job applications or during interviews (Lowery, 2015). The criminal history box is on the majority of applications and numerous released offenders note that they have difficulty getting an interview after checking it (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Alexander, 2012). Recently, 19 states have banned the box and seven have extended the policy to private employers (Townes, 2015). Released offenders and criminal justice advocates think that banning the box will give released offenders the opportunity to make it to the interview process and explain their criminal history (Townes, 2015). All but 10 states prohibit employers and licensing agencies from considering arrests records when making hiring decisions. Yet many of them still consider convictions (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, employers are in some instances barred from hiring people with criminal records even if the convictions are unrelated to the job (Alexander, 2012). This further restricts the limited amount of employers willing to hire released offenders. A study showed that only 40 percent of employers would consider hiring released offenders (Alexander, 2012). Reasons cited for not hiring released offenders include the criminal stigma, the lack of skills and lower levels of education (Pettit & Western, 2004). Research Action Design conducted a study with 700 released offenders and found that 67 percent were underemployed or unemployed after five years, with only 40 percent working full time (Lowery, 2015). The group most impacted was African-American men (Gao, 2014). Alexander (2012) stated that overall unemployment in the black community is similar to rates in very poor countries. African-American men comprise one-third of the unemployed population (Alexander, 2012). African-American men also earn 10 percent less than white men post-release (Lyons & Pettit, 2011). Research has shown that a white man with a criminal record is more likely to get a job than an African-American man without a criminal record (Alexander, 2012).

Education

Another component that makes employment difficult for ex-offenders is their lack of education. In 2014, New York City spent \$100,000 per inmate versus the \$46,000 annually it would cost to attend NYU (Ford, 2015). The United States spends, on average, \$11,000 per year per student in elementary and secondary public schools compared to \$31,000 per inmate (Chettiar, 2013). Overall, 65 percent of African-American male dropouts are unemployed (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, 70 percent of convicted felons are high school dropouts and an astounding 50 percent are illiterate (Friedmann, 2014; Alexander, 2012).

Pew research shows that education level is highly correlated to incarceration rates for all races (Gao, 2014; Bureau of Justice Statistics: Prison Statistics, 1997). Lowery (2015) found that the lack of education severely influences post-release employment status. Rains (2013) suggests that a child who is not reading at grade level by the fourth grade is 20 times more likely to be incarcerated than other students. Literacy levels have contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline by pushing low-scoring students into the juvenile justice system and eventually into the adult system (Fairtest, 2010).

African Americans have long been denied a fair and equal opportunity to obtain an education (Alexander, 2012; Blackmon, 2008). During slavery, African Americans were prohibited from learning to read and write, which affected families for generations. Even after emancipation, African Americans were not offered equal educational opportunities. Decided in 1954, *Brown v. the Board of Education* was supposed to help right the wrongs of the past, yet by 1960, only 17 schools had desegregated. In fact, in response to the landmark Supreme Court ruling striking down separate but equal laws as unconstitutional, five southern legislatures passed

50 new Jim Crow laws (Alexander, 2012). Historically, new discriminatory laws have been enacted after movements that yielded progress for African Americans (Alexander, 2012). African Americans are still impacted by the lack of a quality education. Predominantly African-American schools continually rank lower than schools in more affluent areas as it relates to overcrowding, technology, and facilities (Short, 2014; Alexander, 2012).

The correlation between low educational achievement and prison is especially pointed for African-American men (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). African-American men who drop out of high school have a 50 percent chance of being incarcerated compared to 11 percent of white men who drop out (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Western, 2006). African-American men ages 20-49 without a high school diploma, which are considered prime working years, are more likely to be incarcerated than white men (Gao, 2014). From 1980 to 2000, the rates for African-American men without a high school diploma rose from 10 percent to 30 percent for ages 20-24 (Gao, 2014).

Voting

Although voting is one of the most significant components of democracy, simple misdemeanors can strip it away (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012). An estimated 5.3 million Americans are denied the right to vote because of felony convictions. Nearly 1.4 million are African-American men (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2003). Some argue that there have always been maneuvers and tactics to deny voting rights to people of color. When individuals are involved in the criminal justice system, they are often not aware of the risk of losing their privilege to participate in democracy. The courts and lawyers do not inform individuals that a plea or conviction can automatically strip them of their right to vote and serve on juries. Often, there is little to no interest in helping individuals restore their rights once they are released.

Currently, just Maine and Vermont allow inmates to vote. This is in stark contrast to other states prohibiting millions of released offenders from voting for many years or for life (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, 32 states deny felons on parole the right to vote, 29 states disenfranchise felony probationers, and 11 states have felony disenfranchisement policies (Kerby, 2012). The disenfranchisement policies have revoked the voting rights of 10 percent of African Americans (Kerby, 2012; Street, n.d. retrieved Oct. 2015). Furthermore, 13 percent of African-American men have lost their electoral rights (Kerby, 2012; Street, n.d. retrieved Oct., 2015). The stripping of voting rights also is a psychological punishment. In “The New Jim Crow” an ex-offender stated that he felt voiceless due to the loss of his voting rights (Alexander, 2012).

The collateral consequences imposed by incarceration impacts the dynamics of criminal justice reform, which are reentry, recidivism, and reunification. Of these variables, reentry is the most complex obstacle offenders face (Travis & Visher, 2003). The success of reentry significantly impacts reunification and recidivism.

Criminal Justice Reform

Reforming the criminal justice system is no small task. It is going to take years to amend the current laws that have contributed to mass incarceration. Nevertheless, it is time to implement plans to reform a system that has claimed so many individuals and families (Mauer, 2012). President Clinton stated that there are too many people in prison and that our nation has overshot the intended mark (Baker, 2015). Michael Waldman, president of the Brennan Center for Justice, agrees that it is time for politicians and citizens to address mass incarceration and criminal justice reform (Baker, 2015).

Before President Reagan declared the War on Drugs, the government allocated millions to drug treatment and rehabilitation programs. However, President Reagan increased anti-drug

funding and decreased funding for agencies responsible for drug treatment, prevention, and education (Alexander, 2012). Presidents Bush, Clinton and W. Bush also conveyed that prison is supposed to be punitive (Alexander, 2012). Yet decades of research concluded that sending a person to treatment versus prison was cheaper and increased the chance of recovery (Alexander, 2012). During this era, many identified reform as an exercise in incarcerating as many people as possible. In 1994, William Barr issued the American public an ultimatum, more prisons or more crime (Alexander, 2012). At the time, Newt Gingrich suggested that mass executions of drug smugglers would reform the system by deterring future crime (Krajicek, 2015). Bill McCollum agreed that the purpose of criminal justice reform was to lock away the bad guys and throw away the keys (Krajicek, 2015).

Criminal justice reform has always been an opportunity for political parties to display power and control under the veil of public safety (Alexander, 2012). Political candidates have used their platforms to pledge their commitment to making communities safer by reforming the criminal justice system. However, the priority of criminal justice reform has been to make the system more punitive and criminalize as many offenders as possible (Baker, 2015). Mass incarceration is at the top of political agendas; however, the same invisible tactics are being implored. For instance, 6,000 offenders are being released from federal prison within the next six months (end of 2015-2016) (FAMM, 2015; The Washington Post, 2015; CNN, 2015). Nonetheless, releasing offenders from prison does not revoke the policies that are in place (Lowery, 2015). Prison does not criminalize offenders; the policies and laws in place do (Lowery, 2015; Alexander, 2012). Texas Gov. Rick Perry (R) agrees from a conservative standpoint that the goal of reform is not to be soft on crime but to be smart and build a system that offers redemption (Baker, 2015). To pursue redemption, there must be the inclusion of

rehabilitative measures. Releasing offenders without taking any therapeutic measures, as is the case for the majority of criminals, is condemning them to fail. According to The Coalition for Public Safety, the focus of mass incarceration has to be strategic and address the primary targets of reentry, recidivism, and reunification (Baker, 2015). If these objectives are not addressed, offenders will continue to return to prison, especially African-American men, who already have the highest recidivism rate (Race and Prison, 2013; Alexander, 2012). In addition to revising laws and adding rehabilitative programs, there must be meaningful bipartisan efforts.

Bipartisanship

No political party or even citizens felt it necessary to slow the pace of incarceration (Alexander, 2012). Instead, it was encouraged by former presidents who vowed to be tougher on crime and political pundits and the media, who exploited the fear of the public by convincing many that the stringent laws and policies were legitimate and necessary (Alexander, 2012). According to the Justice Policy Institute, the Clinton Administration policies resulted in the largest rate of federal and state incarceration in American history (Alexander, 2012).

Recently, the term bipartisanship has been mentioned but has not been displayed on many issues such as immigration, health care and education. However, in regards to incarceration bipartisan efforts have been successful without the threat of government shutdowns. With the assistance of The Coalition for Public Safety, left-leaning, libertarian, and conservative organizations such as the ACLU, Center for American Progress, FreedomWorks, Americans for Tax Reform, and Right on Crime have united to collaborate on how to effectively combat mass incarceration (Ford, 2015). These organizations have received more than \$50 million from Koch Industries and the George Soros' Foundation to support reform efforts (Ford, 2015).

In the 1980s and 1990s, mass incarceration was considered a triumph of bipartisan efforts (Krajicek, 2015; Ford, 2015). President Reagan expanded the drug war. President H.W. Bush eradicated reform initiatives while Sens. Ted Kennedy (D) and Strom Thurmond (R) collaborated on the Sentencing Reform Act (Ford, 2015). Additionally, President Clinton's crime bill and Prison Litigation Reform Act had strong support from both sides of the aisle (Ford, 2015). Conservatives were not the only ones to support these policies; liberals were equally involved in designating state money to build new prisons (Ford, 2015). Paul Wright states that over the past 40 years, literally every Democrat and Republican has voted in favor of getting tough on crime laws without any dissent or discussion (Krajicek, 2015). The current bipartisanship arrangement consists of Chuck Grassley (R), John Cornyn (R), Lindsey Graham (R), Patrick Leahy (D), Cory Booker (D), Rand Paul (R), and Ted Cruz (R). They have constructed The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act (S. 2123) and revised the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 (Martinez, 2015; Ford, 2015).

Political pundits question the timing and significance of prison reform (Ford, 2015). Former Attorney General Eric Holder thinks that incarceration has destroyed and weakened too many communities with the assistance of the criminal justice system and its policies (Ford, 2015). However, the response to "why now" is the financial destruction caused by incarceration (Mauer, 2012). The strategies employed to incarcerate millions is an economic failure that costs the U.S. economy \$200 billion annually (Alexander, 2012). States also have begun to realize that incarceration is expensive (Krajicek, 2015; Short, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006). At least 24 states have revised their approach to crime by eliminating mandatory minimum sentences and reestablishing early release and drug treatment programs (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, sociologists and criminologists have consistently produced data that shows incarceration and

stringent laws have not decreased crime (Ford, 2015; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006). Besides financial woes, punitive failures also are a reason there is bipartisanship (Ford, 2015; Alexander, 2012). The conversation surrounding mass incarceration has been on political agendas in the past. However, it was not considered an urgent matter. In 2008, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights produced a report that showed how representatives and senators voted on civil rights issues (Alexander, 2012). Some of the issues under consideration included voting rights, immigration, health, housing, and poverty (Alexander, 2012). Criminal justice issues did not make the list, although they represent a rapidly growing problem (Alexander, 2012). Politicians on the left and right have been in agreement that tough on crime was the way to go. Former Chief of Staff to President Obama Rahm Emanuel (D) was known for advocating for the drug war during the Clinton Administration (Alexander, 2012). Vice President Biden also was one of the loudest proponents of the tough on crime tactics (Alexander, 2012). However, both now say that the system is severely damaged and requires reform.

Alexander (2012) suggests that as America moves forward in reforming the criminal justice system, policymakers must revise and, in some cases, eradicate the ideologies and laws at the root of the problem. Furthermore, to reform the criminal justice system, Alexander outlines several steps that need to occur simultaneously. First, as a society we must recognize that mass incarceration is the result of a criminal justice system that is “designed to create crime and criminals rather than to eliminate crime or reduce the number of criminals” (Alexander, 2012, p. 254). Alexander offers five significant changes that must occur: (1) end the War on Drugs and eradicate mandatory minimum sentencing laws; (2) facilitate change in law enforcement culture and limit federal grant money for drug enforcement operations; (3) enact new laws that require police and prosecutors to collect data and disseminate it nationwide; (4) implement equal

funding for public defenders and prosecutors; and (5) create reentry programs that focus on helping individuals reintegrate into their families in addition to job training, education, and drug treatment. Others, including Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Govs. Chris Christie (R-NJ), Rick Perry (R-TX), and Scott Walker (R-WI), suggest releasing nonviolent offenders without bail pending trial, expanding drug treatment as an alternative to prison, and making it harder to convict federal defendants without proving intent (Baker, 2015). Rand Paul (R) stated that to reform the system, the size of government has to be reduced and power has to be redistributed to the judges that dictate sentences and give exceptions to mandatory minimums (Carpenter, 2015). The reduction of lengthy sentences will decrease some of the suffering experienced by released offenders; however, it will not alleviate the consequences of the felon label. Therefore, as Loic Wacquant states, the revision of sentencing guidelines must coincide with a revision of laws and policies that redefine the terms and conditions of what constitutes a felony (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006).

Since 2008, a plethora of criminal justice reform bills have been introduced, including the widely publicized Second Chance Act. The act authorizes federal grants to nonprofits and government agencies with the intent of reducing recidivism by providing support during and after incarceration (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2015; CSG Justice Center, 2015). With the assistance of bipartisan agreement, the Prisoner Incentive Act (H.R. 1251), Corrections Act (S.467), and Recidivism Risk Reduction Act (H.R. 759) also have been introduced (FAMM, 2015). Alexander and Lind are critical of the proposed bills, noting that the Corrections Act will most likely benefit white and affluent inmates when African Americans overwhelmingly inhabit the system (Carpenter, 2015; Ford, 2015). However, for any of the acts to be effective, Alexander, Mauer, and Gottschalk all emphasize that they must address the racial, social, and

economic injustices that gave birth to mass incarceration (Ford, 2015; Mauer, 2011). Jerome Miller of Smart Sentencing Alternatives states that resolving these issues is of the utmost importance because previous sentencing reforms were based on the concept of “locking them up and throwing away the key,” which targeted young African Americans (Krajicek, 2015). ACLU Executive Director Justin Romero agrees that these components are crucial starting points and suggests that the initial phase of reform should begin in the Deep South because it locks up more African-American offenders than any other region of the country (Carpenter, 2015).

Although criminal justice reform has received bipartisan support, critics remain on both sides. Critics of reform Krajicek, Kelly, and Wright consider the notion of reform to be publicized political rhetoric. Krajicek (2015) states that the level of backtracking would be insurmountable because they would have to rewrite sentencing guidelines and retroactively revise or eradicate sentences. Sen. Cam Ward (R-AL), who represents the state with the most overcrowded prison system in the country, also is a critic. Ward argues that Alabama lacks the financial capacity it would take to release a large number of offenders (Carpenter, 2015).

Variables of Criminal Justice Reform

Scholars, advocates, political figures and researchers agree that an influx of collaborative programs that strategically address the criminogenic variables of released offenders have to be implemented to reform the criminal justice system. The literature has revealed that these variables are reentry, recidivism, and reunification.

Reentry

Reentry is a significant challenge for many post-release (National Institute of Justice, 2015; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Alexander, 2012; Kiczkowski, 2011; Visher & Travis, 2003). Rose and Clear (2001) suggest that while criminal justice reforms rightly focus on

reducing recidivism, they also must focus on helping released offenders successfully reunite with their families, especially their children (National Institute of Justice, 2015). Incarcerated fathers have been compared to soldiers returning home from war (Maley, 2014). Like soldiers, when incarcerated fathers are released they experience anxiety, panic attacks, paranoia, and cognitive dysfunction, which can hinder their reentry journey and damage their familial relationships (CSG Justice Center, 2015; Maley, 2014).

Vulnerable released offenders also are immediately confronted with social factors post-release. Social factors are referred to as relationships with the family of origin, neighborhood influences, employment, and peer factors (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015). The stress of these social factors significantly impacts the process of reentry, which has many complex components, due to the restrictions imposed after release (Ford, 2015; Hattery & Smith, 2014; Alexander, 2012). One of the most significant factors is the amount of time a person has spent in prison (Ford, 2015). Released offenders are often returning to the same environments, community, family, and peer situations with little resources to help them cope and transition into life outside prison or jail (CSG Justice Center, 2015; Hattery & Smith, 2014; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Pettit & Western, 2004). Also, post-release barriers and powerful laws, regulations, and informal rules deny individuals access into mainstream society, which in turn denies access to the economy (Alexander, 2012; Kiczkowski, 2011).

Released offenders also must learn to deal with what Alexander (2012) calls second-class citizenship. Once released, offenders enter a hidden world of legalized discrimination and permanent exclusions (Alexander, 2012). It is legal to discriminate against offenders in nearly all the ways it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans (Alexander, 2012). The consequences of incarceration are similar to some of the atrocities of slavery. Post-release

consequences for felons include the loss of voting rights, the ability to enlist in the military, the right to bear arms, and the ability to serve on a jury as well discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public benefits (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 2006).

