2021

# Exploring Formerly Incarcerated African American Males' Relationship with Their Children

Najjiyya Christine Arnold
*Walden University*

# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Najjiyya C. Arnold

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Jennifer Rounds-Bryant, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Tracy Masiello, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Valerie Worthington, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Exploring Formerly Incarcerated African American Males' Relationships with Their Children

by

Najjiyya C. Arnold

MA, Fielding Gradate University, 2009

MA, National University, 1999

BS, National University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore formerly incarcerated African American fathers' perceptions on reestablishing relationships with their children. Prior to this study, little or no research had been conducted to examine how formerly incarcerated parents build relationships with their children. Data were collected through one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with 11 African American fathers 18 years and older who were formerly incarcerated and had one or more children under the age of 18 years while incarcerated. The theoretical frameworks for this study included Attachment Theory and African American Male Theory. These data were analyzed using the thematic analysis procedure. Most participants reported that they could not fulfill the obligation of providing for their children financially because of external barriers, such as having a criminal record, or perceived internal barriers, such as an inability to retain a job. However, for all participants, having a positive relationship with their children meant a purposeful, sustained effort to meet the obligations they attributed to fatherhood. Consistently, participants attributed their positive experiences of fatherhood after their release from incarceration to their taking the initiative in recognizing and negotiating barriers to strong father–child relationships. Although formerly incarcerated African American fathers may report typical father roles, such as provider, protector, and role model, they report not always being able to live up to these roles, as shown in this study and others. Because of such findings, future researchers should continue to study this subject as it holds far-reaching consequences for society. This issue is relevant to positive social change because many African American fathers experience incarceration-related adverse relationship outcomes.

# Exploring Formerly Incarcerated African American Males' Relationships with Their Children

by

Najjiyya C. Arnold

MA, Fielding Gradate University, 2009

MA, National University, 1999

BS, National University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2021

# Dedication

I dedicate this paper to my mother, Saabira Naimah Muhammad (aka, Mildred Arnold); my son, Z. Zion Arnold (aka, Najeeb Z Peavy); Sylvia Arnold, daughter-in-law; my sister, Antoinette Muhammad; and my grandson, Najeeb Z. Peavy-Arnold II. They have been my motivation. They stood with me from start to finish.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, my thanks to the Almighty Creator of the Heaven and Earth "The Great I Am" Exodus 3:14 and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In addition, I want to thank Dr. Jennifer Rounds-Bryant, Dr. Masiello, Dr. Valerie Worthington, faculty, friends, Dr. Barbara Thomas, Lorraine Allen, Marjorie Beazer, Marlon Bieber, Dorsey Nunn, Aaliyah Muhammad, Drs. Phillip G. and Brenda Goudeau, Dr. LouAnn S. Tung, Valeri Bocage (CEO to Powerful Women International), Dr. Denise Strong, Dr. Veronica Hunnicutt, Linda Richardson (Commissioner to San Francisco, CA), and Cathrin Myburgh who have helped me reach this life changing point in my academic career.

Table of Contents

List of Tables ..... v

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study ..... 1

Background ..... 1

Problem Statement ..... 4

Purpose of the Study ..... 5

Research Questions ..... 5

Conceptual Framework ..... 5

Nature of the Study ..... 8

Definitions ..... 9

Assumptions ..... 10

Scope and Delimitations ..... 11

Limitations ..... 12

Significance of the Study ..... 13

Summary ..... 15

Chapter 2: Literature Review ..... 16

Literature Search Strategy ..... 17

Conceptual Framework ..... 17

Attachment Theory ..... 17

African American Male Theory ..... 21

Synthesis of the Theories ..... 22

Review of the Literature ..... 23

Disproportionate Phenomena ..... 23
Incarceration Rates ..... 23
The Psychological Effects of Incarceration ..... 24
Institutionalization ..... 27
Parental Incarceration Impacts ..... 31
African American Fathers' Roles in Families ..... 38
Formerly Incarcerated African American Fathers ..... 40
African American Father Incarceration and Parent-Child Relationships ..... 41
Summary and Conclusions ..... 46
Chapter 3: Research Method ..... 48
Research Design and Rationale ..... 48
Role of the Researcher ..... 50
Methodology ..... 51
Participant Selection Logic ..... 51
Field Test ..... 53
Procedures for Recruitment, Participating, and Data Collection ..... 54
Data Analysis Plan ..... 57
Issues of Trustworthiness ..... 59
Credibility ..... 59
Transferability ..... 59
Dependability ..... 60
Confirmability ..... 60

