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## A Phenomenological Inquiry Into Familial Contact for Releasees on the Route to Desisting From Crime

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Whitney N. Johnson

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Walden University  
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Abstract

A Phenomenological Inquiry Into Familial Contact for Releasees on the Route to  
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by

Whitney N. Johnson

BS, University of South Carolina, 2015

MS, Walden University, 2018

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

May 2021

## Abstract

High levels of imprisonment in the United States have surpassed historical records, with the United States having the highest per capita incarceration levels in the world. Criminal desistance research has been conducted to create reentry programs and to reduce recidivism. To contribute to previous studies and promote social change and future research opportunities, this study was designed to explore familial contact during incarceration and how it helps releasees desist from crime. Familial contact, as a component of desistance, relates to social relationships, decision making, positive behaviors, and self-concept; as such, it may be critical to successful reintegration into society. Social identity theory and the identity theory of desistance served as the theoretical frameworks for this study. The research questions were designed to address lived experiences of familial contact during incarceration as an element of the desistance process, recognizing factors that affect familial relations, and detecting behaviors that support familial contact. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 8 ex-offenders who were 3 or more years beyond criminal desistance. Findings indicated that offenders (a) had self-determination and motivation, with a commitment to make changes; (b) prioritized their development and growth; (c) pursued structural support such as finishing school, community service, and support groups; and (d) chose favorable social structures to leverage positive relationships and environments to increase adaptation and behavior modification. This study may contribute to positive social change by improving familial relationships, implementing a familial training program, supporting established familial relation programs, and reducing recidivism.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to both myself and my daughter, Ryleigh N. Burgess, who openly expresses her understanding, love, and loyalty to me. To my mother, Carrie, I love you beyond measures; this is for you. Thank you, God, for your everlasting mercy, protection, and grace.

This dissertation is dedicated to

- Every generation whose members have felt that their past has defined their future. Positive change is possible; take the first step and reclaim your life.
- My inspiration, my sister, LaSonya, and her support through this entire process. You have provided unwavering love, support, and encouragement. Thank you for your prayers and patience, but most of all, thank you for the PUSH.
- My sister from another mother, Mignon. Your feedback and knowledge have been invaluable. Your inquisitiveness, the rants, and the days I wanted to give up. I sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am unsure of how I will ever repay you, but it is only up from here. Thank you.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background .....	3
Problem Statement .....	7
Purpose of the Study .....	9
Research Questions.....	9
Theoretical Framework for the Study.....	10
Nature of Study .....	11
Definitions.....	12
Assumptions.....	14
Scope and Delimitations .....	15
Limitations .....	16
Significance.....	17
Summary.....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	20
Introduction.....	20
Literature Search Strategy.....	21
Theoretical Foundation .....	23
Social Identity Theory.....	23



Behavior .....	24
Rationale for Selecting Social Identity Theory.....	25
Identity Theory of Desistance .....	26
Rationale for Selecting the Identity Theory of Desistance .....	26
Prior Identity Theory of Desistance Applications Similar to This Study .....	27
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts .....	28
Criminal Desistance .....	28
Recidivism .....	38
Familial Support and Mental Health.....	39
Reintegration Challenges for Offenders .....	42
Crime Rates in the United States .....	45
Incarceration and Parental Relationships.....	45
Women, Crime, and Incarceration .....	47
Recent Studies Relevant to Critical Concepts .....	49
Desistors vs. Persisters.....	54
Familial Development and Change.....	56
Summary and Conclusions .....	58
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	60
Introduction.....	60
Setting of Study.....	61
Research Design and Rationale .....	61
Role of the Researcher .....	62

Central Concepts .....	63
Qualitative Methodology .....	63
Descriptive Phenomenology .....	64
Population and Sampling Procedures .....	66
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.....	68
Instrumentation .....	68
Procedures for Instrument Pilot Study.....	69
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	70
Qualitative Data Analysis Plan .....	72
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	73
Trustworthiness.....	74
Credibility .....	74
Transferability.....	74
Dependability.....	75
Confirmability.....	75
Intra- and Intercoder Reliability.....	76
Ethical Procedures .....	76
Treatment of Human Participants .....	76
Treatment of Data .....	77
Threats to Validity .....	77
Summary .....	77
Chapter 4: Results.....	79

Introduction.....	79
Pilot Study.....	80
Research Setting.....	80
Demographics .....	81
Data Collection .....	83
Data Analysis .....	85
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	86
Transferability.....	86
Credibility .....	87
Dependability.....	87
Confirmability.....	88
Results.....	88
Central Research Questions .....	89
Theme 1: Familial Support and Relationships.....	89
Subtheme 1a: Motivation and Commitment to Change.....	91
Theme 2: Postrelease Identity.....	92
Subtheme 2a: Self-Development/Adapting to Life.....	94
Subtheme 2b: Adapting to Life Post Release/Stability.....	95
Theme 3: Incarceration Support.....	97
Summary.....	98
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	100
Introduction.....	100

Interpretation of the Findings.....	101
Finding 1: Familial Support and Relationships .....	102
Finding 2: Postrelease Identity.....	104
Finding 3: Incarceration Support .....	107
Theoretical Framework.....	108
Limitations of the Study.....	110
Recommendations for Future Research .....	110
Implications for Social Change.....	111
Conclusion .....	112
References.....	114
Appendix A: Informational Letter .....	131
Appendix B: Interview Guide.....	132
Appendix C: Confidential Demographic Form.....	135
Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer.....	137
Appendix E: List of Local Therapists.....	138

## List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics.....	82
Table 2. Participant Demographics, Continued .....	83
Table 3. Emergent Themes .....	89
Table 4. Familial Support .....	92
Table 5. New Identity .....	96
Table 6. Incarceration Support.....	98

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Crime Report by Region in U.S. Uniform Crime Report, 2018.....	4
Figure 2. Arrest Distribution by Age in U.S. Uniform Crime Report, 2018 .....	30
Figure 3. Type of Familial Contact Received.....	103

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Incarceration within the United States is unbearable as many families try to navigate the criminal justice system to extend support physically, financially, and emotionally to their loved ones. The criminal justice system of the United States is one of the largest and most overburdened in the world. For those who are released from incarceration within this system, reentry into society is sometimes successful and sometimes unsuccessful. Incarceration has a substantial and long-lasting impact on offenders, their prodigies (children), and their families.

Alper et al. (2018) conducted a study using data collected through the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) on a sample of offenders released from prison. The sample contained 67,966 prisoners selected at random to represent the 401,288 prisoners released in 2005 across 30 states. Before the analysis of any offending behaviors was completed, the BJS collected data using the same sample to analyze recidivism patterns for 5 years. Later, in 2015, the BJS re-collected criminal history records on the same sample population of offenders to extend the follow-up period to 9 years (Alper et al., 2018). According to Alper et al., prisoners released between 2005 and 2014 were arrested at least once post release. Alper et al. examined the offending patterns of former prisoners' post release and their involvement within their community, inside and outside their state. When studying recidivism, there are three characteristics that should be measured; a) the start of the event (i.e., release from prison), b) during the event and the measurement of failure after the event has started, which can be followed with a consequence (i.e., arrest

or return to jail). Lastly, an observation period is needed from the start of the event to a predefined end date (e.g., 1-5 years). During the 9-year follow-up period of the Alper et al. study, some of the prisoners died and/or transitioned, and the population size dropped from 404,638 to 401,288.

Because offender reentry is at its highest peak today, it has been part of criminal justice reform (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2015). Ensuring that offender reentry is successful is of pivotal importance, given the unwieldy and expensive justice system. In June and July 2018, local county and city jails across the United States had approximately 738,400 inmates (Zeng, 2018). Among this number, about 248,500 inmates had already been sentenced or were awaiting sentencing, while the remaining two thirds were awaiting court action on their current charge.

Zeng (2018) conducted a study of jail inmates from 2008 to 2018. The results indicated that incarceration rates dropped by 12% for Caucasians and by about 30% for Blacks and 33% for Hispanics in local jails. Additionally, findings revealed that the incarceration rate for Black residents was lower in 2018 than it was in 1990. Over the 10-year study period, the female incarceration rate increased by 15%. Additionally, the overall population for Hispanic incarceration grew by 23%, and the Asian community rose to 40% in the United States after they were released (Zeng, 2018).

There are significant challenges that offenders face once they are released, with reentry being the highest priority. Reentry after incarceration can be a frustrating journey as men and women released from correctional institutions receive inadequate preparation, assistance, and resources to assist them (Li, 2018). As Li (2018) explained, a criminal



conviction can limit employment, housing, and other support resources, and even a minor criminal record makes it difficult for individuals to transform their lives. A criminal record can have collateral consequences and can create a cycle of criminality and poverty. These individuals face limitations in education, employment, and housing. Offenders also experience barriers that can prohibit them from obtaining professional and technical licensures (Li, 2018).

My study revealed the need to investigate familial contact after incarceration as a part of the criminal desistance process. In this chapter, I offer an extensive review of the study's background, problem statement, purpose, and research questions. The nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, and scope are also addressed in this chapter. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary and transition into Chapter 2.

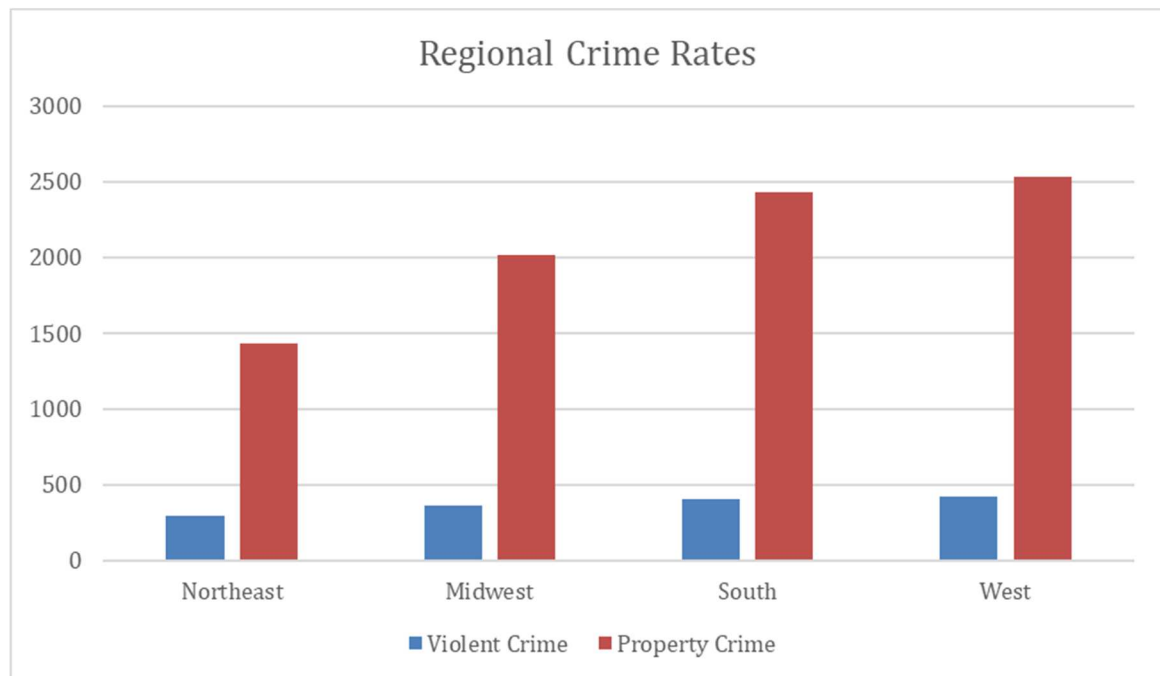
### **Background**

Incarceration can take control over the lives of people who are confined within a jail setting. Bierie and Mann (2017) stated that prisons are the quintessential government institutions. A prison is contained within a government facility and depending on how its daily operations function and what services it provides, it can impact releasees' lives for better or worse. Bierie and Mann explained that imprisonment has dangerous consequences for society itself. Although those who are imprisoned can change their lives after being released, ex-offenders' rights can remain restricted after they leave incarceration (e.g., felons are not able to vote). Some may be on probation and have a curfew, some may have limited ability to travel due to a lack of money, and some may be enrolled in a rehabilitation program.

In 2015, there were around 2 million incarcerated U.S. citizens (Bierie & Mann, 2017; BJS, 2020). The United States has higher incarceration rates than any other country (BJS, 2020; Cloud et al., 2014; McCurdy, 2019; Porter, 2016; The Sentencing Project, 2020; Zeng, 2018). Bierie and Mann (2017) explained that out of every three Black men born in 1990 or later, at least 1 would become incarcerated at least once in their lifetime. According to the FBI's (2018) Uniform Crime Report, crime has skyrocketed across the nation.

### Figure 1

*Crime Report by Region in U.S. Uniform Crime Report, 2018*



The U.S. criminal justice system has shifted its focus to address the damage that mass incarceration has on taxpayers and families. There is concern about rising incarceration rates and the funding that is being spent on incarceration. McCurdy (2019)

explained that federal spending on incarceration was estimated at \$81 billion in 2012.

According to the BJS (2020), the total correctional population consists of all offenders in local jails and state and federal prisons. The latest data collected on jail imprisonment are from 2018, when there were 10.7 million jail admissions. Jail rates increased over a period of 2 years (2018-2020) for Whites by 12%, decreased for Hispanics by 33%, and decreased for Blacks by 28% (BJS, 2018; Zeng, 2020).

There are several programs and initiatives to help ex-offenders with reentry, such as the Second Chance Act and the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI). The PRI was designed to assist those formerly incarcerated with reentry into their communities. This initiative connects individuals with faith-based and other organizations within the community to help them find employment and other resources to reduce their risk of recidivating. Policymakers and criminal justice agencies are continuously creating new policies and ways for offenders to reenter their communities successfully without returning to illegal behaviors (Visher et al., 2017).

A criminal record can impede new beginnings and resources, making it extremely difficult for individuals to survive. People who have prior criminal convictions confront barriers and have minimal preparation to access resources once released.

Postincarceration policies can prohibit offenders from receiving public assistance, employment, welfare, sustainable living wages, housing benefits, and financial aid for education (Hall et al., 2016; Li, 2018).

Most desistance studies that have been conducted in prisons have focused on postrelease outcomes and family contact during incarceration. It has been recommended

that researchers conduct further study of adult releasees who were incarcerated in the jail setting (Folk et al., 2019). This study assessed various forms of familial contact (videoconferencing, contact letters, phone calls, in-person visitation) that occur in the jail setting. I sought to fill a gap in the literature by addressing how familial contact affects criminal desistance for formerly incarcerated offenders.

There is a process that offenders go through physically, mentally, and emotionally as they move in a more positive direction. Although criminal desistance can occur at any age and at any time in life, it mostly occurs from adolescence into adulthood (Walters, 2020). A criminal identity can impede social relationships, self-control, and familial structures. Copp et al. (2020) demonstrated that significant identity changes occur in the criminal desistance process, and there were several factors such as cognitive transformations that included attitude and/or personality that helped shaped an adult. Copp et al. used structured data collected from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS). Results indicated that as positive identity changes occurred, involvement with delinquent peers decreased, and closeness and bonding with parental or parental influence reduced individuals' interest in criminal activity. Although cognitive processes are essential to desistance, they cannot provide a clear pathway to sustained behavioral changes (Copp et al., 2020).

Chapter 2 contains a more thorough review of current desistance literature, addressing the range of researchers who have contributed to knowledge about successful desistance. This review addresses structural and human factors (Giordano, 2014; Laub & Sampson, 2013). The most recent research developments in this area have focused on

familial contact and social identity as a part of the criminal desistance process (Bachman et al., 2014; Copp et al., 2020; Folk et al., 2019; Walters, 2020). Criminal desistance, the transition from offending behaviors to nonoffending behaviors, has been the focus of a large amount of research dating back several decades. This study is needed to contribute to the literature about adult releasees and their experiences of having familial contact during incarceration and the implications that such contact may have on releasees' desistance from crime post release.

### **Problem Statement**

There are thousands of offenders released from incarceration daily within the United States, where most offenders serve time for nonviolent offenses. Massoglia et al. (2013) emphasized that most offenders released from imprisonment return to the neighborhoods that they were raised in, reentering a family home or a dwelling occupied by their loved ones. As such, there must be a focus shift to identify and address the damaging effects of mass incarceration on families. This problem continues to draw more attention because as offenders are released, they reside in low-poverty communities where crime continuously increases due to externalization and internalization of their behavioral problems (Ramey & Harrington, 2019).

There has been an interest in exploring familial contact during incarceration as a component of the criminal desistance process. Researchers have shown a need to fill this gap in the literature by identifying specific determinants of familial connection and supporting behaviors that allow ex-offenders to desist from crime (Bachman et al., 2014; Folk et al., 2012; Folk et al., 2019; Galnander, 2020; Mowen et al., 2016; Rocque, 2015;

Visher, 2013). Because offenders face difficulties while incarcerated, there is a need to explore those collateral consequences of imprisonment while discovering other components of the criminal desistance process in addition to having a criminal record, those who are released from incarceration may have difficulties with reentry into the labor market and securing and maintaining employment post release. Other collateral consequences involve housing and public support access. Releasees may receive minimal preparation for reentry and inadequate assistance with obtaining necessary resources, and they may have limited education (Li, 2018). For an incarcerated individual, having familial support, strong familial relationships, and familial contact is vital in preventing criminal behavior and reducing recidivism (Folk et al., 2019).

Folk et al. (2012) conducted a study on video messages received by incarcerated parents from their children. This study examined parental moods (on a scale of positive and negative affect) before and after a video messages using a sample of 186 incarcerated parents. The results indicated that parents were negatively affected by negative emotions before sending their messages, resulting in their children having negative affect after receiving the notification. Negative feelings from children, mothers, and other family members can directly impact the quality of incarcerated individuals' familial relationships.

According to Folk et al. (2019), prior research on familial contact in jails and prisons has fixated only on the experience of visitation and how family interaction affects children of incarcerated parents. Folk et al., observed that most of these studies focused on postrelease outcomes and family contact during incarceration and were conducted in

prisons, recommended that future research focus on men and women who were incarcerated in the jail setting. I sought to fill this gap by addressing the effects of various forms of familial contact on releasees' in a jail setting and their desistance from crime. Further discussion regarding supporting research follows in Chapter 2.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand how family contact during incarceration helped offenders who were released to desist from criminogenic behaviors after imprisonment. Adult jail releasees who were incarcerated for at least 5 years and have been thriving for at least 3 years are considered desisters. First, I explored the preincarceration, during-incarceration, and postincarceration experiences of ex-offenders who had familial support and how such support helped to advance their criminal desistance. I focused on identifying the type of familial contact that supported desistance from criminogenic acts after incarceration, using a diverse target group that included men and women of ethnic minorities.