Alexander (2012) reports that upon release, many released offenders are just concerned about finding a place to sleep that night. Alexander notes that for many released offenders there is no going home because they are financially destitute. Furthermore, the ability to pay for private housing is typically nonexistent and public housing is not an option. About 650,000 individuals are released annually. The majority must immediately confront housing and employment barriers (CSG Justice Center, 2015). African-American men, who are more likely to not have resources or stable family support, are particularly affected (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Alexander, 2012).

Recidivism

According to Alexander (2012), just one arrest can tie an individual to the criminal justice system for a lifetime. Of the 650,000 individuals released from prison annually, 429,000 are likely to be rearrested within three years (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2015; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Sanders, 2014). In addition, 32 percent of fathers report serving three or more sentences (The Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). Alexander (2012) posits that the length of the sentence increases the odds of recidivating. Warren (2007) notes that the removal of rehabilitation and treatment programs significantly spiked recidivism rates among felony offenders. The individuals most likely to recidivate are those on probation or parole because they are in virtual prisons governed by unjust rules and restrictions (Alexander, 2012). Felons on probation or parole are not allowed to associate with other felons even if they are family members (Alexander, 2012). Furthermore, there are the restrictions placed on their travel, the

burden of paying fines, and mandatory meetings with probation officers (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander, 2012). The system demands that individuals who were arrested and/or convicted of crimes due to circumstances such as lack of housing, unemployment, and inherited poverty have to pay fines that they often do not have the means to do so (Alexander, 2012). The injustices of the punishment are reflected in the enormous amount of individual's recidivating. A study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that about 30 percent of released offenders were rearrested or rejailed within six months. Within three years, 68 percent of these offenders were rearrested for a new offense (Alexander, 2012; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012).

Researchers and advocates argue that the surge in recidivism is a response to the War on Drugs. Before the War on Drugs, only 1 percent of people were rearrested due to parole violations. By 2000, that figure had increased to 35 percent. Since 2000, more offenders have recidivated because of parole violations than all individuals that were sentenced to prison in 1980. Not only is that evidence of perpetuated injustice, but the majority of parole violators were returned to prison because they failed to secure employment in a required period, failed to stop using drugs, or missed an appointment with their parole officer (Alexander, 2012). Loic Wacquant, as cited in Alexander (2012), refers to this as closed circuit of perpetual marginality, which describes the phenomenon of people cycling in and out of prison.

Ninety-five percent of all inmates will be released. Two out of three will reoffend while four out of 10 fathers will return to prison (Sanders, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Pew Charitable Trusts' Center on the States, 2011; Kiczkowski, 2011; Pettit & Western, 2004). The majority of these reoffenders are African Americans, who are often thrust back into communities with minimal economic resources and high criminal activity (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Alexander,

2012; Kiczkowski, 2011; Reisig, Bales, Hay & Wang, 2007; Mauer, 2006). In a longitudinal study that consisted of 34,868 males released from Florida state prisons in 62 counties, racial inequality amplified the impact of criminal history on reconviction (Reisig et al., 2007).

Reunification

Families are considered one of the most important factors for offender's post-release (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Murray, 2005). Social support from family members and involvement in family roles limit deviant tendencies and promote mental health (ASPE, 2013; Hattery & Smith, 2014; Visher, 2013; Visher & Travis, 2003). A qualitative study of 302 men found that incarcerated fathers who had relationships with their children upon release had a more balanced psychological profile (ASPE, 2013; Visher, 2013). A similar qualitative study with 200 fathers revealed that fathers who assumed an active role with their children began gravitating toward positive factors, such as seeking legal employment as opposed to reverting to criminal activity (ASPE, 2013; Visher, 2013).

In a study of 294 men, 57 percent of them reported living with their children before incarceration, which is significant in the reunification process post-release (Visher & Courtney, 2007). Reunification is difficult for fathers because the potential benefits of reintegrating back into family life and being responsible for young children is overshadowed by the fear of not living up to expectations once released (Mazza, 2001, 2002). There is little empirical data on reunification and incarcerated fathers. However, data for incarcerated mothers implies that reunification for fathers is difficult because of the lack of prison programs (Day, 2005). Researchers have implied that reunification is easier for mothers because during incarceration they communicate more with their children through visits, telephone, and mail (Shlafer-Nealy et al., 2013; Bureau of Justice, 2008; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008; Day, 2005). As illustrated

throughout the literature, reunification has been effective in reducing recidivism. Therefore, evidenced-based prison programs that target reentry, recidivism, and reunification are recommended by advocates, researchers, and policymakers (Sanders, 2015; National Fatherhood Initiative; 2015; CJC 2015).

Prison Programming as a Method of Reform

The booming prison population and associated costs have led researchers, advocates, and policymakers to look at the impact of incarceration beyond the prison walls (Sanders, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Warren, 2007). This includes evidence-based prison reentry programs that focus on recidivism, employment opportunities, reunification of families, and reintegration into communities (Sanders, 2014; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Warren, 2007). Warren (2007) states that prison programs should be evidence based and focus on changing behaviors via prevention efforts.

Throughout the past decade, evidenced-based guidelines have been put forth to help judges and courts hand out more thoughtful sentences that take into account a variety of factors. These factors include assessing the risk of the offender, the criminogenic need, the use of risk/needs assessment instruments, the treatment and responsivity, the development of motivation and trust as well as the integration of therapy and community-based sanctions (Warren, 2007). Applying these principles treats the offender based on their specific needs instead of prescribing a one-size-fits-all solution (Warren, 2007). The idea of using evidenced-based programs is supported by policymakers, researchers, advocates, and the public (Warren, 2007). In a survey by the National Center for State Courts, 1,502 participants were asked to choose between the following two statements: (1) Once someone turns to crime, very little can be done to turn them into productive, law-abiding citizens; or (2) under the right conditions,

many offenders can turn their lives around. Eighty percent of respondents chose statement one (Warren, 2007). Another survey question asked respondents to choose between having their tax dollars spent on building more prisons versus funding programs to help offenders get jobs and treatment. Seventy-seven percent chose the latter (Warren, 2007).

In conjunction to addressing reentry, recidivism, and reunification, the role of fathers must be addressed, particularly African-American fathers who are impacted by incarceration more than any other racial group (Sanders, 2014; Race & Prison, 2013; Mazza, 2002). The role of the father is often understated; however, understanding the significance of a father's role will further illustrate the need for more evidenced-based reentry programs.

The Role of Fathers

Although research has shown that both parents are equally important in providing nurture and discipline, fathers are often overlooked (Jeffries, Hairston, & Menghraj, 2011; Leonard, 2011; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997). Sanders (2014) describes a fatherhood factor as the root of many societal issues in America. Society has defined the role of the father as being a good monetary provider (Maldonado, 2006). The U.S. Census Bureau stated that 24 million children live in a home without their father (Sanders, 2014; Jones, 2013; Maldonado, 2006). A significant amount of nonresident fathers are not involved in their children's upbringing, and about 40 percent see their children just once a year (Maldonado, 2006). For decades, research has shown that the presence of a father matters to most children and influences their social-emotional well-being (Maldonado, 2006). Research cited in the article "Social Factors and Crime" found that parenthood also helps some individuals refrain from or transition away from crime (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015).

African-American Fathers

According to Dr. Vernon McClean, the role of black fathers in the black community is considered one of the strongest and most important traditions (Fathersworld, 2015). Literature examining African-American fathers has shown that they have their own style of fathering, which is often misunderstood (Maldonado, 2006; McAdoo & McAdoo, 2006; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997). African-American fathers have been highly criticized in regards to parenting and are often considered violent, underemployed, inattentive to their children, and marginal to their families (Elebee, 2015; Cadet, 2014; Jones, 2013; Maldonado, 2006; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997). Their known plight, and in many cases predetermined path toward destruction, has been ignored by whites and African Americans alike (Alexander, 2012). There is a constant demand from high-profile citizens and the media for black fathers to do better, most notably President Obama and Bill Cosby (Elebee, 2015). During a speech, President Obama asked, where are all the black fathers, saying they need to show up and take care of their children (Slate, 2014). President Obama further stigmatized them, stating that they are acting like boys instead of men (Alexander, 2012). During this speech, one reporter yelled that they are in jail or prison (Slate, 2014). In response to President Obama's speech, sociologist Michael Eric Dyson published a critique that took to task the false stereotype of African-American men as poor fathers (Elebee, 2015; Alexander, 2012). Dyson's response was backed by research from Boston College that found that African-American fathers are more likely to be in contact with their children than any ethnic or racial group, even when not living in the same home as their children (Cadet, 2014; Alexander, 2012; Maldonado, 2006; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997). As cited in Maldonado (2006),

a study by Hamer found that African-American fathers saw their children three to six times a week.

According to Maldonado (2006), African-American fathers also are often considered deadbeats because responsible fathering is measured by formal child support payments. Yet, African-American fathers are less likely to make formal child support payments because the majority are poor and underemployed or unemployed. However, Maldonado cited research that they are more likely to make nonfinancial contributions to their children. Thus, Maldonado finds that the majority of African-American fathers are not deadbeats, they are dead broke.

Family Reunification Programs

Over the past 40 years, the central findings of prison programming research have shown that strong and consistent positive correlation exists between recidivism success and maintaining strong family ties while incarcerated (CJC, 2015; Prison Legal News, 2014). Furthermore, over the past 20 years, research has shown that prison programming can effectively change offender behavior, which is significant in reducing recidivism (Warren, 2007; Hughes & Harrison-Thompson, 2002). A meta-analysis conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy reviewed 291 evaluations of more than 30 types of prison programs to determine their effectiveness in reducing recidivism (Warren, 2007). The results revealed significant reductions in the recidivism rates of program participants (Warren, 2007). Other researchers have concurred that prison programming is a critical component in assisting offenders to transition back into society because family members provide social control and support, which inhibits criminal behavior (Sanders, 2014; American Correctional Institute, 2012; Murray, 2005). The majority of prisons in the United States do not offer reunification programs for fathers despite the fact that 69 percent of them have two or more children (Mazza, 2002). Yet, there is an overwhelming

amount of programming available to mothers, although their length of stay is usually shorter and they are less likely to recidivate (Day, 2005). Incarcerated fathers have stated that reunification has more significance than simply forging a bond or maintaining a relationship with their families (CJC, 2015; Hattery & Smith, 2014). Fathers also report that these programs promote self-improvement before release, assisting them in being employable and mentally able to cope with reintegration into society (CJC, 2015; Hattery & Smith, 2014).

Interest in programs that combat recidivism, reunite families, and help offenders reintegrate into society is at a high (Sanders, 2014; Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Kjellstrand et al., 2012; Eddy, Martinez, Schiffmann, Olin & Short, 2008). A systematic review published in “Social Factors and Crime” revealed that reentry programs were effective in increasing employment rates, decreasing the likelihood of recidivism, and keeping families intact (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015; Sanders, 2014; Warren, 2007). Family reunification programs address several issues, including relationships with caregivers and children, the absence of parents, marital history, and parenting skills (Prison Legal News, 2014; Sanders, 2014; Eddy et al., 2008; Mazza 2002). A growing body of research suggests that there is an ongoing need for fathering programs in prisons to assist in reentry and reunification (Sanders, 2014; Eddy et al., 2008; Swisher, 2008).

The primary purpose of family reunification programs is to help incarcerated fathers realize that they are irreplaceable in their children’s lives (Sanders, 2014; Eddy et al., 2008; Mazza, 2002). This is achieved by helping fathers change their outlook and improve their confidence and motivation (Sanders, 2014; Eddy et al., 2008; Mazza, 2002). The importance of family reunification programs is evidenced by research conducted by the National Fatherhood Initiative, which found that fathers connected to their children pre-release are less likely to

recidivate (CJC, 2015; Sanders, 2014; Vera Institute, 2012). Reentry efforts that utilize evidenced-based family reunification programs have been shown to reduce recidivism by 37 percent (Sanders, 2014; American Correctional Association, 2012). A study conducted by the National Fatherhood Initiative showed that recidivism rates after attending fatherhood programs were 24 percent compared to 38 percent for fathers who did not participate (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2015; Sanders, 2014). Family reunification programs also have been linked to safer prison environments, due to the encouragement of good behavior while connecting inmates to their role as a man and father (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2015; Sanders, 2014). Moreover, when connected with their children incarcerated fathers are more motivated to maintain good behavior to maintain visitation rights (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2015; Sanders, 2014).

Family reunification programs also reduce fiscal strain, societal costs, and collateral costs associated with family and community (Kiczkowski, 2011; Warren, 2007). The average program requires a small investment of \$10 per inmate compared with the \$29,000-35,000 it costs to house an inmate for an entire year (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2015; Sanders, 2014).

Although parenting programs are extremely effective for incarcerated fathers, there is debate over who benefits most (CJC, 2015; Sanders, 2014; Mazza, 2008). Some researchers suggest that family reunification programs are more effective for non-Hispanic white fathers when compared to African-American fathers (CJC, 2015). This is primarily because African-American fathers continue to recidivate at high rates and, in many cases, struggle with reentry and reunification despite participating in such programs (CJC, 2015). A criminal justice commission tracked 855 fathers who participated in a prison reunification program over the course of three years post-release (CJC, 2015). By year three, just 31.1 percent recidivated; however, more than half were African American (CJC, 2015). Others attribute this phenomenon

to shorter sentences for non-Hispanic white offenders with similar crimes and the often higher socioeconomic status of these families (The Sentencing Project, 2014). Little is known about differences in effectiveness rates for other groups such as Hispanic fathers. Emerging research suggests other factors are critical to a father's success while participating. These factors are the father-child relationship, level and type of communication and the father's marital status (Visher, 2013).

Factors That Affect Prison Programming

Father-Child Relationship

Research suggests that the father-child relationship critically influences a father's likelihood of recidivating (Visher, 2013). This warrants further exploration into understanding relevant factors that may affect the father-child relationship among incarcerated men before, during, and after incarceration (CJC, 2015; Sanders, 2014; Visher, 2013; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012). Recent research on incarcerated fathers indicates that before incarceration the majority of fathers resided with at least one of their children (Maley, 2014). The majority of these fathers regularly contributed financially and emotionally to the lives of their children, making consistent communication throughout incarceration an essential factor in maintaining a strong relationship (Maley, 2014).

Communication

It is through communication that relationships are defined (Allen, 2007). However, communication between the parent and child is impacted significantly by incarceration (Jarjoura, 2014; Shlafer-Nealy, Gerrity, Ruhland & Wheeler, 2013; Poehlmann, 2010; Murray, 2005). Incarceration immediately creates new circumstances that shift communication, living arrangements, and family dynamics (Murray, 2005). A large and growing body of research has

shown that the communication before and during incarceration determines the severity of the impact (La Vigne, Davies, & Brazzell, 2008; Hairston, 2001). The communication system parallels the relationship system (Allen, 2007). Communication patterns express what is going on within relationships inside of the family (Allen, 2007). As cited by J. Murray and L. Murray (2010), Bowlby stated that open communication between child and parent is essential to fostering children's sense of attachment and security.

The preferred method of communication for incarcerated fathers is visitation, which is considered a critical component of maintaining the relationship (Poehlmann 2005, 2010; Shlafer-Nealy, 2010; Christian, 2009). Mumola (2000) found that although visitation is encouraged in most cases, more than half of incarcerated parents (mothers and fathers) do not receive visits from their children during their prison sentence. This correlates with the fact that the majority of incarcerated parents are imprisoned over 100 miles from their primary residence, discouraging visitation, particularly for those experiencing financial hardship (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Christian, 2009; Lavigne, Davies & Brazzell, 2008; Murray, 2005).

Telephone communication is another option for inmates. The prison phone system is a \$1.2 billion a year industry run by Global Tel-Link Corp and Securus Technologies (Williams, 2015). Similar to the cost of visitation, the option of utilizing the prison phone system presents a financial burden for many families (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Mauer, 2003). At federal prisons, inmates are allowed to purchase 100 minutes of telephone time for \$50, and they are limited to 10 minutes per call (Coleman Federal Correctional Institution, 2015; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009; Christian, 2009). In Pennsylvania, the cost of a 15-minute telephone call is \$12.95 and can cost upward of \$1.22 per minute (Williams, 2015). When families deposit \$25 to the phone account, they also must pay a \$6.95 surcharge (Williams, 2015). Related

research has shown that many families' phones are disconnected within two months of a family member being incarcerated (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Mauer, 2003).

The financial burden of visitation and telephone calls leave letters as the easiest option for incarcerated individuals. About 73 percent of fathers receive mail from and/or send mail to their children (Murray, 2005; Day, 2005).