Ethical Assurances ..... 61
Summary ..... 62
Chapter 4: Results ..... 63
Demographics ..... 63
Data Analysis Procedures ..... 65
Step 1: Familiarization with the Data ..... 66
Step 2: Initial, Inductive Coding ..... 66
Step 3: Searching for Themes ..... 70
Step 4: Reviewing and Refining the Themes ..... 71
Step 5: Naming and Defining the Themes ..... 72
Step 6: Presenting the Findings ..... 72
Trustworthiness ..... 73
Credibility ..... 73
Transferability ..... 74
Dependability ..... 74
Confirmability ..... 75
Alignment of Findings with Research Questions ..... 75
Results ..... 76
Research Question 1 ..... 76
Research Question 2 ..... 84
Research Question 3 ..... 95
Summary ..... 101

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations ..... 105
Interpretation of the Findings ..... 107
Research Question 1 ..... 107
Research Question 2 ..... 111
Research Question 3 ..... 115
Limitations of the Study ..... 116
Recommendations ..... 117
Implications ..... 118
Conclusion ..... 120
References ..... 122

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics ..... 64

Table 2. Summary of Data Sources ..... 65

Table 3. Data Analysis: Initial Codes ..... 69

Table 4. Data Analysis Clustering of Related Codes into Categories ..... 70

Table 5. Data Analysis Clustering of Related Categories into Themes ..... 71

Table 6. Research Questions and Themes ..... 72

# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

African American men represent 40% of the prison population in contrast to 13% of the U.S. population (Sakala, 2014). The high and disproportionate incarceration rates of African American males result in many adverse outcomes for their children (Arditti & Savla, 2015; Bell & Cornwell, 2015; Miller & Barnes, 2015; Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015). Thus, there is a need for more excellent knowledge regarding how formerly incarcerated fathers approach relationship building with their children (De Giorgi, 2016; Golinelli & Carson, 2013). Formerly incarcerated African Americans males and their relationships with their children were the focus of this study. This topic is essential because incarcerated African American fathers are absent from their children's lives during incarceration, which may negatively influence the father–child attachment relationship (Hunt et al., 2015). This chapter provides the background for the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the study research questions (RQs). Chapter 1 also includes discussions of the theoretical framework and nature of the study. This chapter follows with the definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the study's significance.

## Background

Appropriately 2.3 million people—excluding youth, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and involuntary commitment (e.g., civil commitment and detention, not guilty because of insanity, incompetent to stand trial pre-trial evaluation, and treatment)—are incarcerated in U.S. prison each year (Sakala, 2014). Of the 2.3 million, 1.9 million are men. Of the 1.9 million men in the prison system, African

American men equate to 760,000 or 40% of the prison system's population. State and federal prisons release approximately 641,100 people into their communities each year, of which 230,760 are African American men (National Institute of Corrections, 2020). Approximately 54% of prison inmates are parents, so 124,610 of those incarcerated are African American fathers (The National Reentry Resource Center, 2021). Local jails hold parents and family members in local jails (Bertram, 2019; Ryo & Peacock, 2018), but the racial disparities are substantial. For example, in 2016, approximately 8% of U.S. children younger than 18 years had a parent incarcerated, with rates substantially higher among children from racial and ethnic minority heritage and disadvantaged minorities (Gifford et al., 2019). Forty-five percent of incarcerated parents are African American compared to 28% White and 21% Hispanic incarcerated parents (Bertram, 2019). Additionally, state and federal sentencing policies prescribe lengthy prison terms for low level and minor offenses, which disproportionally affect African American men (Morsy & Rothstein, 2016). Although difficult to determine the actual length of sentencing for each male prisoner, African American men are likely to receive prison sentences 20% longer than European American men's sentences for the same crimes (Hansen, 2013). Even though African Americans' incarceration rates decreased by 12% between 2015 and 2016 (Carson, 2018), fathers' absenteeism may influence the father–child relationship.