### **Research Questions**

I addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1. What is the lived experience of familial support during incarceration for adult jail releasees?
- RQ2. What are the lived experiences of family contact during incarceration for adult jail releasees?
- RQ3. How do the jail releasees make sense of their lived experiences?
- RQ4. How do the adult jail releasees describe their familial relationships?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Since the late 1970s and 1980s, social identity theory (SIT), also known as the “grand theory,” has been used to argue that social identity reinforces intergroup behaviors. In seminal work, Henri Tajfel and John Turner used this theory to examine psychological symptoms that occur in both women and men that may have been caused by their criminogenic behaviors and incarceration (Tajfel & Turner, 1982). Those who apply the SIT theory use many strategies to help individuals of various social groups cope with their known social identity. Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009) explained how the use of a theoretical framework allows hypotheses to be tested, which includes the involvement of the presentation of a specific approach and empirical work that the researcher is using. In this study, I applied SIT and the identity theory of desistance (ITD) to explore familial contact and desistance from crime.

According to Paternoster and Bushway (2009), the ITD indicates that criminal desistance is a self-initiated process. Using an existing framework such as the ITD allows researchers to shed light on what they see. Hence, the ITD acted as a secondary lens guide to SIT. As indicated, the ITD implies that desistance from crime is a process that involves self-initiation, and this process supports behavioral changes. I used this lens to address familial contact issues and the target group of men and women post release from jail. Creswell (2014) explained that it is vital to use a theoretical lens to determine the population and issues examined through research. An in-depth review of SIT and ITD follows in Chapter 2. Folk et al. (2019) and others have explored familial contact during incarceration and desistance, noting research gaps that I sought to address in this study



(Amemiya et al., 2017; Comfort, 2016; Michalsen, 2019; Mikytuck & Woolard, 2019, Rocque et al., 2019). This study may contribute to identity theory development while offering an in-depth understanding of familial contact and its impact on men and women releasees and the process of desisting from crime.

### **Nature of Study**

Because the purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences of familial contact during incarceration, a descriptive phenomenological approach was the most appropriate. Using a qualitative approach provided better insight into the experiences of those who had lived through imprisonment and life after being released, as it gave a better understanding of how familial contact and support helped them to change their lives and desist from criminogenic behaviors. The foundational objective of a descriptive phenomenological study is to understand the significance and the real meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest for an individual or a group of people (Giorgi, 2009). Because familial contact continues to emerge as a part of the desistance process, it is essential to understand the phenomenon of interest and the supported interventions. A few researchers have focused on this specific phenomenon, but in review, those studies had a few sampling limitations that involved an all-male sample base and/or a single offender type (Folk et al., 2019). Hence, this study may contribute to a deeper understanding of the process of familial contact and its influence as a secondary method of criminal desistance, and I designed it to inform and be used as a tool to create rehabilitation and interventions.

The recruited participants were all adults who met the eligibility criteria for short- and long-term criminal desistance, as explained in Chapter 3. I conducted semistructured interviews with 8 eight participants via phone, virtual platform, and/or video conferencing to understand how these men and women releasees who had family contact through various forms could desist from criminogenic behaviors. Interviews were conducted by phone or video conference to allow good notetaking and observations of the participants, including language (vocal and body), expressions, and appearance during the virtual interviews. As a result, documented reviews supplemented the narrative responses. I also used an audio recorder to obtain the participants' responses verbatim while recording notes for all follow-up questions. Participants' responses were transcribed for analysis using NVivo 11 (QSR International, 2015) and Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method. After careful analysis, the data were used to determine how the SIT and ITD theories were best fit for the study (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1989).

### **Definitions**

The following terms used in this study are defined for readers' convenience.

*Criminal desistance*: Desistance researchers have various definitions of criminal desistance, but researchers have not agreed on what qualifies as desistance (Kazemian, 2009). Kazemian (2009) in *Oxford Bibliographies in Criminology* defined desistance as the cessation of offending or other offending behaviors. According to Bushway and Paternoster (2011), criminal desistance can be observed from on a scale from 0 to 10 or on a much higher level, which can show a decline in offending. To make sure that SIT

and ITD align with this study, I refer to Bushway and Paternoster's definition within this study. Per this definition, three principles are relevant to assessing desistance: (a) desistance is a process, and the individual does not transition instantly after release; (b) criminal offending is nontrivial; and (c) in desistance, criminal offending does not end up at zero but needs to be close enough to zero to ensure that offending behavior does not increase.

*Criminogenic*: In this study, I explored familial contact experienced as a part of the criminal desistance process. The term *criminogenic behaviors*, for the purpose of this study, refers to the production of crime or criminals or living within a criminogenic environment (Dictionary, 2020). Because dishonesty and crime persists in afflicting neighborhoods, most crimes are committed by repeated offenders (Mandracchia et al., 2015). Criminogenic needs or behaviors comprise characteristics, traits, and problems directly related to the offender's likelihood of reoffending and committing another crime, which can be broken down into static and dynamic. Gonzalez et al. (2014) explained that crime-promoting attitudes and cognitions that are labeled as criminogenic are antisocial and maladaptive behaviors seen in offenders and nonoffenders. Using this study to focus on criminogenic actions related to familial contact aided in addressing the gap within the criminogenic literature.

*Familial contact*: This study was designed to explore a process of familial communication, from beginning to end, that remains in line with SIT and ITD as a theoretical lens. Familial contact refers to the process of communicating with family members for support. Mowen and Visher (2016) explained that family interactions and

support increase when visitations and other forms of contact include day-to-day communication and letter writing.

*Jail incarceration rate:* This term simply refers to a measure of the number of inmates held in local jails' custody per 100,000 U.S. residents (Zeng, 2020).

*Releasees:* This study was conducted to explore the experiences of jail releasees on the route to criminal desistance, focusing on familial contact and its impact. Zeng (2020) defined releasees as persons who are set free after a period of imprisonment or confinement. This category includes individuals who have completed weekend programs and leave a facility permanently, to exclude work releases, medical appointments, furloughs, or transfers within the local jail.

### **Assumptions**

Four philosophical assumptions are used in qualitative research: methodological, axiological, epistemological, and ontological (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative researcher should know the four assumptions and beliefs to understand the research guide and practice through acknowledgment. For this study, I determined that the epistemological concept would fit the premises that I uncovered. With this notion, the story that I sought to present occurred through known personal encounters that the individuals experienced (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I make no claims regarding the participants' lived experience to determine if the exposure occurred (Giorgi, 2009). My primary assumption was that the participants answered all interview questions as truthfully and accurately as possible. According to Creswell (2013) and Giorgi (2009), a researcher relies on participants' quotes as data using the epistemology method.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The purpose of this study was to examine how familial contact supported jail releasees in criminal desistance. Participants needed to have served at least 5 years in jail and must not have been arrested for at least 3 years after imprisonment. After careful exploration, this study was designed to investigate familial contacts' lived experiences as a part of the desistance process. The data derived from the investigation include narrative responses to semistructured interview questions and document reviews to supplement interviews, observations, and notes. I also documented the participants' body language, behaviors, and appearances. The participant pool that was provided confirmed that the participants were 3-5 or more years beyond desistance, as determined by the criminal desistance criteria. I used Tajfel and Turner's (1989) SIT and Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD to frame the study to apply existing information on familial contact and desistance within the desistance model. Both methods made a solid foundation for this study based on the population and formulated research questions. The small group of participants might affect the transferability of the study to other people. Men and women were excluded from this study if they presented with no criminal history.

The transferability of the qualitative findings was limited. The results are only relevant to the population designated for this study. Women and men of all ethnicities who may have similar characteristics may be eligible for similar studies. However, the results that are reported here are detailed and specific to ensure the possibility of transferability. The findings may be useful in future research with jail releasees when aimed at particular subjects identified in this study.

### **Limitations**

Limitations can prevent a study from being accurate and thus can alter the discoveries and results. The primary data source for this study was interviews. In the interviews, the participants were asked various questions regarding familial contact during incarceration and criminal desistance; in their responses, they could have provided false information for a few reasons. Additionally, research bias and credibility issues could have yielded limitations for this qualitative study because I was required to analyze data through observations and subjective explanations (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

In addition to credibility, researcher reflexivity must address the researcher's bias in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) described reflexivity as a constant and thorough examination of "what" and "how" regarding a study and a researcher. Reflexivity is a method of strengthening self-awareness, attentiveness, and understanding concerning one's experience and perspective, impacting the researcher's interpretation, and noted themes. Creswell (2013) also implied that qualitative researchers seek the acknowledgment and understanding that qualitative research cannot be divided from the researcher, but the writing must be bias-free, and the influence of personal experiences should be included in the study.

The sample size for qualitative studies is sometimes small, but this sample size was established on how many individuals participated in collecting data. Once saturation was reached, data collection ceased.

## **Significance**

Criminological practices have extended funding and research on various interventions that provide an in-depth understanding of the causes of crime, deviance of the crime, and how it caused some to deprive the attention of transitioning away from crime. Desistance findings show that familial contact is a critical factor in the process of desisting from crime. Therefore, it has been suggested that researchers who conducted studies paid less attention to exploring the familial contact process as an element of the criminal desistance process, which left countless questions unanswered. These unanswered questions related to how offenders create a new self-identity after incarceration, what factors support their criminal desistance process, and what behaviors are vital to begin, sustain, and achieve this process. Behaviors are deeply affected by the expectations that people have about themselves, the expectations of their families, and the consequences of their actions (Doekhie et al.,2017).

The theories of Paternoster and Bushway (2009) and Tajfel and Turner (1982) may be applied to address these unanswered questions. The ITD and SIT are two frameworks that can be informative regarding familial support groups and reentry programs within the community. The results may vary and help those desist from crime recognize signs that support a new life with familial contact and support. The results of this study may also fill a gap by addressing concerns about how family contact or family relations helped the releasees and how their own expectations' influence, along with their families' expectations, aided them in making the right decisions after being released from prison, thus promoting long-term desistance. This awareness can help with the

implementation and creation of new curricula and interventions across various systems that can help facilitate long-term criminal desistance and reduce recidivism.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, I described the background of the study, as well as the problem addressed. I included definitions of terms for the readers' convenience and outlined the study's purpose, nature, assumptions, significance, theoretical foundation, scope and delimitations, and limitations. The above review included in-depth insight concerning behaviors that can help the criminal justice restructure its format in numerous ways that can be beneficial for criminal desistance research. Because familial contact continues to emerge as a part of the desistance process, it is crucial to understand the phenomenon of interest and the supported interventions. Applying criminal desistance research to the field and creating offender reentry solutions can enhance fundamental programming techniques that help reduce recidivism and achieve a reduction in collateral consequences within the criminal justice system. The literature revealed a need to investigate familial contact as an element of the desistance process. Because desistance is multifaceted and integrative, it is also related to changes in social relationships, family relationships, attitudes, and identity, and how individuals view themselves. This study addressed the gap to advance both Tajfel and Turner's (1982) and Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) existing theories of desistance. The results may offer a perspective shift relating to the phenomenon of interest involving familial contact, desistance, and reentry into society after incarceration.



In this chapter, I highlighted the research questions, the nature of the study, and the approach I took to minimize limitations. Next, Chapter 2 contains a review of literature relevant to this topic to provide an understanding of familial contact and criminal desistance research pertinent to this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

There has been much controversy regarding politics encompassing the criminal justice system in the United States. Over the years, many news platforms, have been shining the light on discrimination, racism, mass incarceration rates and wrongful deaths that have occurred in the United States. Such injustices can be associated to unfair trials, police brutality, and overall violent crimes that can severed many working and familial relationships. All which have and can cause collateral damages that can last for decades. Several factors can obstruct criminal desistance, and many interventions now have the agenda to serve those who are struggling with desisting from crime, all while focusing on the many problems that ex-offenders face after release. For example, the Second Chance Act of 2007: Community Safety Through Recidivism Prevention was introduced to reduce recidivism and help local and state governments address the increasing population of offenders reentering their communities after release. The Second Chance Act has five parts that address rehabilitative models, drug treatment alternatives, and related programming that includes family-based treatments within the community, reentry services, and recidivism reduction. This initiative also addresses the Bureau of Prisons to improve all jails' conditions to provide necessary resources and funding allocations for successful reentry (Henry, 2009). Desistance researchers have emphasized the need to understand why offenders cease engaging in criminal behaviors, while recidivism researchers focused on why offenders engage in crimes.

I conducted a thorough literature review to detect gaps in the desistance knowledge base. Desistance researchers have identified many factors that help in a successful transition. Familial contact is one of factors often noted within desistance literature (Bachman et al., 2014; Folk et al., 2019). There is a need to understand the determinants of familial contact and behaviors that help facilitate the offender on a path of desistance from crime. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into lived experiences of familial contact on the route to criminal desistance.

The following literature review provides insight into the study's theoretical foundation, desistance literature, and essential concepts. Chapter 2 provides an overview of literature on criminal desistance, incarceration, reentry, and the impact of familial contact on criminal desistance. I used peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly works, and other online resources for this review. The most strategic analysis was given to the literature that addressed the theories used in this study and the study's key concepts. In this chapter, I also discuss the desistance literature, focusing on what has been discovered about family contact and criminal desistance. I present the theoretical basis for desistance research, with a focus on the theories that guided this dissertation—SIT and ITD—with a phenomenological approach to the study of desistance.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

While conducting a review of background literature for this study, I limited my research to literature published in the last 5 years (with the exception of seminal works), accessible using the following databases: Embase, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, Psychology Databases Combined Search, PubMed, Criminal Justice

Database, Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, and ProQuest. I used the following key search terms: *Blacks, men, Black women, Black males, minority, incarceration, prison, jail, imprisonment, correctional facilities, confinement, captivity, criminal justice system, criminal law reform, prison sentences, mandatory sentences, criminal statistics, incarceration effects, criminal desistance, inmates, juvenile offenders, mentally ill offenders, juvenile delinquency, incarcerated youth, high-risk behaviors, family interaction, family separation, paternal incarceration, maternal incarceration, postincarceration, protective factors, mental health, offender reintegration, desistance from crime, desisting, family contact, families, homelessness, pathways to desistance, social identity theory, employment, educational attainment, crime and delinquency, identity theory and behaviors, criminal desistance and identity, changed actions, family engagement, female criminality, motherhood, fatherhood, crime trajectories, life-course transitions, altered perspectives, changed attitudes, community adjustments, collateral consequences of incarceration, adolescent offenders, adjustment, individualism, reentry, recidivism, reentry plans for families, life courses, social adjustment, social factors, risk factors, violent crimes, visitation, women offenders, criminal offender, informal social control, and reunification*. The key terms were used in multiple databases to conduct the search. As I conducted a thorough review of the literature, if I came across any research dated 5 years or beyond, I saved and noted the topic and did a narrower and more specific search in Google Scholar to retrieve and analyze those publications to use them where necessary. The studies that I retrieved were mostly qualitative and meta-analytical in approach. I reviewed doctoral dissertations as well.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

A qualitative study requires the researcher to explore a conceptual framework, theoretical framework, or no framework at all (Creswell, 2014). According to Imenda (2014) and Wacker (1998), a theory has four components: (a) concepts, variables, and definitions of terms; (b) a foundational domain; (c) relationship variables; and (d) predictive claims. Researchers use a theoretical framework to create a raw format to make a vision come to life. A conceptual framework provides a blueprint for a study, serving as a guide for how the study is constructed (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Researchers who have conducted studies regarding familial contact have begun exploring familial contact in prisons and desistance from crime, although I will use an existing theory to build this study.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Tajfel and Turner (1987), the researchers who developed SIT, argued that social identity reinforces intergroup behaviors rather than interpersonal behaviors. Intergroup behaviors involve how people in groups feel about, perceive, act toward, and relate to other people in other groups. This type of behavior is psychologically fueled and tied to social identity, which is a cognitive representation that the members of a group have of themselves (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). There is a clear distinction between social status and personal identity, whereby one's own character is related to interpersonal relationships and idiosyncratic personal traits. Social identity is the salient basis of self-conceptualization. The self provides judgments and reactions that impact jail releasees who are desisting from crime.

In addition to SIT, the ITD indicates that criminal desistance is a self-initiated process that involves changing behaviors and identity (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). When there is desistance from crime, the individual finds motivation and desires characterized by positivity and refrains from negativity. However, there are criminal desistors who are motivated to become positive role models and strive to bury the negativity that they see in their future selves (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011).

Hoggs and Abrams (2007) explained that different behaviors influence self-categorization. Exploring familial contact as a component within the criminal desistance process allows the individual to examine social relationships and self-concepts. Those who commit to becoming a better person for their future selves will commit to working on themselves, resulting in the criminal self-identity diminishing. Creswell (2014) explained that it is essential to use a theoretical lens to determine the population and issues explored through research.

### **Behavior**

Although Tajfel and Turner's (1987) SIT emphasizes an interest in intergroup behaviors and how they can assist individuals in criminal desistance, it cannot stand alone. Intergroup relations configure actions and allow individuals to behave or act indifferently toward someone else. Prior research has suggested that there is a direct relationship between friends who are associated with criminal actions and a criminal thinking style. SIT proposes that identity mediates a social group's impact and thought pattern (Boduszek et al., 2013).

Group behaviors that involve conformity, discrimination, favoritism, and stereotyping are distinct behaviors within an intergroup (Boduszek et al., 2013). People's motivation to link themselves to an intergroup is due to specific goals that they may want to achieve. Being able to self-identify the behaviors that are caused by social groups can fuel and guide individuals' behavior. The possible future self may be harmful or positive. Individuals can see what they could become after desistance and may thus work to allow the new self-identity to be present (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Hoggs & Abrams, 2009).

### **Rationale for Selecting Social Identity Theory**

Bornewasser and Bober (1987) addressed Tajfel and Turner's (1989) SIT as it relates to social identity and interpersonal and intergroup behaviors. This theory was viewed as a holistic entity within a social group about specific gender roles, organizations, values, or groups. The sole purpose of intergroup behavior was to see the relationship between the individual and the said group's properties, hence the identity. My goal in this study was to bridge gaps in the understanding of the relationship between criminology and psychology. In this study, the strength of this theory was used to assess how families process separation, and articulation of the offender's progress. The role of social identity is responding to one's confidence level (Hoggs & Grieves, 1999). It enhances offenders' ability to identify themselves through an identity lens that can result in life-changing behaviors. The following section expands on the main concepts of criminal desistance, familial support, and contact during incarceration.