Father's Marital Status

Sampson and Laub (1993) and other scholars suggest that a strong marital bond reduces criminal behavior because "marriage engenders personal 'systems of obligation and restraint' that impose significant costs for translating criminal propensities into action" (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015, p. 29). Twenty-three percent of incarcerated men report being married. The majority of those are non-Hispanic whites (Maley, 2014). Family life is a deterrent because individuals fear losing the social capital invested in their family (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015). Data from a study of 1,725 Americans suggests that fewer crimes are committed by married individuals because they spend less time outside their family residence (Murray, Cheliotis & Maruna, 2015). This statistic applies more to non-Hispanic whites than African-American fathers whose marital rates are lower than any other race (Hattery & Smith, 2014).

Father's Length of Stay

The average length of stay for an inmate is 80 to 103 months, which often occur during a child's formative years (La Vigne, Davies & Brazzell, 2008). Incarcerated fathers are more likely to serve, on average, 12.5 years compared to mothers who serve, on average, five years (Day, 2005). Research indicates that longer stays increase the severity of the impact on the parent-child relationship and the child's emotional balance and behavior (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012).

Summary

The review of the literature has revealed that mass incarceration is a problem and has been a destructive force in the African-American community, particularly for fathers. The literature also reveals that historical discrimination via legal means created a legacy of inherited incarceration for many African-American men. From conception, the system of incarceration has targeted and victimized African-American men.

The literature also offers a clearer picture of the factors fueling mass incarceration and the myriad approach that is required to address the problem. It's not enough to release individuals from prison. True reform must recognize the disparities within the criminal justice system and offer policies and programs that allow for punishment while also taking into account that the system must help these individuals prepare to reenter society because the vast majority will eventually be released. As revealed in the literature, the recognition of social factors will assist in the development of reentry and reunification interventions that will help combat recidivism. More significantly, the literature clearly shows that African-American men, fathers in particular, are more likely to recidivate, even when participating in evidenced-based prison reentry programs.

Gaps in Literature

The literature failed to identify solid qualitative studies that highlight the lived experiences of African-American fathers as they relate to incarceration. The literature also fails to identify reasons for increased recidivism and reentry rates for African-American fathers, despite their participation in reentry programs. Furthermore, the literature does not identify underlying factors that serve as barriers for African-American fathers and their families post-release.

Study Aim

This study seeks to address the gaps by exploring why African-American fathers cannot seem to conquer the injustices of the penal system even when prison programming is available and laws are revised.

Chapter Three

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides a discussion of the theoretical principles guiding the study. African American Offending and Family Systems theories were chosen to research this topic due to the complexities and history associated with the incarceration of African-American fathers. Historically, attachment theory has been the dominant paradigm to provide insight into the impact of parental incarceration on a man, his children, and the family unit. However, the literature overwhelmingly illustrates that attachment between African-American men and their children is better than stereotypes suggest. This study argues that attachment is not the root of the problem rather the historical practices of incarceration and the generational consequences.

Theory of African American Offending

The incarceration of African-American men could be linked to their worldview, which has in many cases been shaped by racism, discrimination, and repeated injustices perpetrated by the criminal justice system (Jackson, 2014). A century ago W.E.B DuBois proclaimed that to understand why African Americans offend there must be an understanding of what it is like to live in a racially stratified society (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). A multitude of theories have been used to analyze criminal offenders, including strain theory, social disorganization theory, social learning theory, general theory of crime, Afrocentricity, and labeling theory. However, these theories are generalized and do not account for the cultural components and lived experiences of African Americans (Jackson, 2014). Specifically, the history of experiences that African Americans have endured from the various laws that have kept them enslaved physically, mentally, and politically. The Theory of African American Offending proposes that African

American offending is related to the injustices that have occurred as a result of racial oppression and subordination (Kindle, 2012; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011).

Unnever and Gabbidon evaluated other criminological theories and used the identified deficiencies to construct their theory of African American Offending (Kindle, 2012). African American Offending theory is race-centered in that it locates the cause of offending in the lived experiences of African Americans residing in a conflicted racially stratified society (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) argue that racial dynamics, largely outside of their control, have shaped the worldview of African Americans. Thus, African Americans, unlike any other ethnic group (e.g., whites) or other ethnic minorities (e.g., Hispanics), have a unique racial lens that informs their beliefs and behaviors especially as they relate to the salience of race and how racism impacts their lives in the United States (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). This history of injustice likely shapes not only their lives but also their roles and expectations within their families.

Although the Theory of African American Offending is relatively new, it is being applied to the current criminal justice reform initiatives as a tactic to assist in reentry, recidivism reduction, and reunification (Jackson, 2014). The theory has been reviewed in various social work, criminal justice, and sociology journals, including *Journal of Forensic Social Work* (2012), *International Criminal Justice Review* (2014), and *Journal of Contemporary Sociology* (2012). Kindle (2012) states that the theory is supported by statistical data that exposes racial disparities in the criminal justice system (Kindle, 2012). The theory has been applied in several studies, including the National Survey of American Life, which included 3,570 African Americans and tested the core hypotheses of the theory (Unnever, 2014). The findings revealed that African Americans who experience racial discrimination are more likely to offend because

they experience heightened states of low self-control, anger, and depression (Unnever, 2014). Unnever (2014) generated the findings by including other correlates of arrests, including demographic characteristics, the number of relatives in jail or prison, and strength of family bonds. Additionally, Robin Jackson (2014) conducted the first full test of the theory by conducting a study whose purpose was to explain disproportionate offending by African Americans. Jackson's (2014) findings suggest that African Americans' unique worldview, perceptions of and experiences with racism and discrimination, and their racial socialization experiences may have an impact on offending.

The worldview that this theory addresses is critical in analyzing how and why African-American fathers struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification. This theory also is relevant to this study because it is race-centered and locates the cause of offending in the lived experiences of African Americans (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). This theory also is applicable because as Unnever and Jackson's findings demonstrate, race must be considered as more than a demographic control variable when examining African-American offending.

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory is a philosophy that searches for the causes of behavior in the interactions among the members of a group, since all parts of the family are interrelated. The family unit has properties of its own that can be known only by looking at the relationships and interactions among all members. Family systems theory states that all members have a stake in maintaining the delicate balance in their relationship pattern. The action of one member could cause a change in the family situation, which poses potential problems for every single member (Allen, 2007).

Family systems theory has been used to support reform initiatives, such as family reunification programs, which aim to help fathers strategize for life after incarceration. Family systems can be used to address the crucial dynamics created by incarceration, including the shift in finances, creation of single-parent homes, and the transition in living arrangements (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014).

Family systems theory was significant to this study because one of the major components was family reunification. This theory also enhanced the study because it has been applied in the construction of evidenced-based prison reentry programs.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Theories

The Theory of African American Offending's primary strength was that it cannot be generalized to include all incarcerated individuals like other criminological theories. The weakness of this theory was its newness and it has not been applied in many studies. However, the timeliness of the theory overshadowed the weaknesses.

In regards to family systems theory, the strength lied in its ability to decipher the family structure, clarify roles, and identify responsibilities. Family systems theory has been applied to other research areas; however, the researcher was unable to find studies that applied family systems theory to the phenomenon of paternal incarceration, which was considered a weakness.

Chapter Four

METHODS

The proposed study utilized a qualitative approach that explored the phenomenon of African-American fathers struggling with reentry, reunification, and recidivism post-release. This chapter provides an overview of the research questions, study design, sampling strategy, measures, data collection procedures, permissions and consent, ethical considerations, and analysis.

Research Questions

RQ #1: What is the lived experience of African-American fathers who participate in prison reentry programs?

RQ #2: Why do African-American fathers continue to struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after participating in prison reentry programs?

RQ #3: What is the lived experience of African-American fathers who are reintegrating into society and their families post-release?

Study Design

A phenomenological research design was utilized because it helps to understand the universal experience of a phenomenon through interviewing of participants (Kumar, 2012; Creswell, 2011). It also emphasizes the description and narration of feelings, perceptions, and experiences (Kumar, 2012). This design also was selected because literature in the previous chapters revealed a limited amount of qualitative data about incarcerated African-American fathers. Unlike a quantitative study, it was essential that this study granted the participants the opportunity to tell their stories and have their voices heard. More importantly, the phenomenological design allowed the participants subjectivity of their lived experience to be

reflected in research. Further, the design allowed the researcher to experience the phenomenon through the stories of the participants.

Study Time Frame

The study began and was completed in April 2016 after being approved by the Barry University Institutional Review Board (Appendix D).

Inclusion Criteria

Interested participants had to meet five criteria: (1) African-American father; (2) Served at least one year in prison; (3) Participated in a prison reunification program; (4) Had a biological child/ren younger than 18 while incarcerated; and (5) Been in prison more than once.

Exclusion Criteria

Potential participants were excluded if they were released from prison less than 30 days before the start of the research study.

Sample

Ten African-American fathers (ex-offenders, N = 10) that participated in prison reentry programs were interviewed. Nonrandom sampling was used to select participants. The participants were selected from an agency in Palm Beach County that assists offenders in reentry, family reunification and recidivism reduction.

Recruitment and Permissions

Permission was obtained from the agency to recruit participants for this research from among the population of African-American fathers that participated in their reentry program for ex-offenders. A signed letter of approval from the Program Director is attached (Appendix F). Additional approval was obtained from Barry University IRB.

After getting permission from the Program Director to conduct the study, the Director of Reentry at the agency was contacted by the researcher via phone and asked to post flyers (Appendix H). Interested participants contacted the researcher by phone. An information session was scheduled with participants who expressed interest (Appendix C). Afterward, the researcher held a question and answer session on the study with potential participants. At the end of the question and answer session the participants voluntarily signed up, which included signing the informed consent form (Appendix B). After consenting, the participants completed a 13-question demographic questionnaire (Appendix E-1) and scheduled a date and time to be interviewed.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Informed consent was obtained from the participants to conduct and record each interview (Appendix B). Informed consent procedures met the standards set by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects, which states: (1) participants must be competent to give consent; (2) sufficient information must allow for a reasoned decision; and (3) consent must be voluntary and uncoerced (Kumar, 2012, p. 285).

Throughout the interview, it was reiterated that all responses and identifiers would be kept confidential. The participants were informed that they may refuse to answer any question and stop the interview at any time. The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and deleted once they were transcribed. Participants had the right to refuse to be recorded, with the option of having the researcher take handwritten notes. It was explained that the transcriptions and other data besides the recordings would be kept in accordance to the timeframe allowed by NCPHS.

The interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher. The data was kept in a secure database on the researcher's personal password protected computer. Consent

forms were locked in a file cabinet at the researcher's home to which only the researcher had access. The participants were identified by a participant number, which was not a reflection of the order of the interviews.

Attrition

The agency had a total of 36 clients. The first 10 fathers who volunteered and met the criteria were selected to participate. At the time of the interviews, the researcher was not made aware of more than 10 fathers wanting to participate. The researcher informed the agency that if other fathers wanted to participate at a later date they would be interviewed and their data would be used in future studies.

Incentives

No incentives were offered to the participants.

Benefits

Although the participants did not benefit directly from participating in the study, they made a contribution to the discussion and development of prison reunification programs and their impact on African-American fathers. The participants also benefited by having the opportunity to have their voices heard. Throughout the literature, fathers stated that they feel as if they do not have a voice. More significantly, these participants were able to add to existing literature at a time when criminal justice reform is dominating political forums and societal concerns. Researchers have noted there is a small amount of qualitative empirical studies with incarcerated fathers especially when compared to incarcerated mothers (Day, 2005).

Risks

The researcher expected no harm to come to the participants who were interviewed. However, there was the possibility of minimal emotional discomfort because of the sensitive

nature of the dialogue. To minimize that risk, it was reiterated that they may skip questions or stop the interview entirely. The researcher also supplied participants with hotline numbers and a list of agencies in their geographical areas that offer free counseling should they have the need for emotional support following the interview (Appendix I).

Due to the dialogue's sensitive nature, the researcher presented in a nonjudgmental, supportive manner, making eye contact and encouraging the participants to share their stories. The researcher was aware of the power differential between research/participant and fostered a safe environment that helped the participant feel a sense of control of the experience. The interviews were conducted in an office with only the participant and researcher. If a participant became emotionally or physically distressed, the researcher redirected questioning, proposed taking a break, offered to let the participant withdraw from the study, and reminded the participant that he was not going to be penalized or judged for any of his answers.

The participants received an informed consent document (Appendix B) before the interview explaining the purpose and goals of the study, benefits, risks, incentives, and confidentiality. The participants were informed about the approximate length of the interview and the general topics that would be discussed. The form also informed participants that they had the right to quit the study at any time or refuse to answer any question. The respondents received a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B) with the name of the university, the name and phone number of the IRB contact, and the name, phone number and email address of the researcher and dissertation chair in case they had any questions or concerns about the study.

Measures

An instrument created by the researcher was used. An advantage of using a self-constructed instrument is that it allowed for the collection of primary data that captured the

attitudes of the participants about reentry, recidivism, and reunification. A disadvantage of using the instrument is that it is new. The instrument was tested on a sample population; however, the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability were still unknown. However, similar instruments have been used in the past with similar populations and their credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability was relatively high.

The first part of the instrument was a 13-question demographic questionnaire that was administered at sign-up (Appendix E-1). The second part of the instrument consisted of 16 open-ended questions (Appendix E) and was delivered verbally in a semi-structured interview format with the participants.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher sent a flyer to the director of reentry at the agency. Interested participants contacted the researcher. The researcher scheduled an information session at the agency. After the session, participants voluntarily completed the informed consent form and the demographic questionnaire. The researcher assisted some of the participants with the questionnaire. Once the questionnaires were complete, the researcher scheduled the interviews. The interviews were conducted at the agency. The researcher transcribed the interviews as they were completed.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed with QSR NVIVO 10 qualitative research software. NVIVO helps researchers reach valid and defensible conclusions and recommendations, which has led to practical outcomes (QSR International, 2016). The data was analyzed for emerging patterns and themes as they relate to the father-child relationship, fathers' experiences with incarceration, prison programming, and reentry experiences. Codes for the data were created by NVIVO 10 and there were three categories: descriptive, thematic, and analytic. The data was interpreted by

identifying similarities, differences, themes, and relationships. Once similarities, differences, themes, and relationships were extracted, the data was used to draw conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

To further minimize the risks to participants, the study abided by the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, National Institute of Health guidelines (Appendix I) and Barry University Institutional Review Board guidelines. The primary ethical consideration was the sample population itself. Although the sample is released offenders, ethical considerations that apply to prisoners were followed. Also, references were made to the National Institutes of Health guidelines for research involving vulnerable populations — CFR 46, Subpart C applies to any individual who is or may become a prisoner while participating in research (NIH, 2014).

Chapter Five

FINDINGS and IMPLICATIONS

This section will feature an illustration of the findings and their relevance to the literature, theory and identified gaps. This chapter also will present the range of themes that emerged from the interviews and discuss their relationship as they relate to the purpose of this study, exploring why African-American fathers continue to struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after participating in prison reentry programs. The chapter also will review the limitations of the study and the implications for social work policy, practice, education, and research.

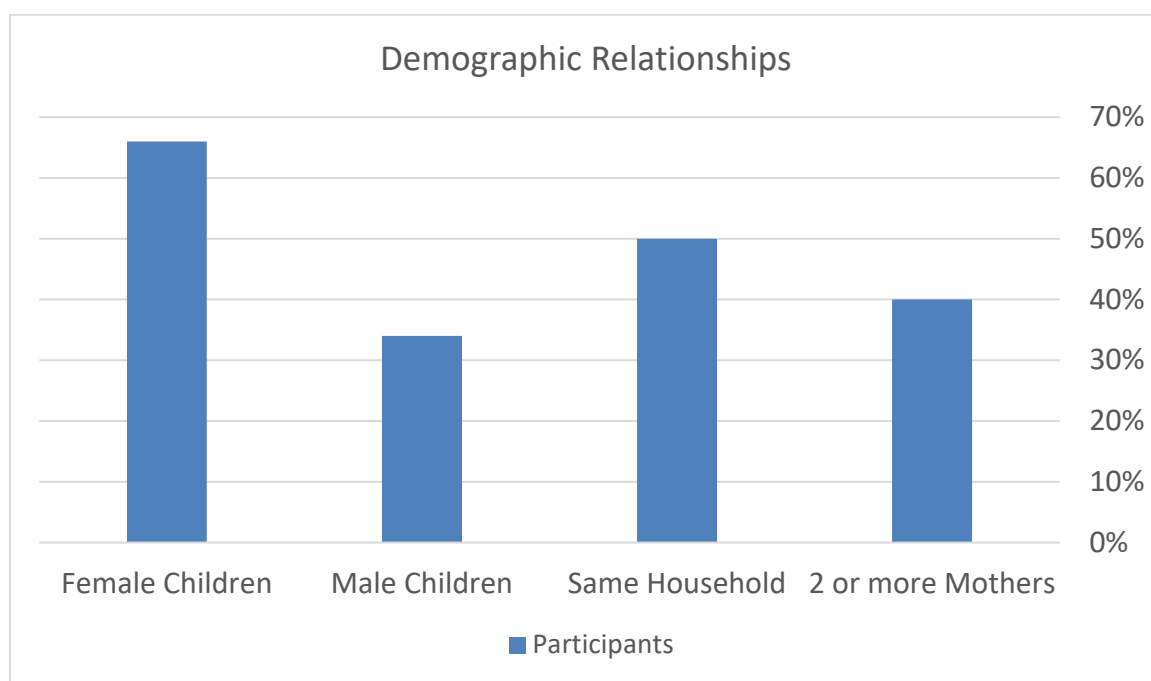
Alexander (2012) suggests that African-American men are more susceptible to incarceration based upon their history of physical and psychological confinement. Alexander (2012) and Moynihan (Coates, 2015) agree that the disproportionate number of incarcerated African-American men when compared to others races creates the impression that incarceration is part of their DNA. This portrayal is further supported by the Theory of African American Offending, which states that incarceration has obstructed how African-American men view their world (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011).