Children of incarcerated parents suffer severe harm (Morsy & Rothstein, 2016). More than 2.7 million African American students would become a part of the school-to-prison pipeline because of their parents' incarcerations (Sparks, 2015). Children with incarcerated parents also have worse cognitive and noncognitive outcomes than children

with comparable socioeconomic and demographic characteristics whose parents have not experienced incarceration. Such outcomes include learning disabilities, lower school performance, dropping out of school, migraines, asthma, high cholesterol, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and homelessness. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to have adverse health outcomes, such as asthma, obesity, high cholesterol, migraines, HIV/AIDS, and harmful speech or language problems (e.g., stuttering, stammering, and learning disabilities; Turney & Goodsell, 2018). Parental incarceration is also associated with increased odds of offspring receiving psychiatric diagnoses well into adulthood (Gifford et al., 2019). Furthermore, experiencing health problems may derail their success of transitioning into adulthood. Issues may include experiencing anxiety disorders, becoming a parent before 18 years, spending time in jail, not finishing high school, and having legal, financial, and health issues.

A father must negotiate how his prison environment does not negatively impact his parent–children relationship (Moran et al., 2017). Leaders of these prison restraints also mediate the harmful effects of parental incarceration by identifying ways it makes daily prison environments appear less hostile to his children's fathering (Moran et al., 2017). African American fathers have reported significant difficulties in parenting from within the prison, such as not being able to engage physically with their children, hearing complaints of other people's children's noise, and having other concerns when their children came to visit the prison (Charles et al., 2019). However, the fathers remained committed to making changes in their children's interactions by writing letters, asking what they had been doing, drawing pictures for them, and asking them to send pictures

and letters. The father would make phone calls to children to establish better relationships (Charles et al., 2019). But there are significant issues of attachment and caregiving relationships in families subject to parental incarceration (Shlafer & Peohlmann, 2010). Children of incarcerated parents might experience a lack of a positive relationship with that parent (Perry & Bright, 2012; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). However, further investigation is needed due to the lack of in-depth studies on how parents reconnect or remain connected with their children after being released from and while in prison (Kerby, 2012; Pew Center, 2008). Specific information is needed about the influence of incarceration on the father–child relationship, specifically the influence on the relationship between the formerly incarcerated African American father and his child or children and their subsequent life experiences. This lack of research supports the need for the current study.

## Problem Statement

Researchers have focused on inmates' family relationships while still in prison (Charles et al., 2019; Moran et al., 2017), but little or no research has shown how formerly incarcerated parents build relationships with their children. Thus, there is a need for further investigation in this area (Codd, 2013). I addressed this gap in the literature by exploring the experience of reestablishing relationships with their children among formerly incarcerated African American fathers. Relationship-building and support are essential not only for the offender's successful reintegration into the community but also for the child's psychosocial development (Haskins & Turney, 2018).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore African American fathers' perceptions of reestablishing relationships with their children after incarceration. This study adds to existing literature regarding how formerly incarcerated fathers build and support meaningful relationships with their children. Exploring how incarcerated parents build and support relationships with their children may provide information on strategies for building stronger relationships between the formerly incarcerated African American fathers and their children (Turney & Wildeman, 2013).

## Research Questions

RQ 1: What meaning does the reestablishment of relationships with their children have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?

RQ 2: What meaning does being a father have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?

RQ 3: What is the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?

## Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study included the attachment theory developed by Bowlby in 1973. Researchers can use the attachment theory for understanding the five stages of attachment and its effects on the child of the incarcerated parent. Bowlby contended that when children experienced a pleasant, intimate relationship with their parents, they would grow up mentally sound. Bowlby also proposed that infants are social from the beginning of life. In the infant's first year of life,

their attachment behaviors go to a specific individual or a small group (Bretherton, 1997). Moreover, Bowlby (1989) argued that attachment was affected by how children's parents behaved toward them, and evidence was assembled to show this assertion (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Rutter, 1995; Sroufe, 2005). Children develop expectations and model those expectations based on their parents' availability and responsiveness (Bowlby, 1980; Main et al., 1985).