### **Identity Theory of Desistance**

Alongside SIT, Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD indicates that behaviors characterized by a commitment to change will produce change. The ITD served as an automatic function that increased the behavioral changes that were necessary to succeed. From this perspective, having familial contact, as an automatic function, guides the individual toward success as familial connections enhance the individual's opportunities for support, education, employment, and a positive future. This theory addresses criminal desistance as a cognitive, individualistic process. This indicates that previous offenders develop a "working self" with a new set of preferences and networks. The process of forming a new working self is known as the "discovery phase," and within this phase, offenders notice that there is a future that involves new desires as to what they may become (the positive future self vs. the feared person). Offenders who identify that they are committed to working on themselves commonly struggle because they fear that they may fail. A new identity can be developed by restructuring their thoughts about their time offending (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). The ITD theory indicates that identity change is necessary for desistance to occur, but the identity change must precede any prosocial opportunities (Bachman et al., 2015).

### **Rationale for Selecting the Identity Theory of Desistance**

The ITD, as defined by Paternoster and Bushway (2009), addresses the cessation of crime that extends from a criminal state to a noncriminal state. The authors have made note that their theory integrated a strong foundation regarding desistance. As mentioned in Chapter 1, my goal in this study was to close the gap between psychology and



criminology. Several authors have benefited from have given much attention to research to focus on how offenders respond to their sense of self after being incarcerated. Such new realizations can help to decrease offending behavior, as there is an abundance of literature that supports a declination in criminal behaviors. The following section expands on two main concepts of the current study: familial contact and criminal desistance.

### **Prior Identity Theory of Desistance Applications Similar to This Study**

Family relationships can change, and every familial relationship is complicated and unique. Familial relationships are altered during and after reentry, but after incarceration, barriers are difficult to overcome, and many familial relationships play a crucial role in overcoming such difficulties (Mowen & Visher, 2016). Incarceration can have detrimental effects on offenders as well as their families.

My searches did not return any results for a phenomenological inquiry into familial contact on the route to criminal desistance. The three studies that I found with the closest similarities were those of Galnander (2020), Visher (2013), and Folk et al. (2019). Visher's study explored the effect of incarceration on prisoners and their family members. Visher used a longitudinal framework to examine fathers reentering society and the impact of familial support, both before and after prison. Galnander conducted a longitudinal interview study following the desistance process of a population of 10 women. This study addressed a diverse range of aspirations among desisters that allowed them to desist from criminogenic behaviors. Folk et al. analyzed offenders who were separated due to incarceration from their families and communities. Folk et al. conducted a study using a longitudinal framework that examined familial support and postrelease

outcomes through contact with family during incarceration. The above 3 studies were discussed later in this chapter to address the fundamental concepts vital to this study.

Desistance theories are constantly being tested while integrating it through cross-disciplinary research. While there is supportive literature regarding the propositions of desistance theories, the testing of the hypotheses to date has been limited. Due to the nature and the purpose of this study, analyzing the process of familial contact during incarceration while on the path to criminal desistance has helped me identify the known gap in the literature. SIT and ITD researchers explained the differences amongst the two theories. This study was done to address the analyses of lived experiences for the critical concepts proposed by both SIT and the ITD to build upon existing theories while exploring the phenomenon of interest.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts**

#### **Criminal Desistance**

##### ***Historical Overview***

“Criminal desistance” simply refers to the behavioral change that individuals undergo as they transition from offending to nonoffending behaviors. Over the years, definitions of desistance have varied within the criminological realm of research. Still, many empirical findings support the idea of desistance and claim that it is a process that results in a dramatic decrease in criminal behavior over time (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Bottoms & Shapland, 2011; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Longitudinal studies focused on the early stages of desistance have been employed to investigate and analyze criminals (Bottoms & Shapland, 2011). Desistance among adults is related to the “age-crime

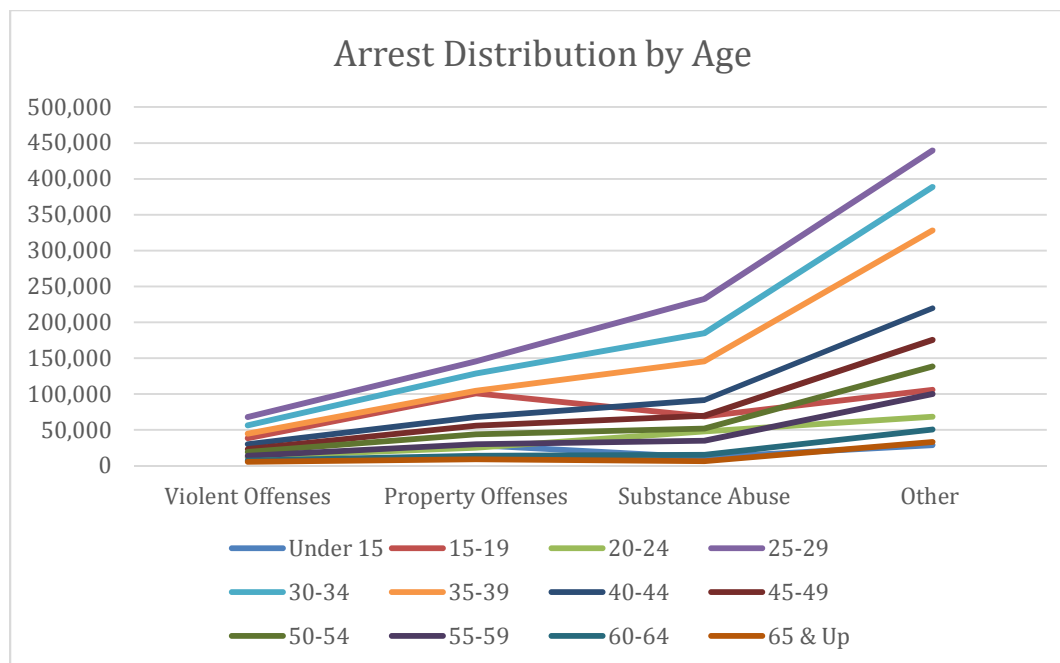
curve,” which is also known as a period when an adult establishes a steady pattern of decreased criminal behaviors (Bottoms & Shapland, 2011).

### ***Age-Crime Curve***

The “age-crime curve” is used widely throughout criminology literature and research. It is a standard criminological term that is not always recognized, but several methods could explain the age-crime curve process. The curve refers to a visible change in criminogenic behaviors, which tend to increase during adolescence, peak in the teens and early adulthood, and cease shortly afterward (NIJ, 2014). The shape measures not only the curve’s effect, but also the specifics and variables such as gender, criminal offenses, location, and population. The NIJ (2014) stated that the age-crime curve is universal in Western society, and the curve is highest for males who have been raised in underprivileged neighborhoods. Shulman et al. (2013) claimed that using the age-crime invariance is misleading, and it can lead one to draw dangerous inferences about offenders’ behaviors. The documentation of the age-crime curve is reported yearly to the FBI, and the data were produced in the FBI Uniform Crime Reports (see Figure 1). Many studies incorporate self-reported data and criminal analysis reports (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Shulman et al., 2013).

**Figure 2**

*Arrest Distribution by Age in U.S. Uniform Crime Report, 2018*



Many longitudinal studies have self-report data that can be applied to many offenders who experienced incarceration. In this instance, Sampson and Laub's (2003) study consisted of official criminal record data for a 35-year follow-up, which consisted of approximately 500 delinquent males ranging from ages 7 to 70. Four offense categories were presented in Sampson and Laub's study (2003); (a) violent offenses, (b) (c) property offenses, (d) substance abuse, and others. This study is arguably the most extensive study completed to date. The researchers conducted a 35-year follow-up after incarceration and assessed whether age, individual differences, childhood characteristics, or familial background were predictors of those long-term criminogenic behaviors.

There is much controversy enveloping the age-crime and curve, and the risk factors varied. Evidence shows that the age-crime curve in the data (as noted above) is

like overall offending. The age-crime curve declined similarly with age for different types of offenders, which showed that desistance is a universal process (Sampson and Laub, 2003). There were no results that were found to be statistically significant in the risk factors or different age groups that stated that aging crime is ordinary. Because desistance can be used as a general term that focuses on general desistance, Sampson and Laub (2003) negotiated the name *life-course desistors* to describe criminal trajectories over one's life span. In conclusion, the age-crime curve has been useful in learning about the "how" and "why" offenders desist, which has recently sparked interest over the years in the criminal desistance paradigm.

### ***Findings and Models***

Desistance is a universal process, and because it is, researchers have identified internal and external factors that consistently supports the studies. Several factors include a shift towards a new identity (Bachman et al., 2015), beliefs in the ability to change (Bachman et al., 2015), ownership of personal responsibility for changes, and fear of possible future self (Paternoster & Bushway, 2011). In Paternoster and Bushway's (2011) study, the work of Giordano (2007), Farrall (2011), and Maruna (2004) was used to build upon the ITD theory. Glynn (2013) explained that desistance is still being developed, and for the offender to desist from crime, he/she must be well-equipped with the tools necessary to reintegrate back into society successfully. However, the desistance theories revealed that change is placed into one of three categories: a) agency, b) integrated models and c) structural models. Desistance requires a fundamental change that is intentional based on how a person views themselves self, though the act is deliberate.

Many criminal desistance arguments showed an uprise in recognizing that structural or agency models are too narrow to capture the complexity of any human experience that involves a person-to-person interaction (Bachman et al., 2015; Farrall et al., 2011; Giordano et al., 2014). The difference between the a) agency models, b) structural and c) integrated models were to understand if criminal desistance was encouraged through internal, external, or both sources. Laub and Sampson (2003) explained that social or systemic contributors were responsible for the influx of outside contexts within the structural models. Integrated models, on the other hand, contend that desistance was a result of both internal and external forces working concurrently (Farrall et al., 2011; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Subsequently, agency models are said to insist that internal factors are responsible for self-control, cognitive transformations, and cognitive strategies.

Although the literature review discusses criminal desistance, there will be a comparison of leading desistance theories from different models (i.e., agency and structural) that includes discussions regarding an example of the Identity Theory of Desistance and Social Identity Theory. Therefore, understanding the desistance process directly from the offender and desistor perspective can help navigate and capture a more deep-felt experience. This review is vital in understanding where and how both theories fit among other leading desistance theories. This study will notify readers of the current state of desistance literature and the most current relevant key concepts about criminal desistance.

### ***Leading Desistance Theories: Age-Graded Theory***

The discovery of the age-graded theory referred to Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime and Sampson and Laub's (1993) emotional attachment theory of relationships that causes desistance; argued that both methods represent two different themes. Laub and Sampson's (1993) theory focused on eternal and social controls that influence an individual's behavior. However, when their study was conducted; they found significant limitations based on a study that held an all-white male participant pool completed by Glueck and Gleuck (1950). They began to analyze the research and found themes for desistance behavior. The study participants found that having a stable job and a healthy marriage allowed them to desist from crime as they matriculated into adulthood. Rocque (2017) examined Glueck's study and concluded that crime does decrease with age, but reintegration reduces future crimes. Many studies that have been completed should generate a diverse sample participant group that outcome shows fair results.

The age-grade theory assumed that social events may change individuals, while others struggle to keep offending. There are three primary components of the age-grade theory. The first component is the micro-level, which shows how individuals are structured and how such structural context is mediated by informal family and societal controls that explain why criminogenic behaviors occurred in childhood and early adolescence. The second component of Laub and Sampson's (1993) age-grade theory is that there is a continuance of antisocial behaviors that begins during childhood and continues through adulthood. The third component consists of informal social bonds from

family and employment during childhood, explaining criminogenic behaviors. However, Laub and Sampson's theory was developed around a life-course perspective that linked parental emotional investment to attachments and social bonds. Therefore, a combination of attachment theory and the life-course theory can explain self-control and reveal that attachment impedes deviant behavior that partners with desistance.

According to Hirschi (2002), social control theories are linked to criminality and delinquency due to weak social bonds. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that a lack of self-control is a common characteristic that criminal behaviors can be predicted. Deviant behavior is caused by weak social ties and restricted goals and accomplishments, and in contrast, traditional practices can form strong bonds and create great goals and achievements (Hirschi, 2002). The stronger the bond the individual has with others, the more he/she is at risk for deviant behaviors, which can result in the loss of friendships, familial relationships, and employment. Gottfredson and Hirschi also contended that self-control can be evident from birth and into early childhood that exposes specific personality characteristics that can include but are not limited to a low tolerance for frustration in risky behaviors and the inability to defer gratification urges.

Therefore, changes in external contexts such as employment, marriage, and the environment can influence social controls and behaviors (Laub & Sampson, 1993). Criminal desistance is an internal behavior response linked to external changes in contrast to the ITD theory that declares internal changes initiate external changes (Laub & Sampson, 1993).



### ***Leading Desistance Theories: Social Cognitive Theory***

Bandura's (2011) work has become a basic understanding of how social forces influence individuals, whether small or large. This theory analyzes social diffusion or new behaviors related to psychosocial factors adopted through the social encounters that are supported. The SCT provides an agentic conceptual framework that analyzes mechanisms that communication that is influenced by humans' thoughts and actions. Bandura explained that behaviorism acquires cognitive and social competencies that regulate behaviors by managing your everyday life. Human behavior is controlled by life effects. The social cognitive theory starts with personal determinants that progress to environmental determinants and behavioral determinants. SCT explained that people bring their influence to bear on their own functioning in which such operation does not have direct control. Social forces can operate in any selected environment, promoting more or less specific competencies, lifestyles, and values. Individuals who choose their environment also chooses who and what they become.

Paternoster and Bushway (2009) explained that their ITD theory complements existing theoretical arguments that in which that have assembled upon other desistance theories of Giordano (2015), Maruna (1999), and other colleagues. Giordano et al., (2002) social cognitive theory has several similarities to the identity theory differences. Giordano's (2014) objective was to determine factors associated with women's desistance similar to men's desistance. The researcher's used a regression analysis in their study to reveal that marital attachment and job stability were not related to male or female desistance. However, Giordano (2014) tested Sampson's and Laub's (1993) theory

regarding informal social control and applied data to illuminate this social cognitive theory's components.

Furthermore, the social cognitive theory is compatible with a control approach in regards that it adds specificity to underlying mechanisms, it begins to explain negative cases, and lastly, that it fits well with life course barriers that male and female offenders face (Giordano et al., 2002). The researchers conducted a mixed-method follow-up that consisted of a diverse group of 210 participants chronically delinquent youth. The qualitative analysis focused on the influence of marital attachment and job stability as critical factors of criminal desistance, according to Laub and Sampson's (1993) informal social control theory. The participants in this sample consisted of 109 females and 101 males that were approximately 48% white and 37% non-white (Giordano et al., 2002). The results concluded that job stability, marital status, nor strong social bonds were significant predictors for criminal desistance for both genders. Subsequently, according to Giordano et al. the transformation begins with a series of cognitive changes that start with the offender's openness to change. Therefore, to start this transformation process, the individual must envision a positive "future self" and be motivated to change. Transformation can be described as having a new attitude towards change contingent upon education, familial support, or peer support. The individual must be ready to be accessible to a more prosocial environment that promotes positive change and access resources in line with evolution.

### ***Leading Desistance Theories: Discussion***

The theories above each involve a person-environment contributing to a criminal desistance outcome. Laub and Sampson (1993) argued that cognitive changes were not necessary, but Bandura (2011), Giordano (2002), and Paternoster and Bushway (2009) argued that cognitive changes were required and would be for identity change for criminal desistance. Each theory captured the importance of social encounters supporting criminal desistance, such as prosocial environments, familial relationships, and job stability. Those who have access to more resources that others do not have access to may not be as dependent on self-cognitive changes as others who are less interested, but more research is needed. The literature review will dive into the recent desistance research relevant to this study's fundamental concepts.

### ***Desistance***

Desistance simply refers to the process when an individual reaches a state of permanent nonoffending behaviors (NIJ, 2020). Fader and Traylor (2015) have explained that within the last two decades, there has been a rapid growth in desistance research. The field of desistance There is an essential connection between recidivism and desistance regarding criminal desistance research. Long-term desistance ensures that the ex-offender no longer has an interest in crime, consistent with working towards the positive self. Further research is needed to investigate the desistance paradigm that can enhance the contemporary critiques of desistance limitations (Weaver, 2019). Bushway and Paternoster (2014) explained that prior research understands that desistance is the cessation of crime that goes from committing a crime to not committing a crime.

However, it has been said that desistance is not an event, but it is a long-term process. Laub and Sampson (2001) conducted several studies. They discovered that several theoretical frameworks explain the process of desistance: maturation and aging theory, social learning theories, developmental theories, and rational choice theories. In this study, the social identity theory and identity theory of desistance was explored to determine if familial contact could terminate crime and begin the desistance process after incarceration.

### **Recidivism**

Before incarcerated, individuals tend to face many barriers once release from jail and having support from their family is a vital step in reducing recidivism. Folk et al. (2019) noted that offenders who have familial contact while incarcerated have more significant postrelease outcomes. However, reentry into the community is a hopeful chance that many, if not all, want a second chance to pursue goals and create more promising opportunities for themselves and change their mentality. Recidivism is a correction that focuses on an offender who is discharged from jail/prison. According to the NIJ (2020), recidivism refers to a relapse of one's criminal behaviors after being reprimanded for previous offending actions. Offenders who support their families and have access to education are more likely to successfully achieve that goal in a smaller environment versus in a larger traditional facility (O'Neill et al., 2007). Having familial contact and support and accessing educational opportunities during incarceration can increase a successful reentry into society upon release and how having an education can help reduce recidivism (O'Neill et al., 2007). Prior studies have shown that those who

were incarcerated that engaged in receiving a college education and have familial support are less likely to recidivate and possibly gain employment after postrelease. Recidivism continues to be an issue even after postrelease due to barriers that he/she may face.

Participating in support groups or having family support during the incarcerated period tends to lower recidivism rates upon release. High recidivism rates occurred in 2005 as prisoners were released from prison across thirty states. According to a report demonstrated by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately two-thirds of the 404,638 offenders released in 2005 were detained within three years of being released, and roughly three-quarters were arrested within five years of being released (Durose et al., 2014). Klingele (2019) argued that recidivism is a binary measure; behavioral change is a multifaceted process and standing alone is an inferior metric for assessing the success of interventions and those who participate in recidivism programs. Recidivism can serve as a measure of intervention effectiveness, but it is a general indicator that failure has happened within the criminal justice system; because it is a stricter approach of ceasing criminal behavior through punishment and rehabilitation (Nakamura & Bucklen, 2014).

### **Familial Support and Mental Health**

Many offenders experience mental health problems both before incarceration and postrelease, but critical is when mental health is assessed daily. (Wallace et al., 2016).