The gaps in the literature fail to acknowledge the voices of these men and their families. Even more glaring is that much of the literature does not recognize how history has fueled the cycle of incarceration and detrimentally affected the African-American family. The literature also neglects to identify robust qualitative studies that highlight the lived experiences of African-American fathers as they relate to incarceration. This study, grounded in qualitative methodology, has yielded themes that will immensely contribute to future research and social work practice, policy, and education.

Demographic Data

Study participants were 10 African-American fathers who, while incarcerated, had a biological child younger than 18 at home. The average age of the participants was 44. The participants had an average of two children. The total number of children reported was 24: 16 girls and eight boys. Three of the participants had children with multiple women. Two of the participants had children with two women. The remaining five participants had children with one woman.

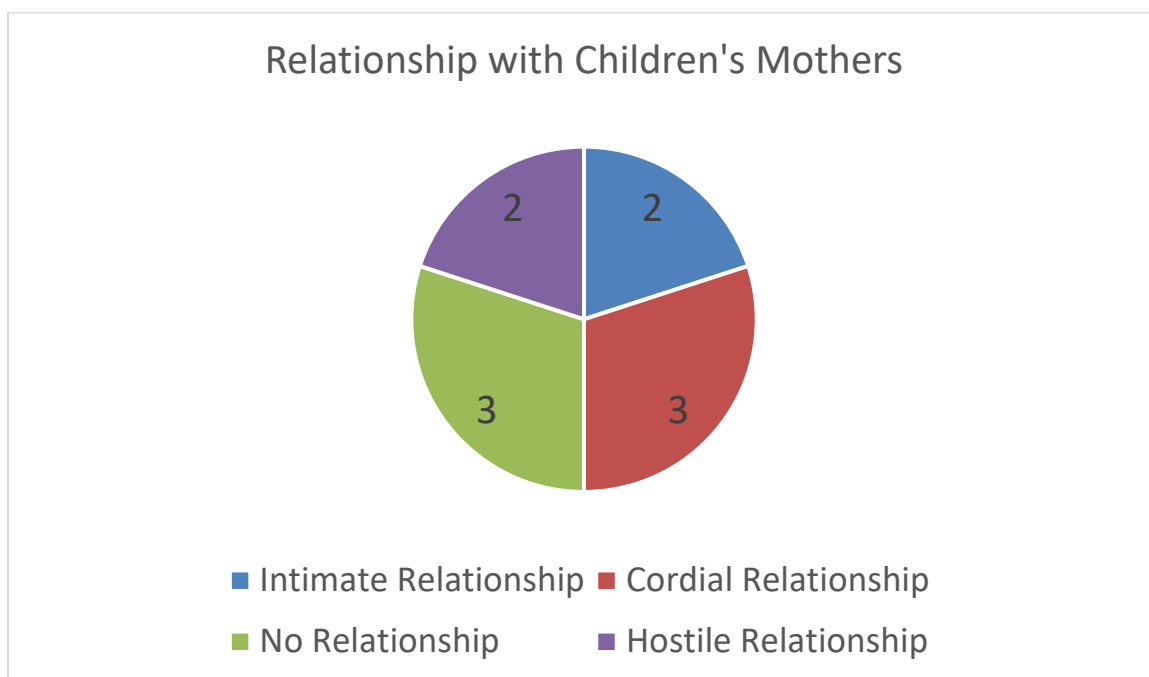
FIGURE 1



Five of the participants reported living with one or more of their children before they were incarcerated. Two of the participants stated that they were in an intimate relationship with one of their children's mother. Three of the participants indicated that they had cordial relationships with the mothers of their children. Two of the participants stated that they had hostile relationships with the mothers of their children. Three of the participants indicated that

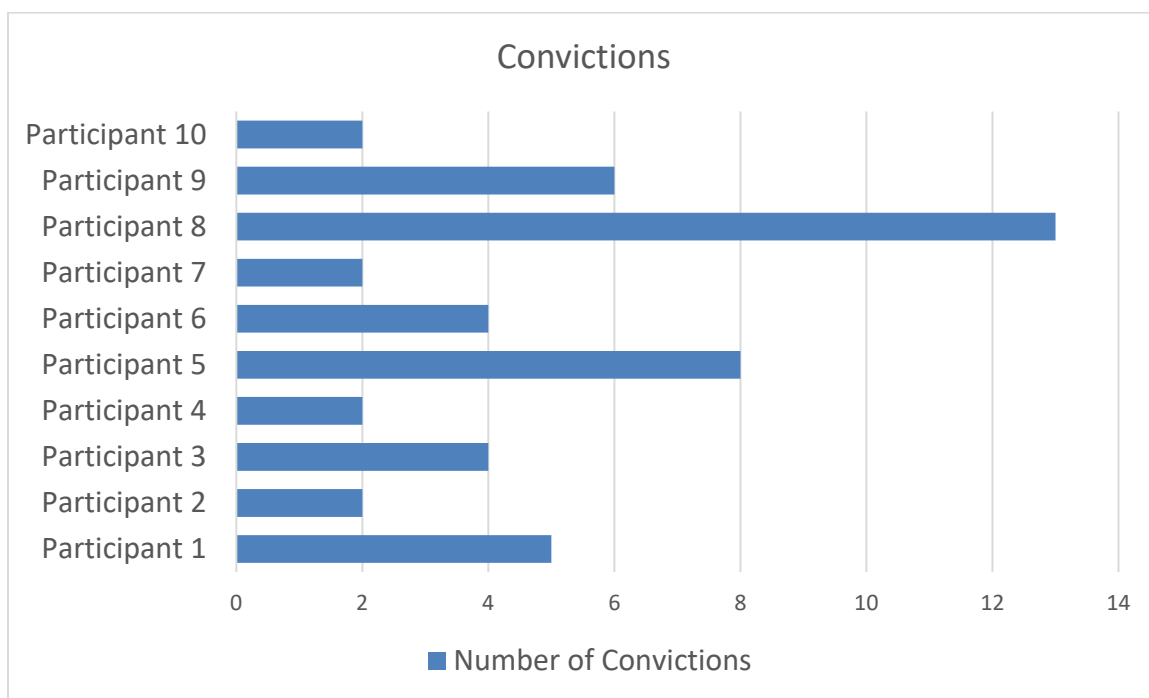
they had no relationship or communication with the mothers of their children. One of the participants reported that he resided with and was still married to the same woman before he was incarcerated. Five of the participants were divorced.

FIGURE 2



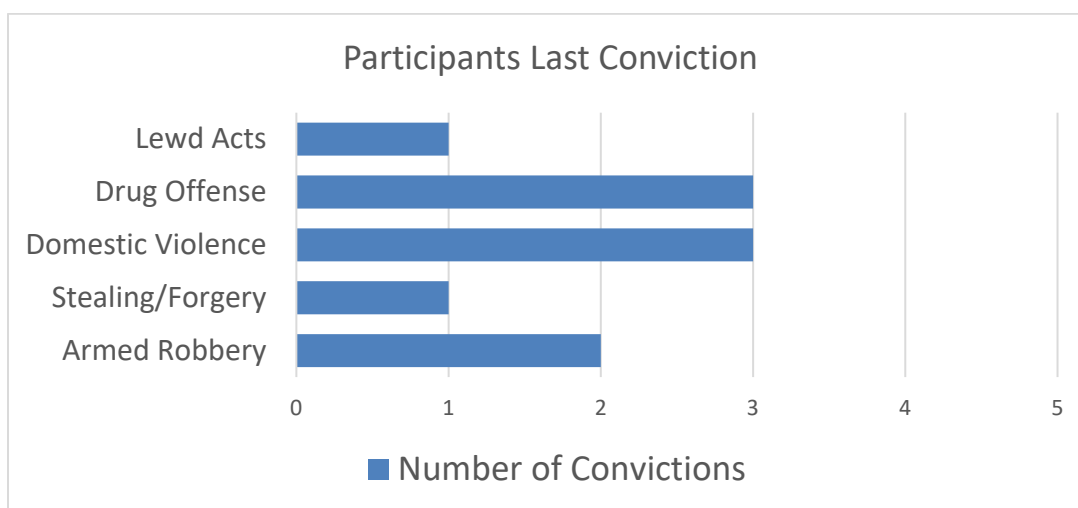
For the purpose of this study, a prison term was defined as spending 366 consecutive days incarcerated. Participants' recidivated an average of four times. One participant was in prison 13 times, another eight times, another six times and another four times, with the other participants averaging two times. This high percentage correlates with the literature, which indicates that African-American men are convicted and sentenced to prison more than any other race (NAACP, 2014; Alexander, 2012). The average age of the participants' upon their first arrest was 26. The youngest first-time arrest occurred when a participant was 11; the oldest first-time arrest was age 40.

FIGURE 3



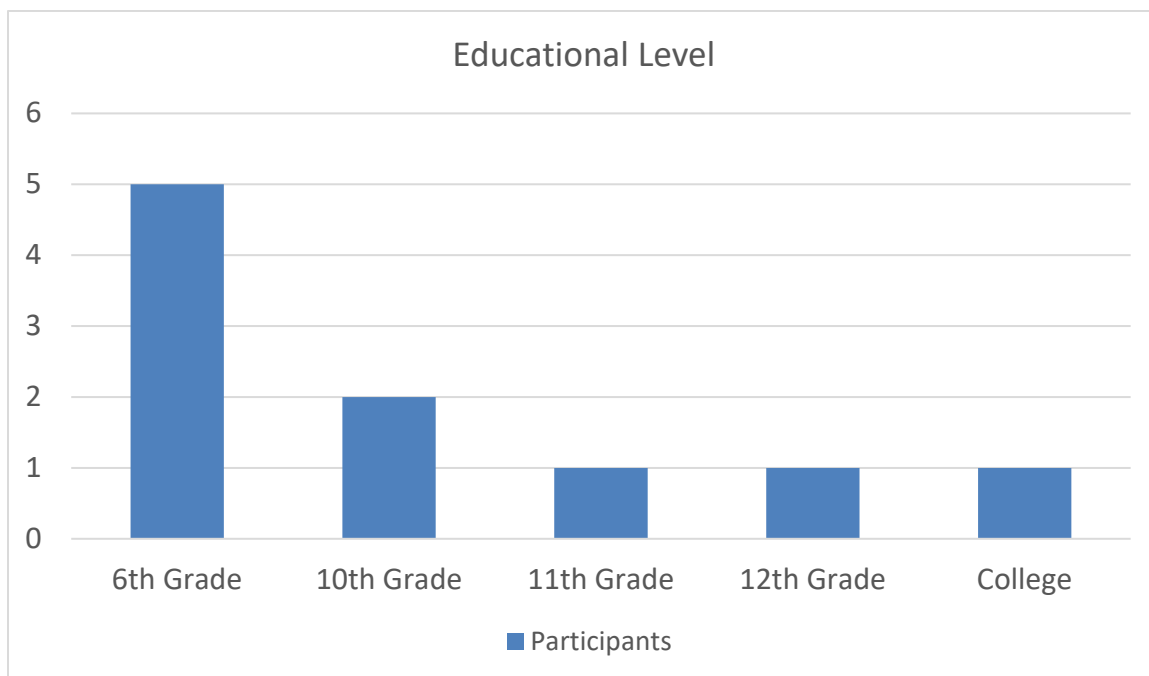
The participant's criminal convictions consisted of forgery, sales of heroin and cocaine, possession of marijuana, domestic violence, child molestation, theft, driver's license infractions, strong arm robbery, and stalking. Eight of 10 had been sentenced to prison for a drug-related crime. The longest sentence was 19 years; the shortest was one year.

FIGURE 4



Four of the participant's stated that they were employed before their last conviction. The other six reported they were unemployed due to parole stipulations, physical disabilities, and their criminal history. Only two of the participants completed high school; one is currently enrolled in college. The other six had between a sixth- to 10th-grade education.

FIGURE 5



The demographic data was representative of what exists in the literature. The participants represented high recidivism rates, extended periods of incarceration, and low educational and marital rates. What differed from the literature is the significant amount of violent crimes and physical disabilities within the sample. Existing literature shows that the majority of African-American men are convicted of nonviolent crimes, which was not the case within this small sample.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

FIGURE 6

TRAUMA	SELF-IDENTIFICATION	REENTRY	REUNIFICATION	RECIDIVISM
Stress	Institutionalization	Resources	Relationship with child's caregiver	Post-release environment
Generational Abuse and Abandonment	Criminalization	Accountability	Parenting before, during and after incarceration	Outlook on the criminal justice system
Family Membership and Belonging		Employment		
Violence		Housing		

Results of the thematic analysis yielded the following themes: trauma, self-identification, reentry, reunification, and recidivism. The mentioned themes construct a story that vividly illustrates the darkness and pain that incarceration inflicts on African-American fathers and their families.

Trauma

Trauma emerged as the most prominent theme. This was an interesting revelation because historical events that have created cultural and chronic trauma in African-American men has been ignored despite a tremendous amount of research that indicates that African-American men experience traumatic incidents 28 percent more than white men (Scutti, 2014). Six of the participants report unaddressed childhood trauma, which likely contributed to their incarcerations. The literature highlights the traumatic impact parental incarceration has on children but neglects to address how the incarcerated parent is affected and how chronic trauma throughout their lives has contributed to their incarceration. Furthermore, a tremendous amount

of research has shown that experiences in our earliest years shape our responses in all situations (Scutti, 2014). Recent literature deems parental incarceration to be so severe that it is now considered an adverse childhood experience (Shlafer et al., 2013). The Adverse Childhood Experience study illustrates that there is a strong relationship between exposure to trauma as a child and negative outcomes as an adult (Aubourg-Millner, 2014).

Aubourg-Millner (2014) finds that the source of trauma for the majority of these men originated from childhood exposure to incarceration, violence, extreme poverty, and maltreatment. Even with the inclusion of empirical data, the literature does not recognize that many of these men were children who were impacted by incarceration. Eight study participants state that their fathers had been incarcerated. This is further supported by the Bureau of Justice report (2012) and The Pew Charitable Trusts (2009), which states that intergenerational and juvenile incarceration is on the rise. The increase of both has been linked to trauma and stigma associated with the removal of the parent (Hattery & Smith, 2014).

Some participants share stories of repeated exposure to trauma that guided and interrupted their life's journey. For example, Participant #2 who witnessed the death of his oldest brother at the age 10 states: "I went to alcohol and drugs because I was trying to get over a lot of things like finding my brother dead in the house." Similar to participant #2, others stated that they also began to experiment with sex, drugs, and alcohol, which led to criminal behavior. Another participant said that when his mom left he was placed with family members who physically abused him and only wanted to collect a check, which led to him running away at 16 and marrying a woman that was 10 years older. This same participant questioned why his mother could not raise him and his seven siblings when a neighbor who had 17 children raised them all.

Further, the participant who has spent the most amount of time in prison stated that he never got over his mother's death although he was raised well by his aunt.

The participants also report that entering the criminal justice system is traumatizing because once you are in, there is no way out. Participants #2, #5, and #8 said that fees such as child support and other unpaid violations incurred during and after prison continuously indebted them to the penal system. This revelation is backed by Alexander (2012) who implied that these fees are in place to systematically cycle African-American men in and out of prison. Alexander's premise also replicates the Theory of African American Offending, which states that once an African-American man is incarcerated it not only becomes a part of his world but it becomes a part of him and his legacy (Coates, 2015; Unnever and Gabbidon, 2011).

The participants also stated that the criminal justice system is traumatizing because it deprives them of their families, employment opportunities, and their pride. Participant #5 says prison stripped him of his pride because he had to work without pay for 12 hours a day, preventing him from participating in the reentry and GED programs. He also reports feelings of hopelessness because he thought society would accept that he had paid his debt upon each release only to realize that people always see you as a felon. "It is traumatizing and depressing to realize that you have to live in a world that considers you to be less than trash, especially when you are a black criminal."

The following subthemes were associated with the experience of trauma.