Regarding affection and consistency of caregiving to children, children may develop a secure attachment (Murray & Murray, 2010). Conversely, an insecure attachment may develop from a variety of environmental threats, such as parental absence. Insecure attachment may expend to the parent's incarceration or the child's current caregiver—caregivers may change due to the parent's incarceration. Furthermore, children's levels of expressed and actual support for the incarcerated parent may differ, and they may experience a sense of personal insecurity (Murray & Murray, 2010). Caregiver behavior can increase insecure attachment to be avoidant, disorganized preoccupied, and dismissive.

Related to the framework and this study, researchers have indicated adverse effects on parent–child bonding when fathers are not present. Adverse effects of parental incarceration are more substantial than those resulting from other forms of paternal absence (Geller et al., 2012). Children of incarcerated fathers might require specialized support from caregivers, teachers, and social service providers. The specialized support that may be needed includes economic challenges, changes in living arrangement (foster care), parents' romantic relationships, disengagement with children and parental

involvement, and children's educational outcomes. All the preceding outcomes and more are negative effects from their fathers' incarcerations (Turney, 2015). There are more substantial consequences for children who lived with that parent before incarceration (Geller et al., 2012). Though these outcomes were also significant for children of nonresident fathers, which indicated incarceration placed children at risk due to family hardship, including concerns beyond parent-child separation (Geller et al., 2012). The incarceration and separation of a parent can have a traumatic influence on children who experience arrests, trial and incarceration, and stigma, possibly influencing their levels of attachment to the incarcerated parent (Murray & Murray, 2010). This study's objective was to use the attachment perspective to examine how the offender perceived his relationship as a father. I also studied how incarceration affected the fathers' roles and relationships with their children.

Additionally, I used the African American male theory (AAMT). Bush (2013) stated that researchers can use this theory to understand African American fathers' perspectives more profoundly. Researchers can apply the theory to considering African American fathers' spiritual, social, educational, and psychological development and statuses due to the era of slavery and how slavery had a lasting impact on their experiences in modern society. Additionally, psychologists may use the theory to understand environmental effects on African American fathers' abilities to relate to others (Bush, 2013). The theory was founded on six fundamental tenets. First, researchers can understand African American fathers' personal and collective behaviors, results, and experiences from their ecological systems. Ecosystems made up of cultural, economic,

and political factors influence people's perceptions and development, thereby affecting their abilities to forge relationships (Bush, 2013). Second, being of African American descent creates a unique quality considering their unique ecological system. Third, African American culture, biology, and consciousness prevail, influencing males' experiences. Thus, any researcher of African American issues must acknowledge their participants' heritages (Harris & Ferguson, 2010). Fourth, African Americans remain resilient due to an innate quality driving them to self-determinations. Fifth, issues surrounding race and the experience of racism coupled with matters of class and sex influence every element of being African American in this culture. Lastly, the focus studies or programs involving African Americans should raise their levels of social justice considering past injustices. I used the AAMT to understand formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships with their children based on their perceptions of past injustices that they had experienced.

## Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative with a phenomenological design. Understanding how African American formerly incarcerated fathers described their relationships with their children and the effects of parental incarceration on these relationships—the primary focus of this study—was consistent with qualitative research (Allard, 2012). The data source used in the study were African American fathers 18 and older who were formerly incarcerated and had one or more children under 18 while incarcerated. A sample size of 11 participants was chosen after reaching data saturation in interview-based phenomenological studies. The interviews were conducted in a field

setting at various churches in Sacramento, California and the Bay Area. This study's research design was used explore the phenomenon of a formerly incarcerated African American father's experience. This research design was used to assess formerly incarcerated African American fathers' perceptions regarding their relationships with their children.