Familial support and mental health seem to tie various matters together as it is one way that helps facilitates a better mental state. Being incarcerated and having familial support can either have a positive effect or negative effect on those who are released, which can affect one's mental health. Family support can enhance mental health quality by fostering

a sense of purpose or attach something meaningful to promote responsibility or promote self-control. Therefore, having such a healthy family and supportive ties can help protect the individual from different mental health problems such as depression, abuse, and suicide.

There have been results that showed that while offenders are in prison, family support does not affect their mental health, but postrelease familial support is affected (Wallace et al., 2016). Familial support is vital to successful reentry and their mental health. If such support is unprotected or undermined, the familial relationship is compromised, and the underlying causes of mental health may be exacerbated. Ex-offenders face many physical and mental consequences, but a significant number of offenders experience mental health issues that gradually increase during incarceration. One of the assessed studies concluded that 15% to 26% of offenders had been diagnosed with a mental health problem during imprisonment, and roughly 700,000 released from custody leaves with more health and psychological issues.

Due to the overwhelming numbers of offenders returning to society and their families, there are no sustainable resources available to combat those individuals' mental health needs. Wallace et al. (2016) conducted a study to explore how familial support during incarceration and after release is associated with mental health. The study analyzed such factors using the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) dataset that investigated the offender's relationship with their familiar up to release and reentry. During this study, the adult male sample was studied and included interviews from 12 programs within different prisons and 12 sites across the world. The results

concluded that familial support's role helps shape those released' mental health, and negative dynamics should be reduced while enhancing positive ties. Future research and release programs are needed to examine various ways to foster familial support for offenders in and out of jail and help families minimize the stress levels for those returning home.

Incarceration places a strain not only on the offender but on the offender's family as well. "Incarceration" can impose many pressures, including financial stress, emotional and physical strain on families who wish to remain supportive of their loved ones. It may be difficult for the support system to stabilize during incarceration as those offenders do not have much capital to navigate. Factors such as depression, suicide, and stress rates are likely to skyrocket as they cannot form and maintain their familial relationships. With those factors at the forefront, many families are unable to visit their loved ones. Several issues can arise that may unintentionally cause a delay in support. A few barriers that may cause a delay in familial support are the correctional facility's location, accepting phone calls even if it is not budget-friendly, or spending one half of their income to help keep their loved one's afloat incarceration. It has been shown that visitations, phone calls improve inmate behavior, provide a sense of security and love, and enhance social skills. Duwe and Clark (2011) discovered that visitation of any kind by family members showed a 13% reduction in recidivism, and violations were reduced by 25% after being released. The more visitations and support received, the more likely the offender will have fewer mental health issues and successful reentry.

## **Reintegration Challenges for Offenders**

Successful reentry is imperative to thousands of offenders released and sent back to the same communities they have grown up in. Many face barriers and challenges that discourage them from reentering successfully. Successful reentry is considered successful when family support is in place, employment opportunities are present, and they are mentally and physically prepared. Challenges include finding housing and sustainable employment, repairing broken relationships, maintaining positive ones, accessing medical and psychological support, and/or continuing education. A few topics are discussed below that are primary concerns for jail releases.

### ***Housing***

Offenders who do not have financial support from their families and/or public assistance risk being homeless and re-engaging in criminal activity. Offenders who have strained relationships or damaged relationships while incarcerated are often rejected by family members and friends after release (Johnson, 2014). Depending on your criminal history, some offenders can receive public assistance based on their commitment to remaining free. Keene et al. (2018) suggested the prior research that has been conducted on offenders released from prison face immeasurable challenges in obtaining a safe, stable residence. The author did a qualitative study that consisted of 44 formerly incarcerated individuals and their life after incarceration while trying to find a home. Finding housing is imperative to a successful reentry as they try to prove that they are no longer criminal offenders (Keene et al., 2018). As a part of the criminal desistance process, your progress from an offending identity to a nonoffending status (Paternoster &



Bushway, 2011). Although, when considering housing with a loved one, friends, the environment, criminal history should be explored to ensure deviant behaviors or deviant associations will cause the offender to recidivate.

Western et al. (2015) analyzed the increase in the United States incarceration rates transitioning from prison to communities for middle-aged men and women. A study was completed on 122 offenders who were newly released and surveyed the hardship the offenders endured immediately after being released. Results yielded that over half of the participants remained unemployed, about two-thirds were eligible to receive public assistance, and the remaining half relied on their female relatives for housing and financial stability (Western et al., 2015). Life outside jail or prison creates an abundance of stress, and having to transition to unstable housing, damaged familial relationships, mental illness, and/or family addictions can cause isolation, anxiety, and even re-incarceration.

### ***Interpersonal Relationships***

Family members sometimes give up on their incarcerated loved ones, making communication, transportation, and financial stability difficult. Interpersonal relationships are imperative in familial support for those releases looking for the outpour of love, motivation, and support. Doherty et al. (2014) point out that once offenders are released, some attempt to avoid their old acquaintances, but they are acquaintances and/or peers who seek out the offenders to reconnect. However, if offenders avoid such associations, they have a better chance of desisting from criminogenic behaviors. Prior studies, including seminal work done by Myers et al. (1999), have noted that mothers,

wives, sisters, and nieces face additional challenges such as parenting while maintaining functional and positive relationships with their loved ones who were once incarcerated. Incarceration places a burden on the family, friendships, and relationships, and it is more difficult to rebuild if it was damaged before imprisonment.

### ***Employment***

Regaining employment is one of the many challenges' offenders face postrelease. Most offenders are offered a job with low wages, with little to no room for advancement (Western & Sirois, 2017). Businesses are very disinclined to hire individuals with a criminal history. However, those individuals who have little to no education will most likely struggle to gain employment. According to Looney and Turner (2018), approximately 55% of formerly incarcerated individuals have wage-earning, but it is less than a full-time job. The researchers examined employment before and after release, family income, and the childhood neighborhood. The results from his study yielded that a combination of high incarceration rates and low employment rates are among releasee's shows that one-third of the young men are in jail or are unemployed, which is among the few problems that families face (Looney & Turner, 2018).

The stigma that is associated with incarceration makes it more difficult for jail releasee to obtain employment. Criminal background checks are completed as a part of the hiring process, thus intimidating ex-offenders who are progressing from offending behaviors. Furthermore, offenders that had prior work experience before incarceration, connection to employers before release, and orthodox familial relationships can improve employment outcomes once release (Visher et al., 2011).

## **Crime Rates in the United States**

There are many types of crimes that are committed by both men and women across the nation. It has been said that women commit different types of crimes than men. Men will commit more violent crimes than women, while some women will commit violent crimes, they often engage in property or drug offenses (Carson & Anderson, 2016). As stated, before women account for such a small percentage of the crime committed within the United States' correctional population. According to the Sentencing Project (2020), the United States correctional population had reached 1.4 million people at the end of 2018. Its peak was the highest in 2009, only declining by 9% in 2018. However, there was a 700% growth in the prison population between 1972 and 2009 (The Sentencing Project, 2020). There has been an increased interest in mass incarceration in recent years, but the United States has not made much progress in ending such a problem. Reported crime rates have declined, but to end mass incarceration will require the ending of the Drug War, which has been a crisis since 1980. Recent investigators have also examined the effects of sentencing for crimes that include minor charges resulting in harsher and longer sentences (Ghandnoosh, 2020; The Sentencing Project, 2020). The Sentencing Project (2020) identifies mass incarceration and severe penalties as evidence that incapacitates both young and older people.

## **Incarceration and Parental Relationships**

As the U.S. incarceration rates numbers have grown, so have the numbers for children who have incarcerated parents. According to Davis, et al. (2011), 1 in 9 children have a parent that is incarcerated in the criminal justice system. Many children who have

the burden of balancing life with an incarcerated parent face many barriers that make it extremely difficult for them to navigate life as poor decisions and vulnerability risk levels increase. Incarceration places a new burden on families as they try to extend encouragement, support, and love through the circumstances. Still, it is delaying meeting the needs of those who need various governmental resources to succeed. The children involved tend to suffer from depression, low self-esteem, emotional withdrawal amongst friends and family, disruptive behaviors, little academic interest, which increases the risk of criminal delinquency in their future. Davis et al. (2011) argued that the numbers of incarcerated parents have increased since 2007 and that many children who have parents in prison/jail are more likely to end up incarcerated. Incarceration places a robust strain on familial relationships amongst parents and their children. Most parents and children suffer long-term effects that questions their parental authority, which leaves negative perceptions encompassing the criminal justice system and intergenerational patterns of illegal behaviors (Davis et al., 2011). In addition to improving their child(ren) success rates, most parental figures try to teach, control, and discipline their prodigies from behind bars, which results in rebellion, mistrust, distancing, and no support. Many of the incarcerated parents provide primarily or half of the support for their minor children. However, when a parent is behind bars, the child(ren) is largely impacted, and it is hidden as they mask their real emotions. Davis et al. (2011) argued that parental incarceration has a variety of adverse effects on children, which can be similar to the impact of experiencing a traumatic event. Children who experience parental incarceration must alter their lives as they adjust to their new norm of residing with a non-custodial parent,

grandparents, or foster care guardians. This type of adjustment causes a significant disruption in behaviors, severe ties with the incarcerated parent, risk of abuse and neglect, financial and emotional stability, especially if the primary guardian/caregiver is the mother.

Incarceration should be viewed as a single event and an event that unfolds many layers that can be disastrous for both parent and child. Davis et al. (2011) explained that the children's needs, length of separation, level of disruption incarceration have caused within the family, and other family and community support should be further explored. As we know, such events from the time of arrest, the conviction and imprisonment phase, and reentry dampen and weakens the relationship between a parent-child. Not all policies that are in effect are child friendly, and most prison-visitation plans do not meet children's familial needs. Those policies do not help heal or maintain the parent-child relationship (Davis et al., 2011). Alongside having various effects on the individual level of having a parent incarcerated, policy levels are in place that make it challenging to take care of their children once they are released from prison. Parents who were incarcerated have accumulated debts that include child support or no income due to their status quo, which forces a parent to engage in illegal activities, leading to them being re-incarcerated. The goal was to maintain the child-parent relationship during incarceration, so when the parent has released, the negative impact of parental separation is decreased.

### **Women, Crime, and Incarceration**

Women represent a tiny percentage and the total number of individuals incarcerated within the United States. Still, the growth rate has increased for males and

has more than doubled than females worldwide. For instance, 29 % of women are incarcerated for drug offenses, 35% are incarcerated for violent crimes, and 30% are accounted for property offenses (Harrison & Beck, 2005). In 2018, the imprisonment rate for Black females was 1.8 times higher than those of White females (Carson, 2018). The 2018-end incarceration rate declined for females, which made up 7.6% of the total prison population. There was an increase in female prisoners across 19 states, with Texas being the highest (up 480) and Indiana (up 150) next. Most of the research that has been conducted involved men because women account for such a small percentage of the U.S. correctional population. According to Thomson et al. (2020) that no matter if the husband, dad, or father is incarcerated, there is an increased chance of having a woman engage in violent crime and or prison violence. Despite having any parental incarceration while pregnant or during childhood, the result can lead to girls/daughters' detrimental effects. Researchers who have conducted studies on women's crime and punishment have suggested that women's reentry into society differ from men due to their victimization rate. However, women's pathway into the criminal justice system starts with victimization, including childhood abandonment, abuse, neglect, poverty, lack of parental stability, domestic abuse, physical or sexual abuse, substance, and alcohol abuse. Because both substance and drug abuse begin as a coping mechanism, it also is the beginning of addictions, arrest, and then incarceration for women who struggle, which is meant to respond to coping progress into a disadvantage that has unaltering consequences (Thomson et al., 2020).

### **Recent Studies Relevant to Critical Concepts**

Ramey and Harrington (2019) completed a qualitative study on the interactions amongst exposure to neighborhood crime and child mental health. High-crime neighborhoods can be linked to the internal and external factors of behavioral problems for pre-school-aged males and females. The researchers used restricted and contextual data that consisted of two studies that reported crime for large US cities. Ramey and Harrington's sample used various young girls and boys that resided in their urban neighborhoods. The population sample included 566 girls and 646 boys at an elevated risk for adverse behavioral, physical, and mental outcomes. Neighborhood crime can influence a child's development, but there is some missing information regarding a child's development. The researchers discovered that prior research focuses on short-term exposure crime and not the relationship of residing in a high-crime neighborhood during critical periods of growth (i.e., birth-1<sup>st</sup> year of life, etc.). Results have suggested that children from high-crime areas are more likely to engage in robberies and burglaries, but boys' relationship is different from girls. Social structures are conditions for child development and exposure to a higher risk of crime. Poor neighborhoods that have a higher risk-level of being unfortunate tends to result in higher crime rates. According to Ramey and Harrington (2019), those individuals who reside in a high-crime neighborhood have many health adverse effects that can be associated with problematic childhood behaviors, low birth weight, asthma, obesity, physical development and activity, depression and anxiety, physical aggression, poor academic performances and internalizing and externalization of behaviors.

High crime neighborhoods can disrupt access to valuable social and economic informative structures that help foster child development. Communities, as such, can also damage family dynamics and affect a child's development. Stress can occur at an early stage in life, and if it is associated with residing in a high-crime neighborhood, it can negatively affect parent's interactions with children and interrupt day-to-day-parenting and increase tension between familial support. Higher crime rates limit resources, and access to communities increases stress and early cognitive and emotional development deficits. Further research is needed about how or whether living in a high-crime neighborhood during the most initial years of life affects developmental health later in life (Ramey & Harrington, 2019).

Kreager et al. (2010) explained that qualitative research can provide a window into the contextualized meaning ascribed to life course and those related to the behavioral outcomes. However, Kreager et al. conducted a 10-year longitudinal study that consisted of more than 500 multi-ethnic women living in a disadvantaged neighborhood in Denver. This study consisted of young females who were a part of a single mother home, teenage females who engaged or were at risk of drug use, and criminal delinquent behaviors. The trajectories used to isolate motherhood's effect consisted of age, pregnancy, sexual activity, marriage, and behavioral outcomes. The data collected and used for this study extended for 12 years from a youth survey that included an age range between 10-and 27 years old (Kreager et al., 2010). The researchers were able to identify five outcomes that determined if motherhood-delinquency relationships varied by age. General delinquency, fighting, stealing, drug use, and alcohol consumption were the five outcomes that were



predicted. Desistance can be defined as a social process where one's behaviors decline as he/she goes from offending to nonoffending. The researcher's findings suggested that motherhood resulted in a declining level of substance abuse and delinquency among women who are from disadvantaged neighborhoods.

A reduction in delinquency and drug use has been associated with motherhood, and motherhood represents a fundamental shift in the lives of women living in a poor neighborhood that helps them steer away from high-risk behaviors (Kreager et al., 2010).

Rivera and Veysey (2018) discovered that in 2013 the correctional population within the United States has reached a staggering rate of 6.9 million. Such factors represented in the criminal justice system range from a social structure at the macro level to genetics at the micro-level that can understand criminal behaviors. Criminal behavior's psychological construct is criminal identity, and the replacement of criminal status is necessary for criminal desistance (Rivera & Veysey, 2018). This study aimed to understand social cognition theory and criminal cognition related to self and criminogenic group behaviors. The researcher conducted semistructured interviews examining "people's identity and experiences" with a community sample of 106 adults located in Newark, New Jersey. The participants were recruited through flyers in exchange for a compensation of twenty dollars. The participants included 52% of African Americans, and the remaining 50% were unemployed, with the median age of 34-years-old. The researchers explored conscious behaviors, control behaviors, and awareness.

Based on the research, it has been suggested that those individuals with implicit self-criminal associations were cognitive markers for criminal behaviors. First, results

showed the individuals with strong implicit self-criminal associations were likely to engage in criminal actions. Similarly, the same exact results were replicated with a more diverse sample and more exposure to crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Finally, demonstrating implicit self-criminal through a longitudinal study of criminal behaviors occurred over a 7-20 month follow up that showed a firm consistency with self-criminal cognition was associated with criminal actions (Rivera & Veysey, 2019).

Sharpe (2015) conducted a qualitative study that explored desistance from crime and experiences amongst 19 young women who were mothers with a criminal history. Sharpe completed semistructured interviews with the 19 young mothers whose ages were between 20-and 27. Sharpe explained that other research has claimed that motherhood has crime-reducing effects for women in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The researcher also expanded on the idea that motherhood motivates women to desist from crime, which is similar to the study Kreager et al. (2010) conducted. Women involved in the criminal life constantly grapple with stigma across several boards, even those who desisted from crime. The sample included a mixture of British women who were both White and Black, 6 of those 19 women were imprisoned at least once, and the remaining had no strict supervision. Amongst the women, all had children that ranged between the ages of three months to eight years of age. Sharpe (2015) analyzed the data and coded themes collected during the interviews using the grounded theory and NVivo 11.

According to Sharpe (2015), motherhood constituted the positive future self or as the “replacement” self, as noted by Giordano et al. (2002). Many women with the “feared self” identity struggled with lawbreaking. However, those responsible mothers felt

powerful as motherhood enhanced their prosocial replacement self (Sharpe, 2015).

Sharpe (2015) also found that women who leave the life of crime behind leaves a residue of a spoiled identity that continues to be the source of social and stigma control, which can have damaging effects on mothers' psyche and their prodigies.

Folk et al. (2019) conducted a study that described how incarceration separates individuals from their families, homes, and communities. Many offenders face many barriers that restrict them from remaining in contact with their loved ones. Folk et al. completed a longitudinal study that examined several mechanisms for 507 adults who were incarcerated in a local jail. Those mechanisms were family connectedness', postrelease planning, recidivism, mental illness, and community functioning. Participants demographics were average with age being around 32 years old, held a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade education with a diverse sample; 70% were males, 44% were Black, 37% were white, 8% Hispanics, 4% Asians, 3% mixed, and approximately 60% were parents. Maintaining family connectedness during incarceration increases the chances of creating a positive future self-postrelease. Those who were less likely to have familial contact during incarceration remain at a higher risk of recidivating. According to Folk et al. (2019), social connections influence how people are, what they do, and the upheld attitudes and values. Participants were both pre-and post-trial individuals that held felony charges in local county jail. The researchers used a criterion that aligned with their goal of the study. Participants were interviewed and were given a small participation fee at the time of assignment within the jail, prerelease and post-transfer, and at their 1-year follow up. The researchers reviewed this longitudinal study results, which showed that incarcerated

individuals who confirmed having familial contact during incarceration were beneficial to their postrelease planning. Communication does not matter, but how frequently interaction is being completed amongst the family is extremely helpful.