Stress

The Adverse Childhood Experience study concluded that children who experience chronic stress are more likely to experience toxic stress as adults (Bornstein, 2013). Over the past decade, researchers have compared the effects of toxic stress to that of substance abuse

(Bornstein, 2013). While discussing trauma, the participants also discussed their feelings of stress before, during, and after incarceration. Malary (2014) stated that men returning from prison could be compared to men returning from war. As noted in the literature, both sets of men exhibited anxiety, PTSD, depression, and a difficult time reuniting with their families and integrating back into society. The findings also revealed that these obstacles can lead to reoffending as well as the loss of employment and housing (Malary, 2014). When asked whether they ever attempted to address their trauma and/or stress with a therapist, eight participants responded, “No.” Instead, participants expressed more comfort in praying about it. However, Participants #1 and #2 confided that they are seeing a psychiatrist and wished they would have done it earlier as it has helped them tremendously. Participant #2 says that he was so stressed out after his last release that he started to hallucinate. “I take pills for stress because there is something that people say you get over things but not some things. Oh man, the therapy helped me. I was going out of my mind. I didn’t know if I was going over or under the fence.”

Generational Abuse and Abandonment

Another subtheme that emerged as part of trauma is generational abuse and abandonment. Minimal empirical data on trauma and incarcerated parents addresses the correlation between childhood abuse and criminal activity. However, Currie and Tekin (2016) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, concluding that child maltreatment doubles the probability that an individual will engage in criminal behavior. All of the male participants in this study identified a form of abuse — physical, mental, and/or emotional. Six of the participants reported beatings. Some witnessed the abuse of their mothers and/or grandmothers their fathers or grandfathers. Three participants who witnessed their mothers’ abuse also have been convicted of domestic violence. Participant #2 shares:

My daddy was a drunk and used to give my grandfather a fifth of liquor. So my granddaddy had my momma to marry him. She married my daddy. My mother was always a church-going woman. When she would come home, my daddy used to beat her up. Used to accuse her of going with everybody in the church. She never drank in her life. My daddy will hold her down and pour liquor in her mouth, make her drink. Over the years, she just gave in and drank more than him. Then both of them started beating us.

The participants reveal that the abuse often led to them being abandoned by both parents.

Three participants stated that after their fathers left, their mothers left shortly thereafter, leaving them with aunts, grandmothers or to fend for themselves.

Abandonment

Participants revealed their experience with abandonment as children and as adults. Only two of the participants were raised by both of their biological parents. Six were raised by their mothers and maternal grandmothers. One was raised by an aunt, and one grew up in foster homes. Participant #2 says that being abandoned by his parents corrupted his ability to love himself and his children. He shares:

My mother and father left us in the house to die. First, my father left. Then my mother left. My mother kept dealing with these younger men, and they would come in and be abusive to us. Then one day she met a young guy that swept her off her feet and took off, and we didn't see her anymore.

Other participants noted that being abandoned by their parents also contributed to them committing crimes as juveniles in order to fend for themselves versus living in a foster home. Participant #4 states: "When I was sick in them foster homes it was on me. When I got cut, it was on me. So I ran away until I learned to patch myself."

The participants also expressed how they felt abandoned while they were incarcerated. The literature states that this is primarily due to monetary issues restricting travel and phone calls (Hattery & Smith, 2014). Two participants convicted of the sale of heroin and cocaine confided that they left enough money behind with their children's mother so that they would be able to see

their children at least twice a year. Even that action did not protect them from the experience. Participant #9 shares: “She told me she will be back in 6 months. I left her financially straight — six figures. She came two times and never came back. Eventually, she stopped accepting the phone calls.”

Other participants stated that they felt abandoned by society before, during and after incarceration. Their sense of abandonment caused them to feel they do not belong anywhere.

Family/Membership/Belonging

When discussing abandonment, the participants express that they wish their mothers had been capable of raising them and their siblings. Participants state that they had resided with their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends and rarely had a place that felt like home. Participant #5 states that he always wanted his mother to walk him to the school bus stop and be there to pick him up after school. Similarly, Participant #2 states:

When my parents separated, I still ain't got over it because I wanted to be like the kids playing together or going to school together and down the road we get to laugh and talk about us growing up. Only grim I do have is like being like the kid next door. I always wanted to be like the family next door. The mom and dad be telling the kids “go over there and play” or we going places. I think about that.

The participants then displayed physical discomfort and did not go into greater detail.

Violence

Existing literature does not exaggerate the number of people in prison for violent crimes, but it overwhelmingly states that the majority of people in prison, particularly African-American men, are incarcerated for nonviolent crimes (The Sentencing Project, 2014; Alexander, 2012). The minuscule sample in this study had a startling amount of violent convictions. Three of the participants had been convicted of domestic violence, and one had been convicted of domestic violence against his child's mother, the police, and others. Eight participated in anger

management courses that they felt did not address the source of their anger. Participant #1 states: “Don’t hit me. I’ll argue with you all day, but please don’t hit me cause then we got to fight. I’m sorry, you hit me we fighting.” This participant had participated in court-ordered anger management during and after incarceration. This participant also was one who expressed how he was traumatized by witnessing his mother being beaten. When he discusses his imprisonment for assaulting a police officer, he recalls:

He actually hit me with the billy club while I was handcuffed. So when he uncuffed me I just punched him in the face in the holding cell. The man actually hit me. They said you could’ve sued us. I said, no thanks, keep the money because you’ll do it again. You hit me, we fighting.

Self-Identification

The participants reveal how they see themselves. They openly share that being institutionalized and labeled a criminal has affected their self-esteem and sense of worth. For example, Participant #2 states:

A lot of guys won’t say it but you can have a low self-esteem about yourself, and they will never know it because you walk around pride. I never thought I was good looking. I never saw myself as that. I always saw myself as a person that didn’t have it all.

Participant #3 considers himself to be successful because he has not been arrested in two years and now works as a reentry counselor. However, he states that he still struggles with people knowing that he is a convicted felon. He adds that he has tried to deal with this by not appearing as a convict by avoiding dreadlocks, gold teeth and tattoos. In describing themselves, six of the participants state that they do not like who they are but view themselves as a work in progress. Participants #3 and #7 describe themselves as rehabilitated and men of Christ. Participant #3 also describes himself as a minister who is struggling to rehabilitate himself as a man and father. Institutionalization and criminalization emerged as subthemes as a result of the participants discussing their identities.

Institutionalization

Alexander (2012) argues that the system was intentionally built to institutionalize African-American men as a way of invisibly controlling them. Existing data in social work and criminology identifies institutionalization as one of the direst consequences of incarceration (Johnson & Rhodes, 2007). The effects of institutionalization are profoundly reflected in this sample. Participant #3 was first arrested at age 11 and entered adult prison at age 14. He has been to prison four times; his longest sentence was 10 years and his shortest four years. He describes his first time in adult prison as a juvenile:

I saw a couple of friends from around the neighborhood. I was pretty much in a safe haven. It was guys there that knew my brothers, that knew my sisters, so I was pretty much okay. With me it was kind of like, I'm right at home. I was kind of comfortable.

Participant #9 has been incarcerated six times and stated that he had spent a total of 19 years and one week of his entire life in prison. Although he was last released from prison four years ago, he still added his prison ID number to the end of his signature on the participant's consent form. Participant #4, convicted of child molestation, has been to prison three times and stated that he was comfortable in prison because he felt respected by the other inmates and guards. Participants #2 and #8 said that when the judge ordered probation for them, they asked if he could sentence them to jail instead. Participant #8 adds that he tried to turn himself in twice for a traffic warrant, but they would not take him. He states:

I was going in and out of people stores stealing. One night I just got the feeling I didn't want to do that anymore. I was out on bond. I tried to turn myself in, and they wouldn't accept me. Finally, they found a warrant and gave me 75 days which I didn't feel that was enough time to get out the situation.

The participant's responses gave credence to not only the existing literature but also the theory that states that incarceration becomes a part of these individual's world (Unnever &

Gabbidon, 2014). More importantly, the themes have highlighted other variables that are significant in moving forward with future research.

Criminalization

When asked how their criminal behavior has affected their lives, eight of the participants reveal that they are not real criminals. Participant #2 states: “I have never been a real criminal. I never been a thief, but when you want that drug to satisfy yourself you will do anything.” When asked to define what is a criminal their responses concurred that a real criminal intentionally commit crimes when they do not have to. One participant clarified this by saying if you rob someone, and you are rich already, you are a criminal. Similar in belief, Participant #4, convicted of child molestation twice, states:

I’m no child molester. Yeah, I know that what I did was wrong, but really if I say that it’s something I regret, I’d be saying I regret having my daughter, which I don’t. I love her and she loves me. If I can just get this new charge to lewd and lasciviousness, instead of child molestation.

In a sense the literature does divide criminality into violent and nonviolent; however, the five participants convicted of domestic violence and strong-arm robbery were the majority who insisted that they are not criminals. The two participants that self-identified as criminals also are the ones who say they are rehabilitated.

Reentry

When questioned about reentry, the participants discussed programs, resources, and accountability. As indicated in the literature, reentry was stated as the most difficult phase for offenders (Hattery & Smith, 2014; Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012; Poehlman & Schlafer-Nealy, 2010; Rose & Clear, 2001). All of the study participants relay that the first 30 days post-release is harder than doing time in prison. Participant #10 thinks that reentry was difficult because of a flaw in transition programs. He says:

If we had transition programs nationwide, it will be a lot better to give people a second chance at life and to not to be a reoffender. They need to have a place where they can go after they get out to finish the work they started in prison.

Participant #5 agrees that the programs lack collaboration and consistency because of the laws governing the criminal justice system. He states:

Most of the time I didn't get a chance to finish none of that stuff, cause they had me on DOT custody. They put you on DOT you work 10 hour days, 4 days a week and on Fridays they work you outside the gate. So it's like every time I go through South Florida and I want to take a program they send you to a prison where the trade is but it ain't no program there, it was there. They just bounce stuff around for the government so that they can get the income and make you think that they rehabilitating people to bring them back into society the right way and it's not. All they want you to do is slave. They want you to get out there with a bush axle, a weed eater, a lawn mower and push it all day long — 10 hours. I mean they work you 8½ hours out of 10.

Six of the participants noted that when you are in a prison program, transitioning into a post-release program is difficult because there is a new set of rules. For example, Participant #8 said that the program he transitioned into had a 7 p.m. curfew which made him feel like he was still in prison. Participant #6 states that the program he transitioned into paired him with multiple roommates, which caused stress because it was similar to his living arrangements in prison. All participants stated that they felt the reentry programs in prison made reentry appear as if it was going to be a tremendous help in obtaining employment, housing, and reuniting with their families. Participants stated that they were shocked to see it was not as easy as the prison reentry programs projected. This is pertinent to this study because it gives insight into why African-American fathers continue to struggle after participating in prison reentry programs.

The participant's responses also address one of the identified gaps in the literature, which is the role of the structure of reentry programs in regards to African-American men. Three participants that participated in a reentry program operated by the same organization during and after release reported that transition was smoother because they were enrolled in the same

program while incarcerated and post-release. Also, these participants have been out of prison longer, employed longer, have stable housing and better relationships with their children.

When the participants are asked what they liked about reentry programs, they overwhelmingly say the discussion groups. Participant #6 responds:

Well, the groups put a little spirit in you. You feel good after you get out of the group. I go to groups every day and because they keep it real. You share what you want to share. You ain't got to be disrespectful; It's all about respect. You learn a lot of things, like how to carry yourself.

The participants also state that the discussion groups gave them an opportunity to be heard and to be amongst others that understood their struggles.

Resources

The participants stated that adequate employment and housing resources exist, but that the system of rules and requirements within agencies make them difficult to obtain. This is in stark contrast to what they experienced during their participation in prison programs. When prompted about what resources they deem as necessary, they state medical/dental care, medications for high blood pressure and diabetes, assistance with paying fines, and legal aid to help with traffic violations and child support arrears. Participant #6 shares that once he finally got dental work his self-esteem improved. "Right now, I'm blessed. I wake up with a smile. You know the program done did a lot for me, got me teeth — that's why I'm talking like this. I got my lil grill in."

Accountability

When participants were asked if they thought they were treated unfairly by the criminal justice system, 5 of the 10 replied no. These participants agreed that you have to do it on your own, and you have to want it. Participant #8 says, "It's an equal opportunity, it's all up to you to maintain it, each man has their agenda. Basically, it's all up to you." Participant #3 expresses:

A person has to want it; you can give them answers, and they still may not pick up on it. The reason for that is that their mind is programmed one way, which is crime, crime, crime and getting in trouble, using drugs, getting high.

Employment

The literature stated that employment is an obstacle for African-American men whether they are an offender or not (NAACP, 2014; Alexander, 2012). Alexander (2012) found that a white man with a criminal record is more likely to get a job than a black man without one. The participants found this to be true, but believed that their type of crime had more to do with it than their race. Participant #10 notes that it was easy for him to get a job. "With some jobs maybe but with others jobs, no. No, because I was working with Walmart before, this is my second time that I was back at Walmart, and they actually hired me." Participant #1 states that one of his convictions was for physically assaulting a police officer, which resulted in an employer telling him: "If we hire you and anything go wrong, it wouldn't do us no good to call the police because you'll fight them, too." Participant #3 says that he did not have the motivation to obtain legal employment. He reveals:

I ain't never think about no job. My momma said, "You need to get a job boy!" Yet and still I had a job, but I still wanted to hustle. I worked next door to that convalescent home (next to agency where the interview is being conducted) I stayed right there. I used to walk across the street to work but that wasn't enough. Eventually I got back out into the streets and I went back to prison and I did 10 years.

Participant #3 adds that the criminal justice system was a hindrance when he tried to maintain legal employment. He says:

I had a good job. I was a forklift operator on Southern Blvd. I made good money, but I was on parole. The parole officer made me quit my job because I couldn't make it to the parole office on time. She came to my job and harassed my boss. It was a whole big thing, but instead of me being educated on how the system supposed to be I got upset and quit my job. Instead of me going to her supervisor and saying let's rearrange my schedule I got bent out of shape, I quit and went

back to the streets. I went back to what I knew best, hustling and selling drugs and robbing.

Existing literature also fails to take physical disabilities into consideration when compiling employment data for incarcerated fathers. Five of the participants were receiving SSI for a disability and stated that they would prefer to work. Participant #1 state that no one wants to take a chance on convicted felons with a disability even if its desk duty. He shares:

I got a back injury and they tell me if I work I can't be on a job where I have to lift more than 10 pounds. So now I'm trying to get my license so that I can get a driving job. I'm trying to make it happen but it's moving slow. I'm trying to get back on my feet. I just have to get me a job and get my license. I just have to work from there — that's all I could do. I'm not going to lay down and give into it.

Participant #4, who also is considered disabled, says: “I don't think it's my criminal history. I think it's my health. I can't really get a job because I have seizures. When I tell people I have seizures they won't hire me.”

Seven of the participants were employed before their most recent conviction. Five of the participants are currently employed. When asked about their employment pre and post prison similar changes in demeanor were noticed. They started making eye contact, sat up, smiled, and stated how good it felt to work and attempt to earn a living even when it was not enough to support them. They referred to working as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provided them with an income, but the income was not sufficient. They felt that their only option was to participate in illegal activities, which resulted in them returning to prison.

Housing

The literature summoned that housing was a significant obstacle for offender's post-release because of the housing sanctions that were formulated by President Clinton and Hillary Clinton in the 1990s that denied federal housing and funds to convicted felons (Lowery, 2015; Alexander, 2012). When the participants were questioned about housing pre- and post-

incarceration, participants stated that obtaining housing was not a problem. Eight of the participants have always lived with a family member or friend. Only two participants owned a home but moved with family members after they lost their housing due to gambling and incarceration. Participant #6 states that his daughter, who recently turned 18, invited him to go apartment shopping with her and it terrified him. He shares:

I'm going to look for an apartment with my daughter. I don't understand how to get an apartment because I been living at home with my mom my whole life. I done been out to Hinesville and Huntsville. When I get high I have to leave town. I moved around cause my brother is in the military and I'll live with him. I'll do it again and then go live with him.

When probed, the other participants state they preferred living with family members. At the time of the interviews, four were living in transitional housing, and three were living with relatives, while the other three were living in their own apartments.

Reunification

Reunification was a significant part of this study for several reasons: (1) Throughout the literature African American men have expressed that reuniting with their families, especially their children was challenging even after attending reentry programs; and (2) African American men have consistently reiterated that family support is profound in regards to decreasing their chances of recidivating (Sanders, 2015; CJC, 2015). There have been few empirical studies on African American fathers impacted by incarceration and their families. However, this study yielded significant data about the paternal bond and age of the child. All of the participants repeatedly spoke of reuniting or enhancing the relationship with their older children. When asked for the reason why they felt a greater need to reunite with them, the participants stated that those were the relationships they felt needed the most work. In response, the researcher analyzed the demographic questionnaires and concluded that these participants had resided with the older

children at one time which can be linked to the cohesiveness of their parental bond. Also, the demographic data suggested that the participants did not express much interest in the relationship with their younger children due to the relationships with the children's caregivers, which in some cases consisted of grandparents, aunts, or uncles.