## Definitions

This section presents concise definitions of crucial study concepts from the RQs.

*Bond*: For this study, a reestablished bond or a renewed reciprocal relationship between the parent and the child (Gault-Sherman, 2012) was operationally defined as a formerly incarcerated African American father establishing a relationship with his children after being released from being incarcerated, as assessed with the interview protocol items.

*Formerly incarcerated African American father*: For this study, the formerly incarcerated were operationally defined as African American fathers who were incarcerated and were parents of one or more minor children at the time of imprisonment, having been released from prison (Pew Charitable Trust, 2010), as assessed by the interview protocol items.

*Parent–child relationship*: For this study, the parent–child relationship, a reciprocal relationship between the parent and the child (Gault-Sherman, 2012), was operationally defined as a formerly incarcerated African American father's relationship with his child or children. Relationships were assessed with the interview protocol items.

*Relationship impact*: This term was operationally defined to include the influence on fathers' attachment style, specifically secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, or disorganized relationship (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Relationship quality, bond, and impact with each child of the study participants were assessed with the interview protocol items.

*Role:* Role refers to an individual performing or functioning in a relationship with someone else (WordHippo, 2020). The study centered on the perspective of African American fathers about their roles as fathers.

## Assumptions

It was assumed that the sample represented the population of African American father ex-offenders who had relationships with their children to understand parental incarceration's effects on such relationships. I also assumed that participants would provide accurate reports of this experience because all reports were accessed only by me, and identification numbers were used instead of names to ensure confidentiality. Assumptions about the study design were that it would yield detailed qualitative data for content analysis regarding formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships with their children and the effects of parental incarceration on these relationships. I assumed that participants experienced perceptions regarding these relationships. These assumptions were necessary to the study's context, as accurate perceptions were essential for understanding parent–child relationships and related factors in the formerly incarcerated African American father population.

## Scope and Delimitations

The specific aspects addressed in the study were formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships with their children and the effects of parental incarceration on these relationships. This focus was chosen because there was a gap in the literature regarding how these individuals built and supported relationships with their children, indicating the need to explore the parent–child relationship in this population. The study's boundaries included the population of African American formerly incarcerated fathers, ages 18 years and older, with one or more children under 18 years old while incarcerated. All other formerly incarcerated male populations were excluded.

I used the theoretical frameworks of the attachment theory developed by Bowlby (1973) and the AAMT (Bush, 2013) to explain findings. The attachment theory provides an understanding of the five stages of attachment and its effects on the incarcerated parent's child. This theory can show parent–child bonding's adverse effects when fathers are not present (Geller et al., 2012). The AAMT provides a comprehensive understanding on the African American male's position, considering spiritual, social, educational, and psychological development. Researchers can use this theory to explain environmental effects on African American fathers' abilities to relate to others.

Other theories, such as the theory of social exchange and social learning theory, were deemed inappropriate for this study. Social exchange theorists focus on relationship outcomes considering positive and negative outcomes or rewards and costs of relationships (Bradbury & Kamey, 2010), remaining inconsistent with the current study's goal. I focused on the negative aspect of relationship outcomes; moreover, this theory did

not include specific predictive power based on whether an incarcerated father might have difficulty attaching to his child. Social learning theorists focus on behavior as a central component in relationships, with each person in the relationship impacting the other's life based on the exchanged behaviors. In this manner, each party learns from the related behaviors. Because the formerly incarcerated African American father could not participate in relationship behaviors while incarcerated, I did not choose this theory.

Delimitations of this study also included using the researcher-designed interview instrument and the RQs as the basis for data gathered regarding formerly incarcerated African American fathers' perceptions of their relationships with their children and the effects of parental incarceration on these relationships. Additionally, I used an information form to gather data regarding participant demographics and incarceration status information. Findings from the interview and information form might reflect all aspects of African Americans formerly incarcerated fathers' relationships with their children and the effects of parental incarceration on these relationships.