### **Desistors vs. Persisters**

Desistance research has been primarily focused on factors that lead to desistance, but since then, it has shifted the focus on studies between desistors and persisters that can identify factors relevant to aiding in desistance that leads to successful results. Liebrechts et al. (2014) used a narrative approach to analyze data for desistors and persisters. This study had a population sample of 600 cannabis users that ranged between the ages of 18-30 -years old. This study took place over a 3-year time span that explored the process of criminal desistance. Though desistance was induced by life events that encouraged them to set new goals, and persisters were caused by more significant life events but lacked the motivation needed to set goals for their life. Liebrechts et al. (2014) expressed that identity change is at the core of desistance but having strategies for success required actions to achieve such goals. Persisters believe that they are strong enough to cease a habit, such as cannabis, under the right circumstances. Therefore, persisters were not strong enough to envision their future self, resulting in a lack of goals and unsuccessful quitting attempts. Desistors are individuals who committed a criminal act during adolescence but have subsequently ceased all criminal behaviors into adulthood (Byrd et al., 2011). Persisters commit a criminal act/or dangerous delinquency during early or late adolescence and continue to undertake an illegal act into adulthood (Byrd et al., 2011).

Bachman et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study that consisted of 304 participants who were drug-involved offenders released from prison. This participation sample included a mixed-race of males and females; 61% males, 39% females, 39% Caucasian, and 61% Black. Bachman et al. attempted to applying the identity theory of desistance to see if it explained criminal desistance within this populated sample. The researchers' used self-report data from the participant's arrest histories that were used in previous studies and records that were made public both nationally and locally. The researchers placed participants in different categories by offending trajectories. They labeled three desistor groups, low-level desistors= 26%, mid-level desistors= 21%, high-level desistors =15%, and two persister groups labeled low-level persisters =14% and high-level persisters= 20% by their level of offending. Participants were probed for cognitive decision-making processes surrounding their recreated event and interviewed. The researchers transcribed all interviews and used NVivo for data coding (Bachman et al., 2015).

According to Bachman and colleagues, it was reported that more than 80% of those who desisted from substance abuse and crime showed that cognitive identity transformation was conveyed in Paternoster and Bushway (2009) identity theory of desistance. During the interviews, many of the individuals expressed that they were no longer interested in offending. In addition to that, many did not realize the importance of their "feared self" until they recognized and admitted their failures (Bachman et al., 2015). Many factors, such as relationships and employment, help sustained desistance, but only if the offender was committed to changing. Bachman et al. (2015) explained that

there was no readiness for change in terms of persisters. Many of the persisters voiced they were not ready for change, but they were cautious regarding their behaviors and criminal image. In turn, while guarding their illegal images, the decision to keep offending cost the persisters many resources, freedom, and damaged familial relationships and support. In addition to those who conveyed their concerns about ongoing offending, the decision to deescalate their offending behaviors was almost non-existent as the persister narratives had not interested in detaching from their criminal identity (Bachman et al., 2015). The literature review will shift to an extended analysis of familial contact understandings before concluding with a summary of major themes and discussion supporting the gap this study will fill.

## **Familial Development and Change**

### ***Family and Self-Concept***

The knowledge base for the study of family and self has extended into the realm of psychology. Research has suggested that self and self-concept is a fundamental aspect of desistance from crime (Macmillian & Hussemann, 2009). Personal changes extend several opportunities to examine the social and psychological constructs of identity. Identity incorporates a sense of self-related to others within a social context (Fiske, 2010). Self-concept can either be personal or socially (Fiske, 2010). Identities are considered multifaceted, intricate, and unlimited, but it is not a singular concept. Because it is not a unique concept, for example, the self-can be both a mother and a criminal offender but can differ and vary due to the individual's beliefs. However, family

members, friends, and other acquaintances' perceptions and self-knowledge should be acknowledged (Devos et al., 2012).

### ***Identity, Familial Relationships, and Emotions***

Emotions are practical experiences that encompass your traits, moods, personality, and sensory experiences (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). Guided behaviors are interactions with one's emotions, identities, and self-concepts linked to our cognitive functioning. Everyone has differences in their personality that contributes to differences in their emotional traits. However, psychological characteristics are temporary, depending on the situation (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). For instance, Dyer (2005) conducted a study on how incarceration affected paternal identities. Fathers who were incarcerated thought they were not worthy enough to parent from behind bars or be a good parent. Thus, those emotions affected both familial relationships and reconnection with their children. As noted above, experiences may trigger an emotional response within the father and be perceived to others that he neglected or abandoned his responsibility, generating a motivating warfare response within himself.

### ***Familial Attachments***

Externalizing behavior is a factor for engaging in criminogenic behaviors. The social bonding theory suggests that children attached to their socialization agents are less likely to engage in criminal activity (Jeter et al., 2020). Therefore, if the social bonds are damaged, there is an increased chance of turning to illegal activity. Strong familial support is a vital identifier in the continuance of criminal desistance. Familial attachments can improve mental and emotional health, offer essential support once

release, and help reduce incarceration pressure and stress (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). Familial attachments can be weakened due to imprisonment, withdrawal from family can occur, and instability of both mental and emotional support can be impaired. Physical separation and psychological trauma caused by incarceration can also damage familial relationships. Marital attachments, academic careers, and relationships with children can also be altered. Such factors can cause the offender's emotional health to deteriorate rapidly while incarcerated, limiting the extent of social and familial relationships (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). Children of incarcerated parents experience poverty, substance, and alcohol abuse, and even violence (Myers et al., 1999).

During incarceration, family contact is meaningful to establish communication and support. According to Brunton-Smith and McCarthy (2017) and Rocque et al. (2013), various forms of contact, such as in-person visitations, improves family attachments and reduces the risk of reoffending. The improvement of familial relationships before incarceration and after incarceration does reduce the stress of reintegrating into society.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Roughly 95% of those sentenced to jail are eventually released, thus reaching historical reintegration levels (La Vigne et al., 2005). For many years, men and women have suffered from broken relationships, whether it began during childhood or adulthood, but some familial relationships were impaired from the beginning. Family relationships play an essential role in the reintegration process. Yet, after incarceration, reentry should be successful and uncomplicated, but as it is known that reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals is complicated. Reentry is a multifaceted approach that addresses housing,



employment, therapeutic treatment, and familial relationships (Leap et al., 2016). As such, efforts should begin during incarceration and should continue even after imprisonment to ensure that reentry is successful and productive. After release, many offenders rely on their loved ones to be supportive and encouraging to make the process easier. However, some offenders do not have that opportunity to depend on their families, thrusting them into a precarious lifestyle where they are expected to thrive. Relationships (family, friends) are essential and can significantly impact the ex-offender and their outcome. Parents who are incarcerated exposes their children to negative risk factors and delinquency (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010). Daily struggles are faced, and if offenders are not equipped with necessary skill sets and education, he/she will continue to struggle or even recidivate. Overall, adult jail releases have a vast array of needs upon release, and having familial attachments or relationships is a primary need. The practical and emotional needs that are needed to thrive comes from self-motivation and family. Research has shown that family support is essential to avoid reincarceration and should be established at the moment of release (La Vigne et al., 2005; Martinez & Christian, 2009). The offender's absence due to incarceration can cause cognitive-emotional suffering for the offender's family, but family attachments are essential, helping them become a better person for both themselves and their loved ones.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore lived experiences of familial contact and understand how receiving familial contact during incarceration helped offenders to desist from crime. I designed the research questions to focus on familial contact determinants and supportive behaviors in a diverse group of individuals who were successful in desistance. For this study, I considered both men and women to be successful in criminal desistance if they had not had any arrested for at least 3-5 years after release. Any arrest or violation was cause for exclusion as a participant from this study. The participants in this study were adult jail releasees who had familial contact during incarceration and had consistently desisted from crime for at least 3-5 years post incarceration.

An improved understanding the specific person and context attributes, factors, and experiences that contribute to criminal desistance may assist in developing familial support programs or policies relevant to the criminal desistance process. Men and women were of the interested populations, they all had distinctive experiences. At best, they were navigating their type of family contact and the effect of preincarcerated and postincarcerated familial relationship quality and support (La Vigne et al., 2005).

This chapter contains an in-depth explanation of the research methods, design, and rationale used for this study. This chapter also includes a brief overview of participant selection, my role as the researcher, data collection and analysis procedures, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical concerns and measures that I took to address them.

### **Setting of Study**

I conducted virtual interviews for the convenience and safety of myself and the participants. I also chose a virtual setting to promote confidentiality, comfort, and anonymity for my participants. Semistructured interviews via Zoom, Google Meet allowed for observation of hand movements and gestures as well as open dialogue and, email, or telephone (if a virtual option was not available) allowed for open dialogue. Phone interviews made it possible to explore vulnerable topics that would have been more difficult to discuss if the discussions had been held face to face. Participants who were willing to be forthcoming in their responses ensured that the setting was comfortable.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I selected a qualitative design and used Giorgi's (2012) descriptive phenomenological inquiry approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of jail releasees regarding their familial contact experiences during incarceration and reentry. The rationale for using the descriptive phenomenology approach for this study was that I sought to set aside my bias to acknowledge the phenomenon of interest. As the researcher, I made no claims regarding the lived experiences that the participants would describe (Giorgi, 2012). Four research questions were formulated to guide the inquiry into familial connections and criminal desistance:

RQ1. What is the lived experience of familial support during incarceration for adult jail releasees?

- RQ2. What are the lived experiences of family contact during incarceration for adult jail releasees?
- RQ3. How do the jail releasees make sense of their lived experiences?
- RQ4. How do the male and female jail releasees describe their familial relationships?

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's role in a study is to collect data and use the research as an instrument of data collection (Simon, 2011). Data can be mediated through both inventories and questionnaires, but the participant, the human, is the instrument in specific instances. Researchers have the role of describing and explaining any and every aspect of a study relevant to themselves, acknowledging any biases and assumptions that they may have, and addressing any experiences or expectations that might affect the quality of the research or their ability to conduct it.

A qualitative researcher should be an excellent observer, ask probing questions to gain a deeper understanding, and engage in in-depth conversation. My goal in this study was to identify patterns, themes, and models that would help me to understand the phenomenon. The research's overall goal was to paint a picture with empirical evidence and grounded theories to answer the research questions (Råheim et al., 2016).

The accessible participant pool consisted of adult individuals who were interested in the study. To ensure that each participant met the eligibility criteria, I emailed or mailed each prospective participant an informational letter and a consent form. I

completed a demographic form (Appendix C) before the interviews after consent was received.

For me to understand the participants, I remained unbiased. To minimize bias and control emotions, I ensured that I could debrief with other researchers to code the data, review the results, verify with multiple data sources, check for further explanations to be used, and partner with others to review current findings.

### **Central Concepts**

Familial contact, incarceration, and criminal desistance were the concepts that guided this study. Desistance researchers have identified that as individuals make the transition from offender to nonoffender, family connections are an essential component of the desistance process (Paternoster & Bushway, 2011; Rocque et al., 2014). As noted, criminal desistance involves altering behaviors to shift from offending behaviors to nonoffending behaviors. “Long-term criminal desistance” refers to maintaining a pattern of nonoffending for 10 or more years.

### **Qualitative Methodology**

This study was conducted using a descriptive phenomenological approach. Qualitative methods are exploratory and involve the use of inductive reasoning as researchers seek to understand the phenomenon of interest directly from the participants’ perspective (Creswell, 2014). Giorgi’s (2009) descriptive phenomenological method was used to analyze the data. The focus of this phenomenological approach is understanding the conscious experience of the individual. Descriptive phenomenological methods are used to understand individuals’ beliefs, behaviors, and interactions. This type of study

also offers the opportunity to generate nonnumerical data while drawing informative conclusions in a respectful manner that does not violate the complexity of humans individually and as a group (Pathak et al., 2013).

According to Pathak et al. (2013) and Creswell (2014), quantitative approaches are best used when testing theories deductively. These authors explained that the quantitative approach is a simple but reliable method that uses numerical processes such as statistical analyses and generalizability that other researchers can objectively propagate. Because the process of familial contact as a subprocess of desistance had yet to be explored, a qualitative approach was best for this study. Using this approach allowed me to collect rich data by applying the social identity theory and the identity theory of desistance which can aid in future research development.

### **Descriptive Phenomenology**

Qualitative researchers can choose the approach that best fits their study. There are five approaches to qualitative inquiry: phenomenology, narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological approach is a qualitative research method used to describe how an individual experiences a specific phenomenon, so I deemed this method the best fit for this study. Phenomenological researchers must eliminate any biases or preconceived notions about the individual's experience, feelings, and responses so that a thorough investigation into lived experience is completed.

The goal of phenomenology is to directly understand the experience that relates to the phenomenon of interest. A phenomenological study can be viewed as an immediate

investigation into a person's life experience, to explore and provide a description of the phenomenon as it is consciously experienced by a person living those experiences (Creswell, 2013). Because I aimed in this study to explore the lived experiences of those who had familial contact during incarceration within the criminal desistance process, this approach was suitable. It helped me dive deeper into the perspectives, understandings, and feelings of those who experienced familial contact during incarceration. The following subsections include brief descriptions regarding other qualitative approaches and why they would have been ineffective for this study.

Narrative researchers aim to explore human experience as it is represented in textual form. Researchers also gather data from more than one participant in the form of a written document or verbal communication directly from the individual (Creswell, 2013). The researcher arranges the stories in chronological order. Patton (2015) described the narrative approach as a foundational purpose, but Salkind (2010) said this approach aims for an in-depth exploration and understanding of the individual and the world he/she resides. This approach is like phenomenology, but the difference is the participants' sample size (Creswell, 2013). With this approach, according to Creswell, the sample size is a single individual or a small group versus utilizing the phenomenological approach where the sample size can reach up to 25 participants. However, the phenomenological inquiry offers a more vibrant narrative with the opportunity to understand each experience within a larger group.

The purpose of grounded theory research is to discover or construct a theory from data. It is a well-known methodology that has been used in many research studies.

Grounded theory is an inflexible theory and is a more sophisticated methodology that offers the researcher the ability to design a framework that applies to the process (Tie et al., 2019). It addresses the problem of explanations through the lens of theoretical frameworks that have been designed around other studies that may be relevant (Creswell, 2013). This study's intent was not to create a theory but to use an existing method that contributes to the study. Therefore, the use of the ITD by Paternoster and Bushway (2009) and SIT by Tajfel and Turner (1989) helped capture how familial contact and identity change is essential to the criminal desistance process. The use of theory was not the best fit as this study will address the researcher's questions regarding familial contact and criminal desistance.

Creswell (2013) explained how ethnographies focus on a shared group of participants to understand learned behaviors, actions, values, and norms that donate to the system's well-functioning. The researcher uses this method to immerse into the shared group's daily life for an extended amount of time to gather data from the group's natural settings. Though, case study researchers investigate a single or multitude of problems over time in a sterile environment as the phenomenon of interest evolves (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the case study would be a possible fit because my investigation focused on past and lived experiences as they continue to desist from crime.

### **Population and Sampling Procedures**

Purposive sampling is a nonrandom method that does not require underlying theories or a specific number of participants. It is used to better understand the theoretical framework used and identify and select rich information to be utilized within the data



collection process (Etikan et al., 2016). In purposive sampling, the researcher finds specific participants who fit the study's purpose. There are sixteen different strategies to identify information-rich cases that fall within the purposive sampling approach: maximum variation, homogenous, critical situation, theory-based, snowball or chain, extreme or deviant circumstance, random purposeful, typical case, intensity: combination or mixed, and convenience (Creswell, 2013).

When conducting a descriptive phenomenological, all participants must have experienced the phenomenon of interest. Study participants were men and women over the age of 18 who had served at least 5 years in a state or federal jail facility and had not been arrested for at least 3 years or had not returned to jail within the 3-5 years postrelease. To determine eligibility and criteria for criminal desistance was met, participants were asked a series of questions and allowed to elaborate on their incarceration and criminal history. For this study, I used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to determine the appropriate participants for this study based on gender, age, and criminal history. Flyers were advertised within the community and advertised using all social media platforms. If the participants were interested, they were instructed to contact me via email or by phone only. After contact and initial interest, participants were sent letters via mail or email (Appendix A) explaining the study, including the eligibility criteria. The interested parties returned their consent forms via mail or email.

The sample size population was determined by how quickly saturation was reached during the data collection process. Smaller participant pools offered a more

significant opportunity for richness and depth (Creswell, 2015). Saturation is considered the climax where gathering information does not yield new information (Mason, 2010). For this study, the target sample size was 8 participants, or until saturation was reached.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

This research study's criteria were adult jail releasees who have served time in a jail setting before any interviews. For this study's purpose, I preferred adult jail releases to share their lived experiences of their incarceration and how familial contact influenced their decision to desist from crime. The participants should have served at least 9 months or more in a jail setting with 3-5 years of criminal desistance. This study was conducted within my local community and across the world and varied between different states. The inclusion included all male and female adults formerly incarcerated for 9 months or more and desisted from crime due to familial contact and support.

The exclusion criteria consisted of individuals under 18 or 18 years or older but whose sentencing was 9 months or less. This exclusion criterion was in place because individuals who did not meet the requirements could not participate in the study due to the lack of sentencing length.

### **Instrumentation**

For this study, I developed a semistructured interview protocol to conduct telephonic and virtual interviews (COVID-19 Guidelines) based on the four research questions (Appendix B). There were sub-questions and follow-up questions included in the interview protocol for guided direction during the interviews. This instrument was conducted through videoconferencing/virtual to allow a deeper understanding of the

participants' experience. Audio-recording was used for transcription, and document reviews of the desistance process were provided by participants, if applicable.

Semistructured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research for data-collection.

However, I was the critical instrument used for data collection. The objective was to encourage participants to share their experiences without any stigma or judgment. I ensured that all participants were comfortable with the questions being asked to safeguard that all questions were answered thoroughly for a greater understanding.

### **Procedures for Instrument Pilot Study**

The semistructured interviews' procedure consisted of open-ended questions that produced thick and rich detailed responses to shed light on the lived experiences of jail releases who had familial contact during incarceration and how familial support help them desist from criminogenic behaviors. Folk et al. (2019) recommended that further research be done on men and women formerly incarcerated and had familial contact but within a jail setting. The research and interview questions were created to produce a thorough response from the participants to understand their experiences. Most instrumentation that is used within research is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of interest. The instrument pilot's importance was to help identify any obstacles that may have increased qualitative research's methodological reliability (Hurst et al., 2015). I used a qualitative expert panel from Walden to review the interview instrument to ensure consistency with the research questions.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

For recruitment purposes, I contacted the local Sheriff's office to obtain permission to post my study flyer and explain the research's purpose and the need for eligible participants. Each participant was advised of my research theory and was informed of the participation procedure. I also explained the methods in place for conducting the study and that all participation was voluntary. A detailed explanation regarding my role as the researcher, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University, offered a more welcoming approach. However, several individuals were interested in participating in my research study.