Relationships with Children's Caregivers

If your mother and father walk off to leave you to die, then what's the chances of a woman leaving you. I would always leave you first. I wouldn't give you the chance to leave me. I'm the same way now; that's why I see a psychologist now.
— Participant #2

Moynihan (Coates, 2015) predicted that incarceration would tear African-American families apart for generations. When asked about the relationships with their children's caregivers, Participants #1, #2, and #10 became enraged with anger. Participant #1 cries as he shares how his children were put up for adoption by his wife while he was incarcerated. Now that he is free he refuses to be in the presence of his children's mother. He states:

I tell my daughter all the stuff your mom did to me don't ever bring her around me again. She told the judge that she was fearing her life — that I threatened to kill her. I said I didn't threaten to kill her. Your momma sent me there. Out of all the times that I did so much wrong, I barely went to jail and here she go sending me to jail. Then like she always did stuff to try and hurt me. I haven't seen her in 15 years, but she stay trying to get my kids to bring her around. I told them straight up, don't do that. I just let them know, you know. My daughter said I understand. I said OK! Respect my wishes cause if I see her I'm liable to go back to jail.

Participant #10 states that his son's mother refuses to let him see his son because she does not want the child around a criminal. His contact is limited to Facebook. Participant #2 states that he has not seen his three daughters in years because of their mothers. He adds:

I made sure I took care of them, three girls. Now they mother them wanted to run me down town and everything else and wanted me locked up because I didn't want a relationship because I wasn't no family life man because I didn't have a family life.

Two participants state that they had excellent relationships with their children's mothers. One of the participants got married to the mother of his son while in prison. Participant # 5 states that co-parenting with his son's mother is difficult because she allows him to participate in illegal activity at her home. He says:

I think she kinda let him do it. It's a big problem. She don't do anything about it. Sunday it was about 15 people at the house all gits, all around there and they go in and out her house. They call her momma (laughter). She love to party. She throw parties at the house. It's a no-win situation with him being told something the way she tell him. She don't know how to tell him.

Participant #9 says that his wife brought the children to see him once and decided not to take them again because she had read that it could be traumatic. He states:

About three months after she came I said you'll be back in about 90 days. She said, Oh I been meaning to tell you I'm not ever coming back there again. I asked, what's bringing this about? She said, I don't think that's a place where I should be taking my children, it may be something mental on them.

The participants also state that their children's caregivers strategically stripped all power away from them as fathers once they were incarcerated, which tarnished them as fathers in the eyes of their children.

Parenting Before Incarceration

The participants were asked to describe their relationship with their children before being incarcerated. Participants that resided with their children before incarceration expressed greater interest in reuniting with those children, which correlates with the data that implies the relationship before incarceration is pertinent to the success after incarceration (LaVigne, Davies & Brazzell, 2008). Eight of the participants say they were equally involved in the hands-on caretaking of their children before they were incarcerated. They described being hands on as cooking, cleaning, grooming, disciplining, and helping with homework. Participant #5 states:

I wasn't too hard on them. I just wanted them to get up, go to school. I'll pick them up and drop them off just like they were girls (laughter). I love my kids and I just couldn't see one of them getting abducted. They was almost in high school and I was still dropping them off and picking them up. That was just concern and love, you know.

Participant #2 says that he would keep all three of his daughters while their mothers clubbed together. Participant #9 states that he was his kids, primary caretaker, because his wife was the breadwinner. Participant #1 states that he and his daughters were so close that it caused conflict in his marriage. He says:

She was jealous of the kids. Like if I go to work, I'll come home and they haven't eaten. She cook and they wouldn't eat her cooking. I told her don't worry about it. I'll cook and clean and take them to the park and school. She just always wanted to stay distant. Then when I didn't have time for her because of something they wanted to do she got mad about it. After that she just resented them.

Parenting During Incarceration

The participants state that while they were incarcerated their children began to act out, which is a significant variable in existing literature, especially as it pertains to intergenerational incarceration. Participant #5 states that one of his sons dropped out of school and began to sell drugs and go to jail. "Yeah, I seen a change in disobedience, you know what I'm saying. It started to set in because I wasn't there." He adds:

They seen me a couple of times incarcerated but that's only when they started to do something wrong, then they will bring them up, so that I can talk to them. But I say the system should have something different set-up if you got kids or grandkids you can be able to mentor them or something like that from incarceration. But they don't have anything because it's so many different types of prisons that they have. They will send you to a maximum security prison with a drug charge. The last time I was in a room with two life sentence men that been there 30 years and I only had three years.

Participant #4 states that while he was incarcerated one of his daughters began to act out by writing bad checks, which landed her in adult prison for a year. Participant #3 says that his

16-year-old daughter got into boys and asked him to sign a waiver giving her permission to get married to an older man.

Also indicative of the data is that the participants state that they were sent to prisons far from their homes and their children's caregivers could not afford the cost of travel or phone calls (Hattery & Smith, 2014). As the participants recount their stories, the researcher observes each participant's behavior and concludes that this part was the most difficult part of the interview for them. The participants looked away to hide their watery eyes, spoke with cracked voices, and slumped. Participant #5 states that he felt responsible for his children acting out in an attempt to idolize his criminal behavior. Further, he states that when his son would visit him, he felt uncomfortable telling him not to sell drugs because of his situation. Only two of the participants attempted to parent from prison. The other six participants who had contact with their children expressed guilt and shame, saying that it was contradictory to their behavior to try and parent their children. Two of the participants did not have any contact with their children shortly after they were imprisoned. Participant #5 says that his contact with his children ended shortly after he was imprisoned because they were strategically put up for adoption. He adds:

I'm in jail and they sent papers saying that she was putting my kids up for adoption. That was after it was already done. They didn't notify me until everything was done, already done. Because my mom was living at the time, and, if she wanted to put them up, my mom was the next person in line to get them. But she didn't say anything until after it was all done. My youngest daughter was 4 and my oldest was 9. I didn't see them again until my oldest daughter was 18 and my youngest daughter, I just recently got into contact with her about a year ago. I was so mad! My momma told me, you took care of them well and when they turn 18 you'll see them again. And when they turned 18 they was at the door.

Parenting Post-Release

The participants were asked about their current relationships with their children. Participants #2 and #8 do not have any contact with their children. Participant #2 confesses that

he is not sure if he loves his daughters or himself enough to communicate with them because of their mothers. He says:

Awe man, we strangers. Mothers turned them against me. Most girls believe everything their mother's say. My daughters believe everything their mother's say. Before I came down here, I got to deal with them a lil bit but after then I had one that used to call me every week but she stopped calling me. It hadn't bothered me real bad because I done learned to be by myself. I don't know what love is. I was never gave love so I can't tell you I know what love is.

The researcher asked the participant to define love, and he responds, "I just think it's the neighbor next door, having kids, enjoying the family, but you gotta have that breded in you. It's something that don't come normal." Participant #8 states that his daughter has given up on the relationship and asked not to be contacted. Participant # 4 cannot have in-person visitation with his minor daughters because he molested one of them and spent five years in prison; however, he states that the mother of his other daughter said his daughter wants to come and live with him. Others state that it is difficult trying to get back in the habit of teaching and disciplining. Participant #3 says that he is open with his 11-year-old son to prevent him from going to prison. However, he has not revealed to his son that he was incarcerated. He also confides that he is nervous about pursuing a relationship with his daughter. He states: "It's a difficult situation because when you haven't been around someone and they still respect you, her feelings is deep rooted. So I don't want to pop into her life and pop back out." Participant #6 states that his daughter gives him \$20 a week and wants to be roommates. Participant #1, whose daughters were put up for adoption, received a phone call from his daughters whom he had not spoken to in eight years. He says he was speechless about how strong their relationships is after his incarceration, and proudly expresses that they talk to him about boys, school and their lives. At the time of the interview, one of them invited him to her high school graduation in June 2016.

Participant # 5 states that he has a relationship with his three children and is trying to teach them to stay out of prison, but feels he has to be their friend again first. He states:

I have to become their friend again before I can do the father work. I got one; I can't keep him out of trouble. Right now he in the dope game, you know what I'm saying. He try to idol things that I used to do, but it wasn't positive. I try to talk to him every day. I said you need to better yourself, you know. It's like he'll listen, but he won't listen cause he got all his homeboys in his ears. They got they lil clique. If one of them say something that he think is positive toward what he doing, that's what he will go with. I worry about him all the time. I worry about all my kids but him in particular because it's so many violent things going on in the world now and he don't know how to hide his income. I tell him you better save you some money for an attorney and a bond, so when it happens you straight.

He adds that he is not concerned about his daughter's criminal behavior because she only sells marijuana to a small clientele. He states:

She got a couple of clients and that's it, but it help her pay her bills, you know. It's nothing big what she is doing. It all fall back on what I was in my life back then that they seen. I gave them everything they wanted and now they couldn't get from me cause I said now I gotta stop this.

He also has a son at a top university and says that he tells him every day that he does not know how he turned out so different. He concludes by implying that he felt responsible for the encounters his children have had with the criminal justice system. He states:

Oh, it (incarceration) devastated my family. It had a lot to do with my kids. You know I had four boys and a girl. I wasn't there for the boys and my daughter is the oldest. They kind of strayed away and a couple of them didn't graduate from high school. I got one that's in college in Alabama now. He's the baby boy. He was more less kept and preserved by his mom. The rest of them had mothers. The mothers didn't do what they should've did. As A father when I was out in society I did what I was supposed to do. I fault myself for them being a lack of success.

The relationship Participant #9 has with his daughter highlights the strength and resilience of the paternal bond. He states:

I got a letter, and I'm looking at it thinking it was a friend who had got out because the return address was Louisiana. I opened the letter a picture fall out of it and it's a young girl. Then as I look at the picture, I'm seeing my own features. I

say man this girl look like me almost. A voice spoke to me and said turn it over, then I turned it over it said daddy you have waited long enough. I took the letter put it down, picked it up and walked around. I'm looking at the letter and want to read, but I am so touched. When I opened the letter up and started reading, I said man this girl is very intelligent. In reading the letter, I felt she was kinda hard on me right cause she asked me, in the letter she said of all the times you told me you loved me, how could I believe that if you knew that you had a daughter on the way, how could you continue to sell drugs?

Recidivism

The core of this study was recidivism. Why do African-American men continue to recidivate? When asked if they believed they had been to prison for the last time some of the participants expressed uncertainty. Part of the uncertainty stemmed from the environment they were returning to and their outlook on the criminal justice system. Five of the participants articulate that they were not sure if they would return to prison because they thought every time was the last time. When asked if this had to do with housing, employment or other resources they responded, "No." This is in conflict with the literature that lists those things as the main reasons recidivism is so high amongst African-American men. Participants state that it had nothing to do with those variables but more so with them not knowing if they were capable of giving up their criminal activities. Participant #9 argues:

The programs, you know what if the programs can keep — what everything revolves around is money. You can have the best intentions in the world but when you are accustomed to a certain lifestyle and you not getting the money. Right, I'm used to getting whatever the fuck I want, but now I have to contain it, and it's hard, it's real hard. Not only being in the drug game, it's not only addictive for the high. If you in it and you making money, the money get to be addictive.

Participant #6 states:

I don't have stealing in my head no more, but I gotta have money in my pockets, you know what I'm saying. But I still won't touch nothing cause I done been to prison four times and each time I got out I started back doing what I was doing. The second time was the same. The third time was the same thing. Now I'm on my fourth time, it ain't nothing like that no more.

Participant #8 says:

This last experience took a lot out of me. I don't think I'm going back, and it took a lot from me to adjust. See I thought I had got it all out my system. I thought I didn't have to worry about incarceration no more. This last time I was stressed out, I lost weight, I couldn't sleep. I just wasn't ready to go to jail.

Another participant reveals that he was addicted to making fast money by selling drugs.

In relation to this study, the participant's responses also can be linked to the theory, specifically their worldview, which suggests that incarceration is part of their life's journey. The remaining participants state that they are now grandfathers and have vowed to stay out of prison to help their young daughters raise their grandchildren. They expressed guilt for inflicting the oppressions of incarceration upon their children and think that being a good grandfather will compensate for not being a good father to their children. Participant #6 says:

I'm not going back out there to do the same. I'm trying to stay strong. I got three grand boys, so now I got to be responsible for that. I got to help my daughter out. That's on my mind every day. That stay on my mind. I'm a granddaddy now!

Similar to Participant #6, Participant #5 proclaims:

It's not an option. If I had any thoughts of going back, I would not have came here. As far as my kids that's another thing keep me straight right now. They in my life. I want it, now I just have to get a job to help them. It's been over 16 years and I haven't done anything for them besides talk. That's not good enough for me.

Participant #5 sums it up:

My children, nephew and nieces they look up to me. They come to me for advice, a lot of them look up to me. They talk to me about their relationships. When I move out their life when I go to prison they don't have a guy a there. They can't be productive without having someone in their life. They will come see me or write me, they send me money, but it's like I can't afford to do it anymore. Then on top of that, it's what you're doing to people when you selling them drugs. I can't. I grew out of that. I don't want no part of that life anymore. I want to enjoy my life out here. Start my life over and be a productive member of society and pay my taxes. It's been a rough-rough road for me but it's the road I had chose. My goals are greater than what I had set. Why should I go back out there? I can't afford to go back to prison and something happen to my kids or me and I'm incarcerated. I don't want to live like that anymore.

Post-Release Environment

The participants also describe their environments as a contributor to high recidivism rates. One participant states, “Home is home. When we get out it’s not like we can go anywhere else.” Another participant says that when you have to live with family and friends you cannot tell them what to do so you end up giving in to temptation. The most intriguing component of this section of the interview came from Participant #3:

Once I got out, you know my neighborhood Boynton Beach they glorify stuff like that. Like the first thing they will say is like yeah my homeboy done got out. They come looking for you, not looking for you in a bad way but looking for you to hang out with you. You have like loyal guys you grew up with; they gonna come and show you love — we call it breaking bread. They gonna come and give you \$3-\$400, some drugs to sell like a start-up kit.

Participant #1 states:

I haven’t been to my hometown, one town over from here in two years. I ain’t giving the police no reason to mess with me. I don’t even go and see my family. I see them on Facebook. I’m not coming through there, it’s a trap. I’m not going back.

This quote from Participant #1 is representative of not just the role the environment plays in recidivism but also how the participants view the criminal justice system.

Outlook on the Criminal Justice System

The participants were asked for their opinions of the criminal justice system. All of the participants call the sentencing guidelines harsh and unfair. Participant #1 adds:

They could change because half of the stuff they lock people up for- Ok they can lock people up but the time they give people for it is ridiculous. You get more time driving on a suspended license than murder. I got a partner doing 10 years now for getting caught with a dime rock. Really, when I heard that. I got two cousins in jail guilty by association, never had a drug charge and they facing 10 years right now.

Participant # 5 agrees that you should do the time for your crime but the time guidelines are ridiculous as suggested in the literature and by political reformists (Alexander, 2012). He

further stated that a person who sells two crack rocks should not get a sentence longer than a murderer. He admitted that he was sentenced to eight years for a small amount of crack and states, “The justice system, it only works for certain people. It ain’t set up for everybody. It does what the government want it to do. I don’t set good with it. I don’t think it’s fair.” Participant # 3 was facing 15 years for marijuana. He says that once you serve time for your prior convictions they should not be considered in new convictions. He states: “Every time that I went to prison my time was always greater because of my priors. I never went to prison and did less time. I mean I did 10 years straight.”

Surprisingly, the participants disagree with the research that suggests race plays a major role in recidivating and the outlook on the criminal justice system. Only two of them stated that it was racist and unfair. The participants explain that you have to get to a point where you are ready to change and defeat the obstacles and temptations. Participant # 6 defends the criminal justice system:

They do they job, they got a family to feed. They just waiting on somebody to have the opportunity to go do what they do. They do what they do. I ain’t mad with what they do. I’m mad at myself for putting myself in that situation. So they got to get paid somehow.

Implications for Social Work Policy, Practice, Research and Education

The culmination of the themes and social work commitment to those impacted by incarceration imply that social work policy, practice, research, and education needs revising to accommodate individuals impacted by incarceration, especially African-American fathers. NASW supports this by recognizing the need to enhance policy in relation to this population (NASW, 2012). Social Work Speaks represents the policies adopted and revised by the NASW’s policy making body and the Delegate Assembly. It states that social workers working with individuals and families impacted by incarceration have the responsibility of providing

rehabilitation programs, culturally competent treatment, and, most importantly, advocacy (Matejkowski, Johnson & Stevenson, 2014). The data further implies that there is a tremendous need for social worker's professional skills in regards to addressing trauma, prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation with incarcerated fathers and their children. These commitments can only be honored by attacking this on every level, starting with policy creation and revision.

Policy

NASW's outlook on incarceration coincides with the themes revealed in this study. Its policy statement says that an adequate level of policies could reduce the rates of recidivism and enhance the reentry and reunification process (Matejkowski, Johnson & Stevenson, 2014). From a policy perspective, the data implies that the collaboration between social work and criminal justice needs strengthening. Social work has been a part of prison programs for nearly a century (Matejkowski, Johnson & Stevenson, 2014). Social workers are overwhelmingly represented in the criminal justice workforce but have little power in the creation and revision of policies (Wilson, 2010).