A detailed explanation was presented to the interested participants, this study's purpose, and the importance of contributing to social change. Explained in great detail was the following criteria for eligibility and selecting participants. Participants were informed of the interview process and that due to COVID-19, no face-to-face interviews were conducted for our safety. Because a small sample size of participants helped achieve the goal of gathering rich information that was needed for data collection; the criteria to participate in the study was printed on the advertised flyer: adults age 18 and over; who was incarcerated; signed a consent form to participate in research. For this study, a sample of 8 participants were used. Those interested in participating in this study were recruited via announcements using flyers, message boards, social media platforms, and colleagues. The advertised flyer (see Appendix D) was posted within my local community, emailed to colleagues, and posted on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. A detailed demographic form was available to ensure that participants met the

eligibility criteria. My contact information was provided as the researcher and for participation. Each participant that has completed the research study was presented with a thank you gift that included items valued at \$10 or less.

As noted, to start data collection, I used the purposive sampling method. This method is based on the characteristics of a population and the phenomenon of interest studied. A fictitious name was assigned to each participant, and data were collected using an audio recorder and documented notes and organized to conceal the participants' identity. As the data collection progresses, any information relevant to the participant was labeled with their fictitious name and file number; each participant received a file number in sequential order to remain organized and transcribed accurately. Once necessary forms for participation and documentation were verified and confirmed, participants demonstrated their understanding of each step of the interview process and their involvement in the study. As a researcher, I kept an organized log of transcripts and field notes. Two forms of data collection were used in this study: semistructured interviews and observation. Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes, an appropriate time frame for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013). Each participant was allocated a number identification, interview date, and time. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting chosen by the participant via videoconferencing while taking field notes. The field notes were taken to describe nonverbal behaviors, body language (if applicable), and the participant's paraphrased responses.

Before I began the interview process, I debriefed each participant to reiterate the study title of my research, my name, contact information, the purpose of the study, and

follow-up questions. The purpose of this procedure for recruitment was to study how familial contact during incarceration helped jail releases desist from crime. During the interview, probing questions were asked, the participant was allowed to commentate and clarify any information at the end of the interview. If needed, the follow-up questions were only utilized to retrieve more information. I contacted the participant, then those questions occurred after the original interview was completed. If certain feelings and emotions arose at any time, a list of counseling services was provided if the participant needed to speak to someone to help process feelings (Appendix E). Since the interviews were conducted virtually, transcription followed immediately after the interview(s) ended. This allowed me to record the participants' responses while everything was still fresh and accurate. Everything was audio-recorded to listen for nonverbal sounds that may have been in the researchers' field notes.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis Plan**

For this study, I used Giorgi's (2012) detailed phenomenological inquiry to explore the adult jail releases' lived experiences who experienced familial contact during incarceration. Qualitative data consists of audio recordings, written notes, and summaries. I used several options that involved data collection techniques which were manageable and useful. This process was tedious and complicated for those who were discussing their experiences as they can live very complex lives. As a precaution to avoid bias, bracketing was used to eliminate prior knowledge related to the phenomenon of interest (Giorgi, 2012). I used Giorgi's five steps that involve the phenomenological psychological method of descriptive qualitative data. In the first step, I read the transcripts to the end

multiple times to understand how the described lived experience ends. The second step required that I assume the attitude of phenomenological psychological reduction. The third step was to reread the transcript's lived experience description and bracket the meaning units. After the meaning units were determined, the fourth step was to transform the meaning units through a phenomenological reduction. The fifth and last step was to obtain the general structure of the experience. Being open to new data being emerged and taking efficient notes allowed a thorough analysis of interpretations to mitigate potential bias.

Semistructured interviews were used as the primary source of data collection. The data collected was collected manually through field notes and then transcribed using NVivo software and Otter. NVivo is a data collection method used to organize data, interviews, surveys, and literature reviews. Otter is transcription software that analyzes data within minutes, as hand-coding was used as a backup method. This software also can be used to create themes and sub-themes that may emerge during the interviews. Open-ended questions were formulated to provide a level of flexibility and to gather rich and thick information. Semistructured interviews prohibit unexpected topics that may arise during the interview process. This allows for control and probing if needed to collect more data. Saturation is said to be reached once gathered information does not yield new information. Once saturation was reached, data collection ceased.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

I refrained from any bias, because subjectivity can be influenced by the research standards.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the degree to which the researcher has confidence in the data, interpretation, and the methods used to ensure the study's quality (Connelly, 2016). In this qualitative study, the elements of trustworthiness can be provided through reflexivity and triangulation. Triangulation was used to establish both credibility and confirmability. The use of triangulation required one or more methods while collecting data. Triangulation is used to cross-check data, the dictation of audio recordings, and notes. Reflexivity was also used to establish credibility during saturation and even the review of transcriptions. Participants were allowed to discuss any issues he/she may have felt about their responses provided during the interview.

**Credibility**

In qualitative studies, the credibility of the survey is the confidence within the research and the findings. This process relies heavily on the researcher's capabilities to consider all difficulties that may arise. To ensure credibility, the researcher understood the phenomenon of interest, and any preconceived notions or assumptions were delayed getting the true meaning of the participants' lived experiences. Credibility refers to how well the research was conducted, and it can be established by reviewing all transcripts to ensure bias was not present. Because qualitative study aims to describe or understand the phenomenon, the participants can judge the results' credibility (Farally, 2013).

**Transferability**

Transferability is findings that can be applied to other boundaries in different studies and settings. This research phase allowed the researcher to focus on the



participant's story without comparing other experiences (Connelly, 2016). The researcher completed this strategy using a descriptive context, a specific location, and allowing the participants to be as transparent as possible. Because transferability is equated to generalizability, using purposive sampling enabled me as the researcher to provide a detailed description of the participants' experience.

### **Dependability**

Dependability helps establish findings and data that are found throughout the research. This analysis level is responsible for describing the changes that may occur within the interview setting, and such changes can affect the way the researcher addresses the research (Farally, 2013). In this study, dependability was established as the researcher completed and maintained audit trails used for this study while simultaneously cross-checking data during data collection.

### **Confirmability**

Qualitative research must be trustworthy enough to continue to conduct research, and the last component to ensure trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed by others, and such findings are directly from the participants' perspective (Farally, 2013). The researcher should verify if the study was neutral, and the results were consistent enough to be repeated. Multiple strategies enhance confirmability. The researcher was able to document all procedures used to collect data and accuracy, including documentation of audit trails and journal notes. To prevent bias from the researcher's perspective, one should consider the study participants' views.

### **Intra- and Intercoder Reliability**

Intra-and Intercoder reliability is the process that refers to the analysis of two separate written coding documentation. Intercoder reliability can comprise two researchers who independently code the data, while intracoder is the researcher's hand-coding alone. For this study, I was the intracoder. To ensure the accuracy of coding, I used NVivo software to code as well.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The ethical procedures relevant to this study inquiry include the exploitation of participants, full disclosure, and consent required for participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. I ensured that all work and data were not in violation of any ethical standards. This study was conducted under Walden University IRB and APA ethical guidelines to ensure that all safety measures are in place to safeguard against any harm to the participating participants. Privacy and confidentiality are top priorities. If there were any potential risk of ethical violations, such as privacy breaches, misinterpretation of data, or discriminatory behavior, risks were addressed immediately. Data collection began after IRB approved the study. All participants were required to sign a consent form, which is mandatory by Walden University IRB. Participants' identities were redacted and camouflage using a pseudonym to protect their identities.

### **Treatment of Human Participants**

The study participants were recruited through advertised fliers and email ads that included all the necessary detailed information regarding the study's purpose. A telephone number and email address were provided for the participants to express their

interest. According to Walden's IRB guidelines, a mobile number was provided to ensure my safety. An informational email and consent form were provided via mail or email to each of the participants. The consent form was available to explain their rights as volunteers, their confidentiality and privacy, and their right to decline participation. All participants were treated with respect and dignity.

### **Treatment of Data**

All data that was collected in this study will continue to remain confidential. Confidentiality will be ensured throughout the data collection process. All private information that can potentially expose the participants was redacted from public records. However, the participants' information will only be shared amongst the dissertation chair, committee, and myself, as the researcher. All participants received a file number and a pseudonym, as data from this research may be archived for future research.

### **Threats to Validity**

Validity threats were minimized through feedback that was provided by the participants. The dissertation chair and committee members had the opportunity to review the instrumentation procedures, the participants' recorded responses, and the study participants' feedback regarding the interview process. The researcher enhanced external and internal validity by thoroughly discussing the research context and re-reading transcripts to ensure the recording's accuracy.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to add to the existing literature on familial contact during incarceration and how it can be a part of the criminal desistance

process. Chapter 3 defined the study concepts and explained many details surrounding the phenomenon of interest were explored. The research questions and rationale for the research design were given. I selected the descriptive phenomenological approach to understand their lived experiences having familial contact that has helped them desist from crime. My role as the researcher was discussed, and a comprehensive review of the methodology included the procedures for instrumentation, population and sampling processes, inclusion and exclusion criterion, recruitment procedures, data analysis methods, issues of trustworthiness, and participant selection. Ethical considerations were outlined as I explored familial contact during incarceration, criminal desistance, and reintegration. As noted, semistructured interviews by phone or videoconferencing were used as a primary source for data collection, in addition to NVivo, Otter, and hand-coding for transcription. Researcher bias was addressed through bracketing and reflexivity.

Chapter 4 will contain a detailed analysis of data collected, demographics, results, and summary will be revealed in greater detail. Chapter 5 will provide the limitations, recommendations, interpretation of findings, further implications, and conclusion of this research study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

In the recent literature regarding postrelease outcomes, Folk et al. (2019) discovered that family contact had been successful in the prison setting. However, Folk et al. recommended that research be conducted to understand the importance of familial contact during incarceration within a jail setting as a part of the criminal desistance process. Because desistance is a universal process, it has been suggested that a new identity arises after an individual is released. The purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences of familial contact during incarceration and how such support allows an offender to desist from crime as a mechanism of the criminal desistance process that focuses on familial contact and postrelease identity. Using Giorgi's (2012) five-step phenomenological method, I conducted a descriptive phenomenological study using data collected through semistructured interviews, including five telephone interviews and three email interviews. Three themes and 2 subthemes emerged in response to the research questions. The following 4 research questions guided the inquiry:

- RQ1: What is the lived experience of familial support during incarceration for adult jail releasees?
- RQ2: What are the lived experiences of family contact during incarceration for adult jail releasees?
- RQ3: How do the jail releasees make sense of their lived experiences?
- RQ4: How do the male and female jail releasees describe their familial relationships?

This chapter includes an in-depth description of the findings from this phenomenological qualitative study. Alongside the results, I discuss the research setting, evidence of trustworthiness, participant demographics, and the data collection and analysis process, as mentioned in Chapter 3. I also provide a detailed explanation of the themes with supporting evidence and figures. This chapter concludes with a summary of how I reached the results for the research questions.

### **Pilot Study**

The purpose of the pilot study was to get a glimpse of the proper way to conduct a qualitative interview. This pilot study was not completed until the approval of the Walden IRB was sent, #10-28-20-0682601. I asked a former colleague to participate in the pilot study, as I did not want to jeopardize my research using actual participants from the research study. The pilot study was completed in a quiet setting as I informed the pilot participant to depart to a quiet, confidential location and treat the pilot as an actual interview. As the researcher, I formulated techniques that allowed me to ask open-ended questions, probe, and take notes accurately. I used an audio recorder to record responses, which I transcribed immediately after the interview ended. The pilot study allowed me to conduct the main study without anxiety.

### **Research Setting**

Due to COVID-19, all participants were encouraged to choose a confidential location that would ensure privacy and honesty during the interview. I offered the research participants the option to participate in the interview by (a) email, (b) videoconferencing, or (c) telephone. Four of the eight participants opted to conduct their

interview by videoconference. For this purpose, I used a private Zoom webinar that required a meeting ID and password to enter. The remaining four participants preferred email interviews. For the email interviews, I instructed the participants to conduct their interviews in a confidential setting of their choice and prompted them to return the responses as soon as they completed them. No conditions were present that influenced the participants or their answers.

### **Demographics**

The recruitment effort for this study resulted in 11 respondents expressing interest in participation; of those 11 respondents, eight responded with consent to participate. Each participant received full participation details, including an informational letter and a copy of Walden University's IRB-approved consent form. This study concluded with eight participants: four males and four females. The target sample size was eight to 12 participants. According to Creswell (2015), a smaller participant pool offers a better opportunity for richness and depth, and in this study, the smaller sample size was conducive to a more in-depth exploration.

All participants confirmed that they met the inclusion criteria through verbal self-reporting and were over 18 years of age. All participants were between the ages of 20 and 45 and had at least 3-5 years of criminal desistance. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code for confidentiality purposes. Table 1 shows the alphanumeric code (i.e., P1-P8), participant type, age, ethnicity, and number of years post offense for each participant. Participant types were as follows: short-term desistor (STD) and long-term

desistor (LTD). Table 2 provides the data on participants' highest level of education, marital status, and employment type.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Participant type	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Years post offense
P1	STD	24	Male	AA	3.5
P2	STD	26	Male	AA	3.5
P3	LTD	25	Male	AA	5
P4	LTD	33	Male	AA	5
P5	STD	32	Female	AA	4
P6	LTD	34	Female	AA	6
P7	LTD	43	Female	Caucasian	10
P8	LTD	45	Female	Caucasian	18

*Note.* STD = short-term desistor; LTD = long-term desistor; AA = African American.

Of the eight participants, four (50%) were male, and four (50%) were female. In terms of ethnicity, six (75%) participants were African American, and two participants (25%) were Caucasian. The ages ranged from 24-45 years, with an average age of 27 for males and 38 for females. The total overall average age for both genders was 32-33 years. Number of years post offense ranged from 3.5 to 18, with an average of 6-7 years since being released.



**Table 2***Participant Demographics, Continued*

	Marital status	Highest education	Employed: Y/N Type: FT/PT
P1	Dating	Dropout	N
P2	Single	HS diploma	Y—FT
P3	Dating	Drop out	Y—PT
P4	Single	GED	N
P5	Single	College	Y—FT
P6	Single	College	Y—FT
P7	Dating	College	Y—FT
P8/Ally	Married	College	Y—FT

*Note.* Y=yes; N=no; FT= full-time; PT= part-time

Of the eight participants in Table 2, 25% were dating, and 25% were single post release. As for the females, 50% were single, 25% were dating, and 25% married post release. The demographic breakdown was as follows: 50% of the female participants were college graduates, 25% of the male participants were high school dropouts, 12.5% of participants had received a GED, and the remaining 12.5% of participants had received a high school diploma.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were the primary data collection method. The instrument used was a 60-minute interview guide to explore the lived experiences of jail releasees who had familial contact during incarceration. Interviews were recorded with all eight participants. The interviews were semistructured around the interview questions, with follow-up questions used for further exploration. Upon receiving approval from Walden's IRB, I started data collection on October 28, 2020. After receiving approval, I contacted the local sheriff's office and asked for permission for my recruitment flyer to be posted (refer

to Appendix D). The flyer was posted on all my social media platforms. I then used the snowball method to seek more individuals who might be eligible to participate.

Interviews were conducted using the a) telephone, b) email, and c) Zoom. I used the interview protocols shown in Appendices A, B, and E to guide the interviews from start to finish. Before I began the interview, I included an introductory statement that outline who I was, my contact information, the purpose of the study, and what to expect during the process. I also confirmed the consent to record. The duration of the interviews was between 35-60 minutes, given the 60-minute allotted timeframe. No follow-up interviews were required as saturation was reached with the eight participants.

The interview questions were able to provide their perception about a) their familial contact and support that was provided, (b) how they navigated life postrelease, (c) postrelease identity, and (d) how familial connection helped with criminal desistance. There was a total of eight participants. I conducted four interviews via Zoom and audio-recorded; the remaining four interviews were completed via email and took between 35-60 minutes, given the 60-minute allotted timeframe. I utilized Otter (<https://otter.ai/>), a transcription software that was used to transcribe the interviews. Once transcription was completed, I reviewed each transcription thoroughly for accuracy. Lastly, I completed member checking by having each participant review the transcript 24 hours after the interview concluded, and the feedback and added information given was included in the transcription. I also used the journal/handwritten notes taken and placed them at the end of the interview. There were no unusual situations that arose in the data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

For my data analysis, I used Giorgi's (2012) descriptive phenomenological method to explore the experience of jail releasees who had familial contact during incarceration as experienced by participants and to understand and describe the essence of that experience. The analysis for each participant's responses began with the assumption of a double perspective required of descriptive phenomenology. For confidentiality, all participants were identified as alphanumeric (P1-P8). After completing interviews and member checking for accuracy, I started the first step and used bracketing to destroy any past knowledge and experiences related to the phenomenon of interest and increase awareness and attention around the presented information (Giorgi, 2012). Second, I assumed a phenomenological psychological attitude to ensure that the data remain sensitive, and the phenomenon of interest came from a psychological perspective. After adopting a phenomenological psychological attitude, I uploaded each audio-recorded interview into Otter (<https://otter.ai/>), the transcription software, and transcribed it for an accurate analysis. I created a set of initial codes by identifying similarities within the transcription, which provided me the opportunity to relisten to the participant's responses before beginning formal analysis. Once transcription was completed, I applied the five steps of Giorgi's (2012) descriptive phenomenological method.

After reading each response thoroughly in its entirety from all eight participants, I reread the response data to mark meaning units, which resulted in 200 meaning units between all eight participants. Thirdly, I applied variation to identify expressions relevant

to the phenomenon of interest and transform that data into psychological value expressions. I used a table created using a word document aligned with the analysis flow chart used by Giorgi (2012) to organize and identify each response related to the phenomenon of interest. The result yielded 124 meaning units relevant to familial contact and criminal desistance.

Hand-coding was used to allow for an iterative process where the codes were used as data retrieval labels. Throughout, I created a list of codes and assigned a color to keep track of the codes. As hand-coding continued and new data codes emerged, they were added to the code list concurrently. Categories and themes were also organized and reorganized through the process of manual coding. Fourth, I continued bracketing and reviewed the psychological expressions. I further reduced the meaning units to align with familial contact and criminal desistance. Fifth, I identified the emergent themes to clarify, interpret, and report the presented raw data. Lastly, the final codes, categories, and themes were added to a separate word document, as there were no conflicting instances found in the analysis.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Transferability**

Details that stemmed from the participant's demographics and experiences were reported to increase the chances of transferability. The process of transferability involves findings that can be applied and used in other settings and studies (Connelly, 2016). The results were reported in an in-depth and detailed manner that allowed the extensive use of direct quotes to provide insight into each participant's lived experience as they

experienced it for the purpose of transferability. This process was completed by providing accurate information regarding the participants' demographics while maintaining their confidentiality and their lived experiences to allow future researchers to expound upon the phenomenon of interest in future research.

### **Credibility**

Several measures were taken throughout this data analysis process to enhance the credibility of this study's results. The researcher must pay careful attention to the phenomenon of interest and any assumptions that may have delayed getting the true meaning of the participant's lived experience—credibility completed through reflexivity, review of transcriptions, and data saturation. Giorgi's (2012) descriptive approach required that the researcher set aside any bias or personal experience regarding the phenomenon of interest to analyze the present without connecting it to past knowledge. Therefore, bracketing continued throughout the analysis process. The participants were informed consistently throughout the process regarding the phenomenon of interest. Each participant was allowed to make changes to the transcription for accuracy, and each reported that the transcription was accurate.

### **Dependability**

As the researcher, I established dependability using audit trails while simultaneously cross-checking data during data collection to ensure that the information provided during transcription was transcribed in its entirety (Farrally,2013). A pilot study was completed to make sure that the interview questions aligned with the study's purpose. I confirmed that each of the participants offered sufficient information relevant to the

topic and interest phenomenon. I also thoroughly reviewed and double-checked the audio-recordings, transcriptions, and journal notes.

### **Confirmability**

During the data collection process, the researcher must have verified if the study was neutral and if the results were consistent enough to be repeated. However, the confirmability process was completed by allowing the participants to provide a detailed explanation of their lived experiences of familial contact during incarceration. I allowed each participant to justify or expand their response to ensure that the information that was being received was accurate (Farrally,2013). Confidentiality was maintained amongst each participant, as I did not engage or share any personal knowledge about the phenomenon. Each participant was given my undivided attention, without interruption or my opinion.

### **Results**

The following results are organized in the order analyzed that begins with transcription followed by observation and journal notes, then moving into a more thorough analysis to conform to the descriptive phenomenology and fit the identity theory of desistance and social identity theory. From the 4 research questions, 3 themes and 2 sub-themes emerged from the data analysis results. The 8 participants were asked a series of demographic questions, followed by 4 interview questions. The 4 questions asked about the support (mental, emotional, and financial) they received from their family, the type of contact used, familial relationships, and their incarceration experience.

**Table 3***Emergent Themes*

Themes	Subthemes
1. Familial support & relationships → Subtheme 1a.	Self-determination/motivation to change
2. Postrelease identity → Subtheme 2a.	Self-development (school, work)
3. Incarceration support	

*Note.* Some participants' responses fell under multiple themes.

**Central Research Questions**

- RQ1: What is the lived experience of familial support during incarceration for adult jail releasees?
- RQ2: What are the lived experiences of family contact during incarceration for adult jail releasees?
- RQ3: How do the jail releasees make sense of their lived experience?
- RQ4: How do the male and female jail releasees describe their familial relationships?

**Theme 1: Familial Support and Relationships**

Theme 1 addressed RQ 1, What is the lived experience of familial support during incarceration for adult jail releasees. All eight participants expressed a sense of urgency to discuss their criminal desistance. The participants' criminal desistance length varied, but each of them reached a point of self-determination to stop offending and readjust their lives because of their familial relationships. This theme emerged from the participants' responses to their family's perception of being supportive-mentally, physically, and

emotionally during incarceration. For P1, his self-determination came from his family's support after being falsely accused and having to prove his innocence. For P2, it came from him becoming a father. For P3, came from a decision he made for himself. For P4, his determination related to his father's death, and for P5, her determination stemmed from wanting to make her mother proud. Determination for P6 resulting in her admitting her mistake and helping others, P7 making her dad proud, and P8 being abandoned as a child by her mom and dad. The motivation and determination were enough to fuel the participants to make the necessary changes to adjust and address any challenges and discomfort they may have experienced through their process.

P1 shared,

Every time I had visitation; my aunts always gave me encouraging words. They always tried to talk to me to keep my head straight anytime I called they was there. So yeah, I pretty much had all the family support that I needed while I was incarcerated. I was falsely accused. I had seven charges, which were first-degree burglary, four kidnappings, umm possession of a weapon doing a violent crime and conspiracy. All those together, that's like 50 to life and all I'm saying like my life is over. But once I was in that situation, knowing I didn't do anything. You have family that care about you better than this, you could do better.

P3 shared,

My mom was really excellent. She came to see me. Like every visitation she brought me money, socks and whatever else that I needed to keep me alive. She wrote me a lot of letters, you know, just uplifting letters. Just to keep my head on



straight. I read and focused on those scriptures, different Bible verses. Even when she come to see me, she'll come and drop off these little daily prayer pamphlets.

### **Subtheme 1a: Motivation and Commitment to Change**

Participants 2,4,5,6,7 and 8 all mention that they had some familial support that came from their family. Some of these participants stated that their reasoning for wanting to change and how their support was favored more than others, but they all realized that others around them did not receive any type of familial support-mentally, physically, and emotionally from their loved ones. No matter the type of support given, they were supported which was beneficial to their postrelease outcomes.

P1 shared,

I felt lost without them. I felt like I would be lost somewhere else, like it will make me crash out or go to lockup or something, but with me talking to them knowing that they had my back and was supporting me that made me, nah what I'm saying, that made me do the right thing while I was back there. They was just giving me a little hope that I do have someone who care about me, Yeah, I'm not back here alone. Nah, what I'm saying is, it kept me guided. Me knowing that they are writing me, taking the time out to write me, or come see me. It shows that they loved me.

P4 shared,

Every week, two times out of the week, my mother would come see me in the county. If not her, then my father or my aunt. But once I traveled to Upstate, that basically was the same routine they worked out. And if not, probably every other

week or like once a month, which was still cool. And phone calls was every day, that was probably once or twice a week. We had pretty good contact. I was told two months before my release date, that my father would probably be dead before I get home. And when I came home, my father was still alive. So, I mean, geez, anything's possible. You can't afford to miss out on precious moments. Don't miss out on the most biggest thing. The most hurtful thing ever. That kind of helped me get levelheaded a lot.

**Table 4**

*Familial Support*

Theme 1	Number ( <i>N</i> = 8)	Percentage
1. Familial support & relationships	8	100%
→ Subtheme 1a. Self-determination/motivation to change	7	87.5%

*Note.* Some participants' responses fell under multiple themes.

**Theme 2: Postrelease Identity**

Theme 2 addressed RQ 2; What are the lived experiences of family contact during incarceration for adult jail releasees? Identity changes can occur significantly in the criminal desistance process and the participant's identity can be reflected upon their social relationships, familial structure, and self-control. However, many offenders struggle with finding their postrelease identities are after a detrimental circumstance such as incarceration. Most of the participants explained how their identity changed once they were released from jail. One participant stated that he no longer has his criminal identity and believed that he left the identity there as he moved onto a more positive track for his life once he was released. Participants 4, 6, and 7 explained how they struggled with their

criminal identity in the world as the other participants had no trouble creating a new self-identity.

P4 shared,

My child's mom. supportive, but um, it was just, it was like, it was just hard taking care of everything and then me coming home. I had to automatically straddle all her struggles and things on my back before I could figure out, you know, how to put my feet on solid ground. I had to automatically carry the weight of whatever she was carrying. And that was the hardest part you know, because like I said, you just now coming from having everybody support you, send you money, come see you, feed you, or whatever to now the roles are reverse. Like alright, you are back, you are the man of the house, the kids need to be fed and changed. I need help. But to know that is something you have to cope with and make it work because it is a little hard at first but going to jail ain't easy and coming home, it's the same way.

P6 shared,

Having those raw emotions and feelings made me feel like I failed myself.

Uhhhhh, yea, I have to tell you it was rough. If I had to diagnose myself, I would definitely say I suffered from minor depression and PTSD after release because I could not stop replaying my arrest and sentencing in my head. I did not know who I was. Even with me being a first-time offender, it was tough for me to accept me.

**Subtheme 2a: Self-Development/Adapting to Life**

All eight participants pinpointed behaviors that were detrimental to their self-identity and desistance goals, leveraging and developing those behaviors conducive to their criminal desistance, and refraining from using behaviors that no longer were conducive to their criminal desistance. This was a part of their desistance process and finding themselves postrelease.

P3 shared,

Being overlooked really bothered me. I just brushed it off. I mean, people, usually people say a lot about me. So I mean, certain things really made me angry. I knew when to and how to read into certain situations. And when I was told I was a failure, I said to myself I will accomplish this that and be confident. I really can't overlook that. And I just did, you know, basically what I wanted to do. Well, when I say do what I want to do, I mean, as in me deciding I wasn't going to accomplish something. So I end up learning a few trades and learning a way to make money. Even though I didn't graduate from a technical school, I still got some type of knowledge. And it's still in some form, helps me make money, the legit way. P3's attention to self-development was prominent as he discussed his personal life and work life.

P8 described harnessing her willpower to reinvent herself after being left by her mom and dad:

Being locked up helped changed my thinking and for me to not be so explosive about everything. I was mad about everything but did not take the time to look at my patterns and behaviors. I am still working on me, a better me.

P1 described his attitude and shared,

Before I didn't want to listen to nobody. I didn't want to hear nothing nobody had to say. Know what I'm saying, but me humbling myself and changing my attitude it helped me. I am no longer mad at the world.

### **Subtheme 2b: Adapting to Life Post Release/Stability**

All eight participants described the immersion of themselves in positive environments and leveraging familial connections and support to guide changed behaviors. Two of the 8 participants identified different paradigms that supported their route to criminal desistance.

P5 described how she changed her mind set before being released and with the help of her mother, she was able to start over.

P5 shared,

So, she lined up some jobs for me, which provided me with some job openings that allow, you know, ex, you know, convicts or ex-prisoners to work at. And so, she lined up those jobs, she allowed me to stay with her for, you know, a certain amount of time until I moved out on my own, she provided me transportation to get to and from these places, as well, because I didn't have any transportation when I got out. So, she, you know, was helpful when I didn't have money, she

would give that to me as well, too. So, she provided me with every necessity that, you know, I need it when I was released.

P1 described his experience as he relates it to his church/religious beliefs:

Well maybe God put me in this situation, because I was doing and because I was hanging with the wrong people. Maybe he was trying to show me but I didn't listen. So he just had to put me in a place by myself for a while to realize, listen, son, I'm trying to tell you don't need to hang with these people. So he already was sending me the message before I got locked up. I just wasn't seeing it. So it just took me to lock up to see, these are not the people that you need to hang with. You have family that care about you better than this, you could do better. I was given scriptures and stuff and I actually took the time to read it over and over actually get an understanding over so that actually helped me motivate me to do good while I am in jail. So, know what I'm saying, I could become better when I get out.

**Table 5**

*New Identity*

Theme 2	Number ( $N = 8$ )	Percentage
2. Postrelease identity	8	100%
→ Subtheme 2a. Self-dev.	8	100%
A. Cont. ed	6	75%
B. Work (FT/PT)	8	100%
C. No school or work	2	25%

*Note.* Some participants' responses fell under multiple themes.

### **Theme 3: Incarceration Support**

Theme 3 addressed RQ 3; How do the jail releasees make sense of their lived experience? The 8 participants described their incarceration support and their reasons to change beyond desistance and find their purpose outside of themselves as they progressed through the criminal desistance process. Participants 2,3,5,6,8 explained their reasons were through family and self-motivation and their religious beliefs. Two of the eight participants stated that their children were their biggest motivators to change. Participant 7 did not explain-why they declined to answer.

P1 shared and described his child(ren) in this capacity:

My kids was one of my biggest motivation, because my first, my first child was my son. So that right there motivated me to make sure he don't become the person that I am. Make sure he has a better life, make sure he don't end up in the same situation. Make sure he don't end up in the wrong crowd and something bad happens to him.

P4 shared how his reactions affected his children's mother and child(ren),

When I went in my son, when my first son was three months old, I came home, he was already a year old. I found out that I had another child on the way that I didn't know about. I was just so stuck that I missed everything with my first born. I missed everything, walking, talking, first, first real food. And that was just my whole thing. Like, I gotta get to my boys. I got to get out of here. I got to get to where I need to get to. And that was my main goal.

**Table 6***Incarceration Support*

Theme 3	Number ( <i>N</i> = 8)	Percentage
Incarceration support	7	87.5%

*Note.* Some participants' responses fell under multiple themes.

Data from the emerged themes informed how the participants experienced familial contact and identity change as a mechanism of the criminal desistance process. Many progress through these changes and revert back; however, desistors who begin to refine their world internally and externally can become and/or have a new-self working identity that includes continuous developments and self-determination.

### **Summary**

In summary, the study's results have yielded a thorough exploration of each participant fit for ITD and SIT, the study's theoretical framework. The ITD emphasizes that the criminal desistance process is initiated by changing one's behaviors and identity. When criminal desistance is minimal, the individual refrains from the negativity and finds motivation and desires fueled by positivity. The SIT suggests that oneself impacts their own desistance process and provides judgment and reactions that may be conceptualized. However, this study's findings revealed that incarcerated participants believe that familial support—mentally, physically, emotionally, and financially, increases their chances of not recidivating. Many participants stated that they were extremely thankful and appreciative of their family members supporting them throughout their incarceration experience. Many of the participants mentioned how vital family was to their well-being inside of the jail and outside. A few participants who were released



were welcome by the world with open arms, as seeking employment and education was not as difficult for others. Secondly, findings showed that the type of familial contact is beneficial for good postrelease outcomes. All 8 participants used a primary form of communication, with telephone and in-person visitations being used the most. Letters were sent and received; video calls were used as well. Many of the participants credit their success to themselves and their familial relationships. Two of the participants had a parent to transition, one participant did not grow up with her mom/dad, and the remaining five participants had either their mom, dad, or both parents. Lastly, the participants revealed the importance of building or re-building damaged familial relationships as each relationship can help break a barrier and builds trust.

The first research question poised the study's focus to explore the lived experience of familial support during incarceration as a component of the criminal desistance process. The research questions 2-4 focused on the lived experiences of family contact during incarceration, how to make sense of their knowledge, and a description of their familial relationships, which uncovered specific determinants that influenced familial connection, changed behaviors, and postrelease outcome. Chapter 4 included the demographics, research setting, data analysis, data collection, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a detailed summary. The further discussion surrounding the findings' interpretation, limitations of the study, implications, recommendations, and a conclusion follow in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenology study was to explore the lived experiences of jail releasees who received familial contact during incarceration and understand how familial contact helped offenders desist from crime as a component of the criminal desistance process. Folk et al. (2019) conducted prior research describing the effect of incarceration on families and how confinement places a burden on families, homes, and communities. Offenders face many barriers during incarceration that can set a restriction on communication with their families. However, Folk et al. conducted research in a prison setting, and it was recommended that analysis focus on a jail setting. I completed a descriptive phenomenology study regarding ex-offenders who experienced familial contact during incarceration in a jail setting, and they provided their perspectives and lived experience regarding the phenomenon of interest. I collected data from semistructured interviews with the eight participants who were desistors with an average of 6-7 years of criminal desistance since release. I also conducted a secondary qualitative analysis to determine if the participants' lived experiences were a good fit for Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD and Tajfel and Turner's (1989) SIT.

Three themes were identified that have been identified as essential elements of the structure of the criminal desistance process regarding working self-identity and confidence level. As confidence level increases, it allows the offender to identify life-changing behaviors through an identity lens.

I found that many of the offenders (a) had self-determination and motivation, with a commitment to make changes; (b) prioritized their development and growth; (c) pursued structural support such as finishing school, community service, and support groups; and (d) chose favorable social structures to leverage positive relationships and environments to increase adaptation and behavior modification. During and after incarceration, the participants were able to pinpoint their purpose in life, which gave them a sense of direction for life that extends beyond criminal desistance, in a commitment to enhance and develop positively. After review, the results indicated that the secondary analysis fit both theories, ITD and SIT. In this chapter, I discuss the interpretation of the study's findings as they compare to ITD and SIT and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Additionally, I address the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, implications for positive social change, and the study's conclusions.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Chapter 2 contains detailed information on familial contact during incarceration and criminal desistance (Folk et al., 2019). Effort was necessary to determine the internal and external factors that lead to criminal desistance while transitioning from offending to nonoffending behaviors. The results indicated that individuals who go through the criminal desistance process do some fine-tuning to their external and internal factors that fit the nonoffending working identity. This study's findings confirmed that offenders who received familial contact during incarceration in a jail setting did not recidivate and became desistors who no longer engaged in criminal activity. Familial contact should be

encouraged and placed in family law legislation and/or reintegration policies to help decrease men's and women's incarceration rates.

The findings are represented by the themes that emerged from the semistructured interviews. These themes included (a) familial support and relationships; Subtheme 1a: motivation and commitment to change; (b) postrelease identity; Subtheme 2a: self-development/adaptation to life; Subtheme 2b: adapting to life postrelease/stability; and (c) incarceration support.

### **Finding 1: Familial Support and Relationships**

The first finding was that participants in this study explained the type of familial support that they received during incarceration. The majority of the participants explained that they received support mentally, physically, and emotionally from their family members. Many of the participants described their support as if they needed to have it. P8, who had the longest desistance, remained free of crime for 18 years and credited this to the in-person visitations and phone calls/pictures that she received from her family and husband. All eight participants received in-person visitations, phone calls, and/or letters because receiving familial support is vital in reducing recidivism. My research confirmed the Folk et al. (2019) study, which described postrelease outcomes as much more significant for those who receive familial contact than for those who do not receive familial support.

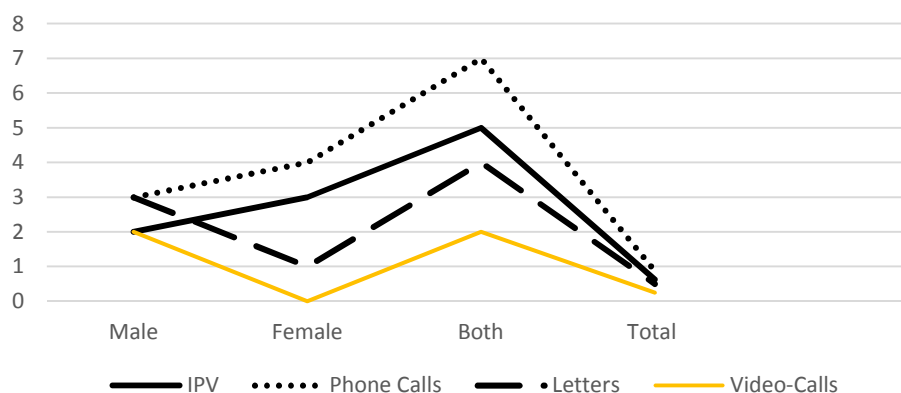
Subtheme 1a (motivation and commitment to change) described that participants' behaviors were guided based on the interactions that they had with family in the sense of their emotions and identities (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). Each participant gave a vivid

depiction of familial support and the type of contact that they frequently received. Many offenders indicated that if they had not received any support through contact during incarceration, they would have recidivated. Two of the participants detailed how life would have gone post release had their family neglected to support them. P1 stated, “I would go back to doing the same thing because I don’t have a family that loves or cares about me.” P8 described her experience as a hustler because of the amount of support she received from her legal guardians.