Melvin Wilson (2010), manager of the NASW Center for Workforce Studies, suggests that social workers should be an integral part of legislative action because their concern for prisoners and public safety will help to create an improved relationship between the justice system and offenders. The findings of this study and NASW implications affirm that social worker's involvement in the process of public policy development can help the justice system provide more effective services to the offender, their families, and their communities.

However, there has always been conflict due to the different values of the social work profession and prison regulations (Matejkowski, Johnson & Stevenson, 2014). Therefore, policy stakeholders should request that social workers receive more leadership roles to address issues

that individuals impacted by incarceration experience. The Second Chance, Recidivism Reduction, and Corrections Acts have been revised to ensure that treatment innovations and resources are available to these fathers. However, this study indicates that there is a need for social work advocates to further amend these acts to include the offender's children. The study also implies that social workers should play a role in addressing the impact of long sentences on the paternal bond. The average length of stay for a male offender is 80 to 103 months (La Vigne, Davies, and Brazzell, 2008). The length of stay has risen 36 percent since 1990, increasing the amount of time fathers are separated from their children.

This study also implies that policies should address the family unit instead of just the offender. New policies should fund visitation during incarceration for fathers that participate in prison reentry programs. The literature has shown that the level of communication during incarceration is a significant factor in reducing recidivism. More than half of parents (mothers and fathers) do not receive any visits from their children during their incarceration (Christian, 2009; La Vigne, Davies & Brazzell, 2008). The literature also reveals that mothers serve an average of five years less than fathers and receive more visits (Day, 2005). The Bureau of Justice (2008) study found that only 14.6 percent of fathers reported personal visits from their child compared to 39 percent of mothers.

The findings imply that policies and funds should be distributed throughout the communities to which these men are returning. Participants of this study expressed that one of their post-release obstacles are the environments to which they often must return. The participant's also stated that the programs in their communities were effective but did not have the resources or funds to serve the large amount of offenders in the community. The findings also imply that more trauma-informed programs should be available to offenders and their

families. All the participants experienced trauma throughout their childhood and adulthood. As the findings depict, all the participants were victims of physical and mental abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Some of the participant's trauma also consisted of the broken relationships with their children. Yet, current post-release programs in which the men participated only addressed external problems such as employment, housing, and food insecurity.

Not only did the data imply that there is a need for the criminal justice system and social work to collaborate, it overwhelmingly indicates that the criminal justice system needs to strengthen its relationship with child welfare. For example, Participant #1 revealed that his children were placed for adoption while he was incarcerated without his knowledge. The participants also shared that their numerous incarcerations traumatized their children. Children are not only physically impacted by the removal of a parent. They also experience emotional trauma (Poehlmann & Shlafer, 2010). Any form of separation from a parent could result in confusion, fear, stress, and/or sadness. Miller (2006) states that death is naturally occurring and final whereas separation due to incarceration is ambiguous. Miller implies that children do not know how to grieve when a parent is alive but physically removed. Therefore, the findings implied that the criminal justice system and child welfare system should create programs that work with incarcerated fathers and their children. These programs should consist of a tracking system that allows the father to know the whereabouts of his children. The programs should also work together to encourage, strengthen, and rebuild the paternal relationship. This could be done through therapy, supplying postage for letters, a monthly stipend for phone calls, and money for visitation.

Practice

The findings of this study imply that social work practitioners have to shift their paradigm in regards to working with individuals and families affected by incarceration. This includes responding to the needs of this population, providing cost-effective services, and promoting social functioning. The data coincides with the social work move toward a more trauma-informed practice. Therefore, it is pertinent that practitioners implement a therapeutic approach that focuses on stress reduction, coping, trauma, and parenting. Wilson (2010) states that treatment is an instrument to help prevent future criminal behavior.

The data also implies that practitioners must look at paternal incarceration through many lenses that encompasses the father, child, and family unit. The research reveals that practitioners have been trained to focus on individuals affected by incarceration versus the whole family. Practitioners must develop more evidenced-based interventions that work with the family during and after incarceration. This includes identifying current research and available resources that seeks to address unresolved trauma, their outlook on the criminal justice system, societal barriers, family structure, and their post-release environment.

Research

Historically social work has been involved with the criminal justice system; however, the profession has not contributed much in regards to research. Social workers have been forced to rely on other professions data and assumptions. This study illustrates that needs to change because social worker's contribution to research and commitment to clients have shifted gears. Wilson (2010) implies that social workers job in the criminal justice system should no longer be limited to case management but instead an integrative approach that is inclusive of theory, policy, and research. The data also implies that social work curriculums should be revised to

train students how to conduct research on this population during incarceration and post-release. This study implies that there is a minimal amount of research on incarcerated parents and even less on African-American fathers affected by incarceration. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct more research that is inclusive of the fathers and their children.

The data also implies that there needs to be more qualitative studies so that the fathers can have the opportunity to express their concerns and fears about reentry, recidivism, and reunification. The data also speaks to the lack of mixed-method studies with the father and child. Conducting mixed-method studies opens the door for significant collaboration between the criminal justice system and social workers. The criminal justice system primarily conducts quantitative studies whereas the majority of existing qualitative studies have been conducted by other professions such as social work and psychology. Additionally, the data implies that there is a need to conduct more research and clinical assessments that will address trauma and allow researchers to enter the lived experiences of incarcerated fathers and their families.

Education

NASW states that schools of social work need to heighten their focus on incarceration in their curriculum. Incarceration is a pressing issue politically and academically. During the 2015 CSWE Deans meeting, it was reiterated that social work curriculums must be more inclusive of working with individuals, families, and communities impacted by incarceration (personal communication with Olga Osby, 2016). Amended curriculums must train and educate students on how to promote social justice and advocate for this population. Social work has historically been strongly associated with the positivist school of thought of crime prevention. This means that the structure of curriculums must first get students to delete the pro-punishment school of thought that stringent punishment prevents crime and instead adopt the positivist philosophy that

suggests criminal behavior is caused by factors such as poverty, chronic and cultural trauma, mental illness, and chronic abuse (Wilson, 2010).

Furthermore, there is little discussion about the delivery of services for families impacted by incarceration. The researcher reviewed numerous Introduction to the Social Work Profession textbooks published from 2000-2015 and chapters about incarceration was, on average, 10 pages and usually in one of the final chapters. The data collected implies that there is a significant need for the revision of family and child welfare courses. Based on the findings of this study, these courses should be revised to include trauma associated with incarceration, intervention, prevention, and rehabilitation for individuals and families affected by incarceration

This study implies that there is a need for social work to take a more aggressive stance toward promoting its founding principle — social justice. The culmination of revised and enhanced policies, practice, education, and research will not only impact the participants of this study but the communities in which they reside.

Chapter Six

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, and CONCLUSION

The identified themes, combined with the theory and existing literature has given tremendous insight into why African-American men struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification. The purpose of this study was to explore why African-American men continue to be plagued by incarceration. This study began with the history of African-American men and their experiences with incarceration in America. The historical journey gave insight into the assumptions of how and why African-American men have become victims of mass incarceration, which further demonstrated the need for this study. The literature implies that African-American men have always been in a system of physical and mental confinement. The literature supports this implication by constructing a linear map starting with slavery, Black Codes, convict leasing, Jim Crow, and the constant revision of sentencing laws and policies. The Theory of African American Offending supports this journey by theorizing that the history of incarceration among African-American men has become a permanent part of their worldview, which has led to the massive destruction of African-American families.

Based on the literature and theory a phenomenological approach was selected. This approach presented the participants with the opportunity to share their experiences. More importantly, it gave the participants the opportunity to be heard. The majority of today's studies are quantitative in nature and do not reflect the same obstacles and solutions as voiced by those impacted by incarceration. For example, the literature overwhelmingly indicates that African-American men consider housing and employment to be a major obstacle post-release; however, this study finds that unaddressed trauma and stress are major barriers. This finding is extremely significant in the development of programs for African-American men and recidivism. The

identified themes, combined with the theory and existing literature, have given tremendous insight into why African-American men struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification. The themes also correspond to the research questions that guided the study. The findings and their relevance to existing studies, limitations and future research will be discussed in this chapter.

Responses to Research Questions

The participants' responses revealed themes that corresponded with the research questions, including research question one: What is the lived experience of African American fathers that participate in prison reentry programs? Throughout the themes, the participants expressed that their participation in prison reentry programs heightened their expectations for post-release. The participants stated that the programs did not prepare them for the difficult reality of reintegrating back into their families and society. The participants also said that the post-release reentry programs were sufficient, but the program rules were strict, which made them feel as if they were still imprisoned. For example, the participants did not agree with curfews, deadlines to secure employment, and timelines to complete parenting, anger management, and/or substance abuse courses. The participants also highlighted what they deemed as an essential component of reentry programs such as the resources, group meetings, and discussions.

Research question two: Why do African-American fathers continue to struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after participating in prison reentry programs? All of the themes respond to this question. Under recidivism, the participants stated that their post-release environment and outlook on the criminal justice system were instrumental in decreasing their chance of recidivating. The most apparent theme that offered an explanation was trauma. All of

the participants have endured chronic unaddressed trauma, which gave tremendous insight into why they struggle with reunification and continue to commit crimes.

Research question three: What is the lived experience of African-American fathers who are reintegrating into society and their families post-release? As demonstrated throughout the themes, these participants are reentering their families and society while battling trauma, institutionalization, damaged relationships with caregivers, and uncertainty about their futures. Furthermore, these participants often are forced back into unstable environments and families that present temptations to relinquish their freedom. These participants also are entering a world where their criminal histories define who they are in the workforce and their family structure. The participants lived experience post-release validate why they continue to struggle with reentry and recidivism.

Limitations and Observations

Study Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations. The constraints of this study include a small sample size that is not generalizable to the larger population, a researcher constructed instrument that had never been used before, and the researcher's personal experiences and biases with having an incarcerated father. The researcher had to be certain not to react to the participant's responses due to personal experiences. To lessen the chances of this affecting the study, the researcher's dissertation committee controlled for biases. The researcher also relied on memoing to ensure biases were not reflected in the study.

Observations

The researcher noticed how none of the men questioned the purpose of the research. They were just excited about having the opportunity to be heard. Many of the participants took out their cellphones and voluntarily showed pictures of their children. They showed gratitude for contributing to research about something that has greatly impacted their lives and their families. Many expressed hope that their contributions will stop the cycle of generational incarceration for their families and others. They welcomed the conversational style of the interview as it gave them the opportunity to share their unfiltered perspectives of the obstacles they face as convicted felons. During the interviews, the participants and I shared many laughs, partially to lessen the uncomfortable reality of the situation. Despite the relaxed nature of some parts of the interviews, many parts were painful but powerful reminders of the consequences of their actions. For example, Participant #5 shared how his actions left his children with nothing but a life path much like his own. I never expected any of the participants to divulge information that would paint them in such a bad light.

Additionally, it was often frustrating to hear how our system as social justice advocates actually contributed to some of the obstacles faced by released offenders. As social workers, we pride ourselves on preserving families, but as expressed by NASW, we have neglected to do so in regards to this population. The realization of the shortcomings of our current system has renewed my enthusiasm to enhance current practice and policy through research and collaboration.

Future Research

Based on the data collected, the researcher will conduct future mixed-method studies with fathers affected by incarceration and their children. The researcher also will conduct a study

that focuses on the paternal bond and the gender and age of their children. Ultimately, the researcher will create a trauma-informed model for evidenced-based reentry programs. In the near future, the researcher will conduct a case study with Participant #2 and analyze the chronic unresolved trauma he has endured.

Conclusion

The 10 participants represented in this study have spent a combined 79 years in prison. It is time for a change. It is time to actively pursue the revisions of laws not just offer political rhetoric. This study has produced rich findings that can serve as a starting point. Moreover, this study was a representation of the voices of the victims, unlike the majority of existing studies. The detriment history has placed on these men, and by extension their families, cannot be erased; however, the laws that continuously allow the systematic mass incarceration of individuals can be revised. It is the recommendation of this researcher that intense collaboration between social workers, persons affected by incarceration, policymakers, and criminologists create prevention and intervention programs that will obliterate the revolving door of incarceration.

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[a-report-says.html](http://www.mobile.nytimes.com/2015/02/11/us/jails-have-become-warehouses-for-the-poor-ill-and-addicted-a-report-says.html)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Letter to Participants

March 2, 2016

Dear Research Participants,

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is, *Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggles with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification*. The research is being conducted by Precious Skinner- Osei, MSW, a doctoral student in the School of Social Work at Barry University. This study aims to explore why African American fathers continue to struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after participating in prison reentry programs. The goal of this study is to collect data that may assist criminal justice reform initiatives about the formulation of more diverse prison programs and policies that represent the needs of African American fathers.

You are invited to participate in this study on a voluntary basis and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study you will not be penalized. I anticipate the number of participants involved to be a minimum of ten African American fathers (ex-offenders).

The study will require a one-time interview that will take approximately 1 hour. However, the total time required for your participation may take up to 3 hours, this includes the enrollment period, survey and follow-up if need it. The interviews will be conducted and audio recorded at the agency. The interviews will be conducted, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher, Precious Skinner-Osei. Your information will be kept in a secure password protected computer database and locked in a file cabinet that only I will have access. This study is confidential, and you will be identified by a pseudonym/ alias name. The study is expected to be completed in its entirety in approximately one year, but your physical participation will only be

required once during the interview. The researcher will discard your data after five years. The audio recordings will be deleted once the interviews are transcribed.

There are minimal emotional risks associated with this study. During the interview, you may experience discomfort triggered by some of the questions, which may also trigger unpleasant memories and thoughts. To minimize this risk, you may withdraw from the study without penalty, take a break, or skip questions. You may also refuse to be audio-recorded and still participate in the study. I will also provide you with a debriefing sheet that contains resources that offer emotional support in your geographical location should you need them. If you should need medical attention I will be prepared to call 911.

Although you will not benefit directly from participating in this study, you may contribute to the discussion and development of prison reentry programs and their impact on African American fathers. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Precious Skinner-Osei, at pskinnerosei@barry.edu or (305) 899-3900, my committee chair, Dr. Osby, at osoby@barry.edu or (305) 899-3961, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at bcook@barry.edu or (305) 899-3020.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Precious Skinner-Osei, MSW

Appendix B: Informed Consent

This consent form for research participation contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Title of Project: *Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification.*

Voluntary Participation

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary. Should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse consequences. If you should choose to no longer participate in the study, then any information you have will be destroyed. Please consider the information carefully and feel free to ask questions. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form for your records.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore why African-American fathers continue to struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after participating in evidenced-based prison reentry programs.

Duration and Time

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately 3 hours. This time frame includes, enrollment, the demographic questionnaire, the actual interview, transcription and time for the researcher to contact you to assure the validity of the transcription.

Procedures

You will be asked to complete a 13-item demographic questionnaire and schedule an interview at sign-up. At your interview, you will be asked 16 questions about your experience in a prison reentry program. Your interview will be recorded on an audio device. You may refuse to be recorded and instead your responses will be handwritten by the researcher.

Risks

There are minimal emotional risks associated with this study. During the interview, you may experience discomfort triggered by some of the questions, which may also trigger unpleasant memories and thoughts. To minimize this risk, if you are triggered you may withdraw from the study without penalty, take a break, or skip questions. Also, I will provide you with a debriefing sheet that contain emotional support resources in your geographical location should you need them. If you should need medical attention I will be prepared to call 911.

Benefits

Although you will not benefit directly from participating in this study, you may contribute to the discussion and development of prison reentry programs and their impact on African American fathers.

Statement of Confidentiality

Your participation in this research is confidential to the full extent of the law. All study-related information will be stored on a password protected computer and locked in a file cabinet at the researcher's home that only she has access to. The consent forms will be stored separately from the transcripts and locked in a file cabinet at the researcher's home that only she has access to. Barry University Institutional Review Board may review records related to this research study. No personally identifiable information will be shared. Pseudonyms will be used to identify the interviews, direct quotes, and references. If a publication or presentation results from the research, pseudonyms will also be used. All data will be discarded after five years, and the audio recordings will be deleted once they are transcribed.

Participant Rights

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits/services to which you are otherwise entitled. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study. Barry University Institutional Review Board reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable per, University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions

For questions, concerns, complaints, or if you feel that you have been harmed as a result of study participation you may contact Precious Skinner-Osei at pskinnerosei@barry.edu or (305) 899-3900, Olga Osby at oosby@barry.edu or (305) 899-3961, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook at bcook@barry.edu or (305) 899-3020.

Signing the consent form

I have read this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that by agreeing to participate I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form and that I will receive a copy.

Printed Name of Participant

Participant Signature

Date

I have explained the research to the participant and a copy of this form has been given to the participant.