The participants’ elaborations on the type of support that they received are depicted in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Type of Familial Contact Received*



The participants all received some type of contact, with phone calls ranking as the most common form of communication at 87.5%, followed by in-person visitations at 62.5%, letters (sent and received) at 50%, and video calls at 25%. Many participants believed that familial contact and support were beneficial to their postrelease outcomes.

The concept of family varies on the extent of the relationship and how these changes can occur if the psychological structure of the identity changes as well. While familial support was a major factor in criminal desistance, all 8 participants addressed that their families were the reason for their changed behaviors. P1, P3, and P4 all explained that they benefited the most from in-person visitation. This allowed them to discuss many emotions, give hugs, and just laugh and feel like they belonged with their families. P2 described how hard his father was on him and how disappointed in him his father felt; his father would call but would not visit. Other participants mentioned that the forms of contact that they received varied depending on the month, their family obligations, and how close they were. P3 explained how his mother and father visited at least two to three times a week because he was closer to them, but when he was transferred to another facility, transportation was an issue for his parents. As their visits decreased, their phone calls and letters increased.

This research study confirmed the work of Brunton-Smith and McCarthy (2017), who emphasized that the stress of incarceration can weaken familial attachments and can cause unstableness in mental and emotional support. P4 stated that the incarceration process placed a strain on his father's health and reduced his weekly visits to monthly visits. P8 also described how the incarceration process caused her siblings to detach from her, causing her to become isolated and depressed.

### **Finding 2: Postrelease Identity**

Findings supporting the second theme indicated that family contact contributed to participants' success after release. 6 of the 8 participants stated that their families had

helped them become successful after release. The participants explained numerous scenarios that encapsulated their lived experience and how they understood the importance of successful reentry. Improving familial relationships before incarceration, during incarceration, and even after incarceration minimizes the stress of reintegrating into society. Therefore, healthy familial attachments can help to protect individuals from depression and/or suicide or any mental health issue that might go undiscovered. During this process, the participants stated that they received an outpouring of motivation, love, and support and were extremely grateful for their families, who encouraged them to maintain functional and positive relationships to continue developing into their new working selves.

In a more profound sense, to change the working identity, one must engage in other behaviors while remaining true to oneself. Because identity is multifaceted and such a delicate approach, it is possible that the self-can have two identities: being a parent and a criminal offender, even though both differ in the individual's principles (Fiske, 2010).

Subtheme 2A: Self-Development/Adaptation and Subtheme 2B: Adapting to Life Postrelease/Stability will be coupled together as both themes are related to postrelease identity. In Copp et al.'s (2020) study, he explained how identity can be reflected in self-control and familial structure. In his study, he founded that many factors shape an adult's elements, including bonding with parental or parental influence as cognitive processes were not a substantial claim to the cause of behavioral changes. These study findings revealed that all 8 participants discovered some self-development before being released

and adapting to life. Every participant that was interviewed revealed that self-development was a part of their self-change. P1 stated that the closer he got to being released, he started developing feelings of being let out into the world and starting over. He stated he knew that he had family that loved and cared about him and wanted to change for his son. P3 stated that a personal decision was made during his process that his family did not contribute to his self-development. P3 said that there was a motivation to alter his behaviors after being told that he could be better during incarceration. Some participants went on to state how their self-development came from reading/spending time in the library, accepting the path to finish their education (high school credits/college credits), learning a trade, and earning a certificate, and even being a mentor to others that were incarcerated as well and did not have familial support. So, the support they were receiving, they were projecting that same encouragement and positivity to other inmates to grow mentally and emotionally. Some of the participants who were proud of their self-development/adaptation skills were passionate about the experience, and others discussed their experience but only when it felt like it needed to be discussed. P3 indicated that he resented his family for a while postrelease because they would continuously ask what his experience was like, and he stated that he did not talk about it because it would cause him to have to relive those moments' feelings. Many of them explained that it was a smooth transition to maneuver in life postrelease with their family's help.

My study confirmed Folk et al., (2019) study about how familial contact within the jail setting reduces recidivism, enhanced a more significant postrelease outcome, and



familial attachments and relationships were strengthened; Bachman et al. (2014) and Copp et al. (2020) study was confirmed as well on how familial contact and social identity is indeed a part of the criminal desistance process. While the participants detailed other situations, they encountered postrelease, many stated that reentry was not complicated, but it was not easy.

### **Finding 3: Incarceration Support**

The study's third and final finding relates to the importance of essential structural support that offenders described as a part of their criminal desistance process, with familial contact at the forefront. While questioning the participants on familial contact and incarceration support, I observed the participants as they began to use hand gestures, body posture changed, and tone of voice changed as they began to discuss their incarceration support. P4 talked about his mom and dad supporting him, but he also discussed how he obtains his associate degree and earns several trading certificates while serving his sentence. The participant mentioned that society did accept his degree nor allowed him to use what he learned through continuing education. P3 also said that he understood and gained knowledge through continuing education and learned the art of construction and wood-building. This trade did not serve him well postrelease either, as he had to learn something new that society accepted without bias. This should not be an issue because it should be widely accepted no matter where you received the education. Education, knowledge, and wisdom are something no one can take from you, and to make a notable change...laws, and policies need to implement such change. P3 and P4 believed that many people who obtain certificates and degrees should be awarded the

same opportunity. Both then went on to explain how this is happening exceptionally often. Incarceration facilities will partner with educational systems to provide a low-cost education and allow them to think they are progressing forward, only to be released and see that it was a slap in the face. Li (2018) described that minimal preparation and limited education can cause recidivism. P5, P6, and P7 all served their sentence and postrelease, re-enrolled into college, obtained their bachelor's degrees, found gainful employment, and learned their role in society. The participants are gaining an education, receiving familial contact and support, but somehow, they face barriers such as public assistance and inconsequential employment as a collateral consequence. The collateral consequences of incarceration limit the offender's access to be accepted within the structural support system. This should be a primary concern for the criminal justice system, such as the Bureau of Prisons, organizations such as the Second Chance Act: A recidivism program, local support groups, and other organizations interested in reducing recidivism rates.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The identity theory of desistance served as the theoretical framework for this research study. The ITD focuses on the autonomous functions that increase behavioral changes that are conducive to a changed lifestyle. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) indicated that ITD examines desistance from crime that focuses more on the individualistic and cognitive developments. For this study, familial contact served as the automatic function needed to guide familial support, education, employment, and the positive future-self; for the offenders to succeed postrelease. These findings are directly

in line with Paternoster and Bushway (2009) structural support system. However, because of the structural support and behavioral change influences have on one's working self, environmental resources, conventional roles, and social bonds, each identity will be modified. Bachman (2015) explained that the ITD theory expects identity change and desistance to occur, but it should be done simultaneously for the identity change to precede any prosocial prospects.

The SIT theory applies to this study's findings related to how individuals' emotions are perceived in groups or relationships. Tajfel and Turner (1987) discovered that SIT reinforces interpersonal behaviors and intergroup behaviors. Interpersonal behaviors are behaviors that are tied to your personal identity, social status, and peculiar traits. When applying this theory to incarceration support, the new working self-provides judgments and reactions impact your postrelease outcome.

This study's participants supported both the ITD and SIT theory to support that criminal desistance does occur. The participants also supported the claim that familial contact does increase familial attachments, support, and relationships. The results yielded that all participants who received familial communication returned to school, found gainful employment, and built/repaid damaged familial bonds. Both theories, ITD and SIT, details the power of familial contact and criminal desistance when it comes to postrelease outcomes and new working-self. With these theories, many family policies should implement the importance of familial communication within the criminal justice system.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study provided in-depth knowledge regarding familial contact during incarceration and how familial contact is a mechanism of the criminal desistance process. A few limitations were natural in the research approach and method to the inquiry. This study's results were primarily developed by analyzing the participants' lived experiences to the phenomenon of interest via the semistructured interview questions guided for this research. The primary limitation was trustworthiness, simply because the information provided was trusted and the reliability of their responses could not be tested (Giorgi, 2009). Secondly, because the researcher serves as the primary data collector (Creswell, 2013), qualitative studies may have been subjected to potential bias, which would be obtained from subjective interpretation (Patton, 2015). Third, due to the localization of the study, the study did not reach all 50 states. The number of appropriate participants for the descriptive phenomenology study potentially limited the generalizability of this study's findings across the world.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of jail releasee's who received familial contact during incarceration and how this familial support helped them desist from crime as a component of the criminal desistance process. A finding that emerged while analyzing and interpreting results related to familial relationships; what is the relationship between resources and how those resources can help contribute to familial bonds amongst the families who were successful with criminal desistance. Because the offenders were able to leverage their external and internal factors as it relates

to criminal desistance, future qualitative research could explore the population of men and women who are US citizens that are incarcerated outside the United States, their lived experiences regarding their incarceration, their families, and progenies'. It is imperative to gather the perceptions from all aspects to promote change. To understand how familial support, relationships occur, one must uncover the foundation, to begin with. Many offenders are incarcerated, and their families are lost and betrayed by the criminal justice system, with no information to move forward. Studies exploring this phenomenon can directly focus on the advantages and disadvantages of the external and internal factors related to practical outcomes. Other future research may also focus on native populations that will include ethnic minorities.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Mass incarceration continues to climb higher as more individuals are being incarcerated for nonviolent crimes—receiving a violent offense sentence. New laws must be passed, policies are changed, and discrimination should be reduced to see a positive social change. From a cultural standpoint, reintegration into society is essential for men and women. There have been studies that have focused on familial contact in a prison setting (Folk et al.2019), familial communication, and parenting (Davis et al., 2011); however, to bring awareness and make a change, many should understand the benefits and importance of familial contact as it relates to criminal desistance. Reintegration is essential, a familial connection is necessary, as well as recidivism. Recidivism is a relapse in criminal behaviors as one works toward a new self-concept. Having familial contact and support during and after incarceration allows the individual to be successful

and reduce those risks. Because many offenders face difficult barriers, this continues to be a problem. Based on the offenders' lived experiences, the first step towards bringing positive social change is implementing that familial contact training should be done within the jail facilities and used as educational workshops. Other participants have suggested that it becomes a challenging task to tackle when dealing with family because of the damage that has been done. However, training on repairing and building a familial relationship would be essential to all offenders who do not have any family. Familial support training is needed to understand how to strengthen familial attachments/bonds. It is vital to understand that everyone experiences some type of familial contact, whether it is biological or by adoption, to reduce recidivism risks of recidivism...familial contact must be done for the individual to succeed in reintegration.

### **Conclusion**

The descriptive phenomenological study results have yielded eight participants and their perspective of their lived experience and familial contact. The participants discussed their experience in a detailed manner that produces in-depth, thick, and rich information that allowed me as the researcher to highlight the importance of familial contact during incarceration and fill the gap. The gap was founded and filled by addressing how familial contact, the type of contact used, and their personal influences depicted their decisions and postrelease outcomes. The study's findings have revealed that familial contact does reduce the risk of recidivating and increase educational opportunities and employment. The findings also showed the link between emotional, mental, and physical support to increase long-term desistance. The review from above

offered a clear explanation from recent studies regarding the desistance literature. Bachman et al., 2014; Folk et al., 2012; Folk et al., 2019; Galnander, 2020; Mowen et al., 2016; Rocque, 2015; Visser, 2013 have identified specific determinants such as prosocial changes in identity, behavior modifications, determination, and motivation to change and the commitment to have a noncriminal identity. However, criminal desistance and identity change emerge as a revolving process that begins with the offender's willpower to change their behaviors, necessary for successful reintegration and depends on the strength of the offender's structural support and how successful he/she wants to be. Each individual has the power to choose their decisions and commit to making those changes that are needed to abstain from criminogenic behaviors and contribute to positive social change. SIT has a lens that must be looked through, and it has been found that criminal desistance solely depends on the individual and their responsibility to change, but society must be willing to allow them a second chance to grow and succeed. All in all, individuals live in the environment they are comfortable in, and their day-to-day survival is dependent upon his/her ability to access the necessary resources needed for substantial growth.

As a scholar for positive social change, it was imperative to highlight familial contact's lived experiences so that implementation regarding this component can create familial prospectuses through various systems that can reduce recidivism and enable criminal desistance.

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## Appendix A: Informational Letter

Hello participant,

I hope this letter finds you well.

As you know, I am currently in the Walden Ph.D. program. As part of fulfilling my doctoral studies, I am conducting semistructured interviews via Zoom, GoogleMeet, etc. I am seeking participants that meet the eligibility criteria of the study. The letter serves as an explanation of my research. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of jail releases who had familial support (i.e., tangible, emotional, psychological, financial aid) and contact during incarceration, in which, and if, family contact had any implications on men and women releasees postrelease.

Participants should be adults 18 or older who served time (9 months or more) in a jail setting. Those individuals who had familial contact during incarceration and successfully desisted from crime for at least 3-5 years after release are eligible to participate in this study. The interview process should take no more than 60 minutes of your time.

Please let me know if you would like to participate. You can contact me by phone or email with your decision to join and also if you have any questions.

Thank You,

Whitney Johnson

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

Thank you for participating! Your feedback is essential and much appreciated. My name is Whitney Johnson, and I am a professional graduate student at Walden University, pursuing my doctoral degree; and this research is needed for partial fulfillment of my requirements required for the Doctoral program.

As stated above, your responses will remain confidential, and the recordings and written transcripts that will be used to understand how familial contact during incarceration helped you desist from crime. This interview should last about 60-90minutes, and if you need to stop or take a break at any time, please feel free to inform me, and we will temporarily stop the interview. Please make sure that you are in a private setting to ensure that your identity is confidential. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may terminate this interview at any time you feel necessary. The interview will be recorded, to protect your confidentiality, your name will not be given.

### **Introduction**

1. All participant's privacy will be protected during all phases of this study. Do you have any concerns about your privacy? Y\_\_\_\_ N\_\_\_\_
2. Do you have any questions about informed consent? If so, please explain.
3. Do you give permission for this interview to be audio recorded? Y\_\_\_\_ N\_\_\_\_
4. Are there any more questions before we proceed? If there are no questions, then with your permission, we will now begin the interview process.

Open-ended questions will be used to elicit responses that will be rich in detail. Questions are based on the research questions and then expanded to allow for exploration of reactions.

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: What is the lived experience of familial support during incarceration for adult jail releasees?	1. Do you think your family was supportive, mentally, physically, and emotionally for you while you were incarcerated?
RQ2: What are the lived experiences of family contact during incarceration for adult jail releasees?	2. Can you describe for me the type of contact you used most while incarcerated? Do you think family contact contributed to your success after release?
RQ3. How do the jail releasees make sense of their lived experiences?	3. Can you describe what part of your incarceration experience helped shape you into the person you are today? Please elaborate.
RQ4. How do the male and female jail releasees describe their familial relationships?	4. How are your relationships with your mom, father? While incarcerated, what were some things that you did that helped you reached your release date.

### Follow-Up Questions

1. How do you think your experiences were different than the experiences of others who recidivated?
2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced after you were released?
3. If you have any children, were they your biggest motivators to change? What were some parenting challenges you faced?

4. Do you think you have any personal traits that may have made your relationship with your family more challenging?
5. Is there any advice that you would give others who wants to strengthen familial relationships within their family?

Lastly, is there anything more you would like to add or discuss?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

### Appendix C: Confidential Demographic Form

This study will ask questions about your experiences you faced during incarceration and/or the benefits you gained when you reintegrated back into your community upon release. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of jail releases that received familial contact while incarcerated. You do not have to answer the questions.

**Would you like to proceed with this study?** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Marital Status.** Please Specify

Married \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_\_ Single \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_\_\_ Dating \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: AA \_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Native

Americans \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_ Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Highest Education**

High School/GED: Y \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_

Some College: Y \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_

College Degree: Y \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_

Certifications: Y \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_

**Employment**

Are you currently employed? Y \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_ Full-Time \_\_\_\_\_ Part-Time \_\_\_\_\_

**Incarceration History**

Have you served at least 12 months or more in jail? Y \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been arrested since your release? Y \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been out of jail? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently active in the criminal justice system? \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer



**A Phenomenological Inquiry into Familial Contact for Jail Releasees on the Route to Desisting from Crime**

**If you are 18 or older and have been formerly incarcerated, you may be eligible to participate in a research study. All Ethnicities are WELCOMED!**

**CONTACT: Whitney Johnson:-FOR MORE INFORMATION.**

- **Volunteers 18 years or older are needed to take part in a study regarding experiences about familial contact and support during incarceration.**
- **Your participation in the study may help practitioners to better understand how familial contact can reduce recidivism and produce long-term criminal desistance.**
- **As a participant in this study, you would be asked a series of interview questions so that you can share information with the researcher regarding your experiences about your incarceration and the various forms of contact methods that were used to receive familial support.**
- **If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to not answer any question(s) or may simply leave the study. Any responses will be collected under a fictitious name or alias, so that no one will know who you are other than the researcher.**
- **Participants will receive a thank you gift for time spent taking part in the study.**

**Location**

- **Telephone and Zoom Interview appointments (due to CDC recommendations of COVID-19), which may take up to 60 minutes of your time broken down into 1-to-2 days.**

**Are you eligible?**

- **Volunteers 18 or older, that have been formerly incarcerated and received familial support.**
- **Must have spent 9 months or more in a jail setting and haven't been arrested within the 3-5 years after release.**

**If you're unsure if you meet the requirements, call or email:**

- **Researcher: Whitney Johnson**
- **Study Supervisor: Dr. Ethel Perry, PHD**

Study conducted for completion of a dissertation under  
**Walden UNIVERSITY**

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## Appendix E: List of Local Therapists

1. Thrive Works Counseling-(803)-234-8596
2. Art and Play Therapy Center of South Carolina- (803)-920-0707
3. Wellness Counseling Services – (803)-751-4256
4. The Center for Counseling & Wellness- (843)-716-0778
5. Awaken Hope Counseling – (864) 207-4071
6. Roots Psychological Associates, LLC- (803) 828-0775
7. Bright Side Counseling- (888)537-2435
8. Blue Ridge Psychotherapy- (864)- 633-2870
9. Healing Solutions, LLC- (864)-990-2744
10. Psychology Service Center- (803)-932-1458
11. National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255
12. The National Alliance Mental Illness: 1-800-950-6264