Printed Name of PI

PI Signature

Date

Appendix C: Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Precious Skinner-Osei. I'm a doctoral student at Barry University in the School of Social Work. I am here to ask for your participation in an upcoming study that I am conducting. The purpose of the study is to explore why African-American fathers continue to struggle with reentry, recidivism, and reunification after participating in reentry programs. The anticipated goal of this study is to assist criminal justice reform initiatives in the formulation of more culturally competent prison programs and policies that represent the needs of African - American fathers.

To participate in this study: 1.) Must be an African-American father; 2.) Served at least one year in prison; 3.) Participated in a prison reentry program; 4.) Have a biological child(ren) under the age of 18, and 5.) Been in prison more than once.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign the informed consent forms and complete a demographic questionnaire. After completion of the questionnaire, we will schedule a time to conduct the interview. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your experiences with incarceration, reentry, family reunification, fatherhood, recidivism, and prison reentry programs. The interviews will take approximately 1 to 2 hours. They are scheduled to begin the first week of April 2016 and will be conducted here at the agency.

All information will be kept confidential and stored in a secure location that only I have access. The interviews will be recorded. If you refuse to be recorded, I will take notes during the interview instead. During the interview, you may, skip, or refuse to answer questions at any time. If you choose to end your participation, you will not be penalized by the agency or me. It is possible that some questions may trigger emotions or cause discomfort. I will provide you with a debriefing sheet with emotional support resources in your geographical area.

There are no direct benefits or incentives, but you will indirectly help by possibly contributing to the development of prison reentry programs and their impact on African-American fathers.

Do you have any questions for me in regards to the research, procedures, or interview? If you have questions at a later time or during the study you may contact me at pskinnerosei@barry.edu or (305) 899-3900, or my Chair Olga Osby at osby@barry.edu or (305) 899-3961, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at bcook@barry.edu or (305) 899-3020.

Appendix D: Barry University IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board
11300 NE 7nd Avenue.
Miami FL 33161
P 305.899.3020 or 1800 756.6000. ext. 3020
F 305.899 3026
www.barry.edu

Research with Human Subjects
Protocol Review

Date: April 5, 2016

Protocol Number: 160316

Title: Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism and Reunification.

Meeting Date: March 16, 2016

Researcher Name: Address: Ms. Precious Skinner-Osei
12644 NW 61h Street
Coral Springs, FL 33071

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Olga Osby- Social Work

Dear Ms. Skinner-Osei:

On behalf of the Barry University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have verified that the specific changes requested by the convened IRB on March 16, 2016, have been made.

It is the IRB's judgment that the rights and welfare of the individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected; that the proposed research, including the process of obtaining informed consent, will be conducted in a manner consistent with requirements and that

the potential benefits to participants and to others warrant the risks participants may choose to incur. You may therefore proceed with data collection.

As principal investigator of this protocol, it is your responsibility to make sure that this study is conducted as approved by the IRB. Any modifications to the protocol or consent form, initiated by you or by the sponsor, will require prior approval, which you may request by completing a protocol modification form.

It is a condition of this approval that you report promptly to the IRB any serious, unanticipated adverse events experienced by participants during this research, whether or not they are directly related to the study protocol. These adverse events include, but may not be limited to, any experience that is fatal or immediately life-threatening, is permanently disabling, requires (or prolongs) inpatient hospitalization, or is a congenital anomaly cancer or overdose.

The approval granted expires on April 4, 2017. Should you wish to maintain this protocol in an active status beyond that date, you will need to provide the IRB with an IRB Application for Continuing Review (Progress Report) summarizing study results to date. The IRB will request a progress report from you approximately three months before the anniversary date of your current approval.

If you have questions about these procedures, or need any additional assistance from the IRB please call the IRB point of contact Ms. Barbara Cooke at (305) 899-3020 or send an email to dfeldman@barry.edu. Finally, please review your professional liability insurance to make sure your coverage includes the activities in this study.

Sincerely,

Chair, Institutional Review Board Barry University

Department of Psychology 11300 NE 2nd Avenue Miami Shores, FL 33161

Cc: Dr. Olga Osby

Note: The investigator will be solely responsible and strictly accountable for any deviation from or failure to follow the research protocol as approved and will hold Barry University harmless from all claims against it arising from said deviation or failure.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Section A. Family Background

1. Please discuss your upbringing. For example, describe your childhood and who raised you.

Section B. Incarceration

2. Please share your experiences with the criminal justice system. For example, arrests, convictions, prison.

3. Please explain how you think incarceration has impacted your family.

Section C. Father- Child Relationship

4. Please describe your relationship with your children before, during, and after incarceration.

5. Please tell me about any behavioral changes in your children during and after your incarceration.

6. Please explain what steps you are taking to improve your relationship with your children.

Section D. Relationship with Child's Caregiver

7. Please describe your relationship with your child's caregiver before, during, and after incarceration. For example, do they include you in decision making and keep you informed about school, etc...

Section E. Living Arrangements

8. Please discuss your living arrangements before incarceration.

9. Please discuss your plans for living arrangements.

Section F. Employment History

10. Please explain the effect you believe your criminal history has on your employment status.

Section G. Educational Background

11. Please describe your educational experiences.

Section H. Reentry Program Participation

12. Please explain your participation in the prison reentry program. For example, why did you participate in the program?

13. Please explain and describe the reentry program you participated in. For example, do you feel the program represented African American men experiences within their families and communities.

14. Please express what changes you would recommend for other reentry programs.

15. Please discuss your experience after completing the program. For example, reentry, recidivism, and reunification.

16. Please discuss your thoughts on the criminal justice system and reform.

Appendix E-1: Demographic Questionnaire

Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification

Participant Name _____

Date: _____

Please write in your answer

1. What is your age? _____
2. How many children do you have? _____
3. Do you have children from multiple partners, if so how many partners? _____

Please circle your answers

4. Did you live with any of your children before incarceration? YES or NO
5. Are you currently in a relationship with your child's caregiver? YES or NO
6. Are you married, single, or divorced?

Please write your answers

7. How many times have you been in prison? _____
8. What was your age the first time you were arrested? _____
9. What was the first crime you were convicted of? _____
10. What were you convicted of the last time you were incarcerated? _____
11. How much time were you sentenced to? _____

Please circle your answers

12. Are you currently employed? YES or NO
13. Were you employed before you were incarcerated? YES or NO

Appendix F: Agency Approval Letter

[Redacted]

To: Precious Skinner-Osei

Today at 2:37 PM

Good Afternoon Precious,

I am e-mailing you to let you know that [Redacted] has approved your request to conduct your study after you receive approval from Barry University IRB. We look forward to working with you.

Please contact me with any questions.

[Redacted]

Director of Justice Services

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Email: [Redacted]

50 Years of Strengthening Our Community.

Appendix G: NIH Certification



Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Precious Osei** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 12/09/2015

Certification Number: 1934966



Appendix H: Research Flyer

**Interested in Being Interviewed for a Research Study****About Your Experience in a Reentry Program?**

Research Title: *Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggles with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification*

I am seeking to interview African American fathers (ex-offenders) that participated in a prison reentry program. The interviews should last about 1 to 2 hours and you will be answering questions about your experiences before, during, and after participating in a reentry program.

If you are interested in being interviewed, please contact me at the telephone or email below.

Although, there are no direct benefits to you, your participation may contribute to the discussion and development of prison reentry programs and their impact on African American fathers. Some of the questions in the interview may make you feel uncomfortable, or bring up some difficult memories. You will only have to answer the questions you are comfortable answering. You can also stop the interview at any time without penalty or judgement. You will also be given the crisis hotline number (211), and information sheet, if you should need anyone to talk to, or experience any emotional distress.

Thank you,

Precious Skinner-Osei, MSWpskinnerosei@barry.edu (305) 899-3900. You may also contact my committee chair, Dr. Olga Osby, at (305) 899-3961 or osoby@barry.edu or Barry University Institutional Review Board's point of contact, Ms. Barbara Cook at (305) 899-3020 or bcook@barry.edu if you have any questions or concerns.

Appendix I: Research Debriefing Flyer

Support Resources for Research Participants

Researcher: Precious Skinner-Osei, MSW

pskinnerosei@[barry.edu](mailto:pskinnerosei@barry.edu) or (305) 899-3900

Title: *Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification*

Research Study During the interview, you may experience discomfort triggered by some of the questions, which may also trigger unpleasant memories and thoughts. Please remember that at any point during the interview you may take a break, decline questions, or withdraw from the study without penalty or judgement. Below is a list of hotline numbers and agencies that can provide support to you if you should need it. If you have any questions or concerns you may contact Barry University Institutional Review Board point of contact, Ms. Barbara Cook at (305) 899-3020 or bcook@barry.edu or my committee chair, Dr. Olga Osby at oosby@barry.edu or (305) 899-3961.

LOCAL SUPPORT RESOURCES

Palm Beach County

- Dial 2-1-1 for all support services, including counseling.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- 800-273-8255 (TALK)
- 800-784-2433 (SUICIDE)
- 800-799-4889 (TTY)

Vita

Precious Skinner-Osei, MSW, Ph.D.

12644 NW 6th Street
Coral Springs, FL 33071
pskinnerosei@gmail.com
(954) 260-2762

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Social Worker with over 13 years of professional experience in the areas of academic instruction, research, grant writing, community organizing, and service delivery. Experience teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels. Research interests and experience in paternal incarceration, impact of incarceration on children and families, opportunity of technology to improve parent-child communication during incarceration, and cognitive behavioral analysis of chronic trauma on incarcerated fathers. Grant writing experience including both federal and private funding. Experience in community organizing to address the needs of the food insecure and homeless. Service delivery experience to include the evaluation, treatment planning, case management, and individual/group counseling for various at-risk populations, including: children, adolescents, families, teen mothers, homeless persons, and veterans. Strengths include adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, strong work ethic, and time management.

EDUCATION

2016 Ph.D. in Social Work

Barry University School of Social Work, Miami Shores, FL

Dissertation Title: *Mass Incarceration: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Fathers' Struggle with Reentry, Recidivism, and Reunification.*

2003 Masters of Social Work

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Tallahassee, FL.

Concentration: Community Development and Organizing

2002 Fellowship

Hamburg, Germany

Concentration: International Social Work

2000 Bachelor of Arts

Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL.

Major: English and Communications

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

July 2016- Present

Florida Atlantic University School of Design and Social Inquiry

Boca Raton, FL

Visiting Instructor

Provide classroom instruction to Bachelor's and Master's level social work students in person and online. Course instruction has included: *Global Perspectives in Social Work, BSW Research Methods, MSW Social Work Research, and Social Welfare Policy*. Utilize a variety of technologies and instructional methodologies including web-based assignments, inclusion of relevant "TED Talks," and various social media outlets to keep courses relevant, stimulating, and likewise engage students in related social justice discussions. Develop lesson plans, advise students, organize coursework and conduct field visits. Also, provide individual student support as needed.

August 2015 - July 2016

Barry University School of Social Work

Miami Shores, FL.

Adjunct Instructor

Provided classroom instruction to Bachelor's and Master's level social work students. Course instruction has included: *Introduction to the Social Work Profession, Ways of Knowing Research, and Introduction to Clinical Assessment in Social Work Practice*. Utilized a variety of technologies and instructional methodologies including web based assignments, inclusion of relevant "TED Talks", and various social media outlets to keep courses relevant, stimulating, and likewise engage students in related social justice discussions. Developed lesson plans, organized coursework, and assessed student progress. Also, provided individual student support as needed.

May 2003- 2003

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

Tallahassee, FL.

Teaching Assistant

Assisted in preparing lessons plans, co-teaching, and supporting Bachelor's level social work students. Course instruction included: *Environmental Context in Social Work Practice and Service Delivery in Helping Professions*.

2001 – 2003

Leon County Schools

Tallahassee, FL.

Adult Education Instructor

Provided General Education Degree (GED) instruction for court ordered students. Developed lesson plans, organized coursework, assessed student progress and provided feedback to court liaison. Provided individual student support as needed. Provided employment resource information to include employment opportunities available for students with a criminal history. Performed other duties as required.

2001 – 2003

Leon County Schools

Tallahassee, FL.

Educator

Provided instruction for behaviorally challenged students with histories of abuse, neglect, and traumatic experiences. Developed lesson plans, organized coursework, assessed student progress, provided feedback to school-based team, worked closely with student parents/guardians and the Department of Children & Families (DCF), provided individual instruction and assistance as required. Integrated classroom behavioral modification techniques. Maintained documentation. Performed other duties as required.

1999 – 2001

Leon County Schools

Tallahassee, FL.

Teaching Assistant

Provided assistance to classroom teachers in the areas of individualized student instruction, documentation support, and classroom supervision. Performed other duties as required.

1999 – 2000

Leon County Schools

Tallahassee, FL.

Substitute Teacher

Provided instruction to students, classroom supervision, and maintained related documentation. Provided feedback to classroom teachers regarding student behavior and progress. Performed other duties as required.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**2010 – 2016****Adrenaline****Pompano Beach, FL.*****Behavioral Analyst/ Case Manager***

Evaluated individuals of all ages who exhibited behavioral and emotional challenges. Developed and implemented treatment plans, provided case management services as needed, maintained all clinical documentation as required by agency and state regulations, communicated client needs and treatment status to multidisciplinary treatment team, provided statistical data to funding agents. Performed other duties as required.

2007 - 2008**Workforce One****Fort Lauderdale, FL.*****Case Manager***

Assisted low-income teenage clients with employment services, identified potential employment obstacles, arranged for required transportation, and maintained related documentation. Provided bi-weekly status reports to the clients' supervisors to determine level of progression. Performed other duties as required.

2003**HOPE Homeless Shelter****Tallahassee, FL.*****Case Manager***

Advocated for homeless individuals on the Capitol, secured grant funding which supported the first homeless shelter for families located in Leon County, Florida, and provided related resource information to the community. Performed other duties as required.

2002**Catholic Charities****Tallahassee, FL.*****Case Manager***

Completed client assessments, developed treatment plans, and conducted individual and group treatment sessions. Communicated client needs to multidisciplinary team. Trained staff at multiple agencies on the use of the electronic Human Management Information System (HMIS) client tracking system. Performed other duties as required.

2001- 2002

Veterans Affairs

Tallahassee, FL.

Case Manager

Provided case management services for veterans and their families which included advocacy, linkage to medical, employment, therapy, and housing services, and ongoing individualized support. Maintained all required documentation. Communicated client needs to multidisciplinary team. Performed other duties as required.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2015

Miami Children's Initiative

Miami, FL.

Research Assistant

Collected data and prepared comprehensive analyses and periodic statewide reports for funding of Miami Children's Initiative "cradle-to-college-to-career" program. Developed an assessment tool to measure impoverished youth attitudes regarding employment.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

2016

United Way

Broward County, FL.

"We Care" Team Leader

Supervised a team of 12 volunteers wherein together we packaged over 30,000 meals for residents of Broward County.

2012-2016

Abraham Fitness

Coral Springs, FL.

Mental Health Counselor

Provide annual mental health support for competitors as they near competition.

2011-2016**True Vine C.O.G.I.C****Deerfield Beach, FL.*****Volunteer***

Participated in the planning and implementation of an annual clothing drive for needy children and families.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Skinner-Osei, P. (2015). Inherited convictions: The impact of parental incarceration. The Lord's Place men's reentry campus, Boynton Beach, FL.

Skinner-Osei, P. (2015). Mass incarceration: Who resides in America's prisons? Palm Beach Criminal Justice Commission meeting, Palm Beach, FL.

Skinner, P. (2002). The face of homelessness in Florida's Capitol. Florida State Capitol, Tallahassee, FL.

PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

McGhee, T., Scott, C. & Skinner-Osei, P. (2015). Comprehensive cradle-to-college-to-career strategy in Liberty City 2014-2015 State Summative Report. Miami, FL.

Skinner, P. (1999). The role of mentors with underprivileged youth. Look Closer Magazine. Tallahassee, FL.

EVALUATIONS

McGhee, T., Scott, C. & Skinner-Osei, P. (2015). Comprehensive cradle-to-college-to-career strategy in Liberty City.

PROJECTS

- Selected by the Barry University Dean of Social Work in 2016 to work with a group of professors to develop a community outreach program in Overtown, Florida.
- Assisted in designing a program model for children with incarcerated parents in conjunction with the Lord's Place organization in Palm Beach County, FL.
- Assisted in planning Barry University School of Social Work 2015 Conference.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

2016, SAMHSA Trauma Informed Care Training

HONORS AND AWARDS

2014, Dr. Neta Kolasa Scholarship, Barry University School of Social Work

SPECIAL SKILLS

Experience with computerized research programs, such as NVIVO qualitative software, IBM SPSS quantitative software, and Taskstream Assessment and Accreditation software.

FACULTY COMMITTEES***Florida Atlantic University College of Social Work***

Faculty Advisor for Students of Social Work Organization

Team member for 2016-2017 Advocacy Day (Lobby Day)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

National Organization of Forensic Social Work

International Association of Schools of Social Work

National Association of Christian Social Workers

Phi Alpha Social Work Honor Society

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority

REFERENCES

Professional references are available upon request.