## Limitations

There were limitations of the study related to design and methodological weaknesses, including qualitative studies not being designed to gather numerical data for statistical comparison (Yilmaz, 2013). The participants in this study narrated their experiences and perceptions, which might have been influenced by their desires and recollection of specific situations. I asked follow-up questions and observed nonverbal communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, to augment the participants' narratives and further enhance the data collected. Because there were no variables

directly manipulated, and the results were derived from existing groups, all findings were provided descriptively. However, this design allowed for gathering detailed data. This method offered the opportunity for a new level of understanding of a topic and related issues.

Additional study limitations were related to the transferability of the findings. The sample selected for this study was pulled from an available volunteer pool. Because the sample consisted of volunteers from one geographic location, findings might not be transferable to all African American formerly incarcerated father populations in other geographical locations, which could limit to the external validity of the study. Characteristics, such as age, were assessed to mitigate the influence of potential confounding variables. I also addressed the effects of interviewing, such as fears of interview findings being shared with others, presenting some limitations on study findings by substituting identification numbers for names on all materials to ensure participants' confidentiality. Biases that could have adversely influenced study outcomes (including researcher interpretations) were addressed by returning all data findings and conclusions to participants for verification of accuracy, trustworthiness, and dependability.

## Significance of the Study

I addressed an under-researched area. The results may provide much-needed insights into the father–child relationships of African American formerly incarcerated fathers. Findings can be used to address the influence of incarceration on the African American family in future studies. Many African American fathers experience

incarceration-related adverse relationship outcomes (Charles et al., 2019; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011; Wildeman & Western, 2010). This study's results can underscore the importance of the early childhood environment, specifically the father–child relationship environment. The findings may provide useful insights in this area for future research.

Understanding how formerly incarcerated males build relationships with their children can also contribute to positive social change. By discovering knowledge about the types of support needed to help an African American father who has been incarcerated to build stronger relationships with their children upon release may improve the lives of them and their children. This information may be useful for psychologists, educators, program developers, and researchers trying to improve the father–child relationships of formerly incarcerated fathers as well as improving the relationship build/rebuilding experience between and outcomes for these fathers and their children.

This study can also fill gaps in the literature regarding how these individuals build and support meaningful relationships with their children. By exploring how African American formerly incarcerated fathers build and support relationships with their children, this study may provide information on techniques to build stronger relationships between incarcerated parents and their children. This study is important because it will assess a group with the highest U.S. incarceration rates (see Golinelli & Carson, 2013) and whose incarceration has devastating effects on the social and economic aspects of their communities (Johnson & Easterling, 2012).

Additionally, this study's findings can have implications for policy in social structures, such as the criminal justice system. The societal cost of incarcerating individuals includes their families. Therefore, researchers should evaluate those effects. Findings from this study may yield important insights for establishing healthy parent child bonding and relationships in general.

## Summary

This chapter presented an introduction to the background of the study on African American formerly incarcerated fathers' relationships with their children. The problem statement supported the study, showing that although research demonstrated high rates of incarcerated African American fathers, there was a gap regarding how these individuals could build and support relationships with their children. I also discussed the theoretical frameworks of attachment and the AAMT as well as the nature and significance of the study. Chapter 2 entails a review of literature relevant to this study's topic. Chapter 3 includes a full discussion of methodology, population and sample, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the results. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by including a summary, interpretations of findings, and recommendations.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

Over 1.5 million men are being housed in state and federal prisons (Carson, 2015). Most of these individuals are African American men, and many are fathers. Because incarceration denies fathers the opportunity to connect or remain connected with their children, it can decrease the likelihood of parental involvement in the future (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Cultural perceptions of the role of fathers also influence parenting, and an African American father typically considers a primary aspect of fatherhood to be providing for the financial needs of their children. Because incarceration negates this effort, fathers are at risk of feeling like failures, resulting in an increased disconnection from a child (Hunt et al., 2015).

There is a gap in the literature regarding how formerly incarcerated African American fathers can build and support healthy relationships with their children after release. This gap indicates a need to explore the state of father–child relationships in this group. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of the experience of reestablishing relationships with their children among formerly incarcerated African American fathers.

The following section contains a review of the literature regarding the topic of formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships with their children. A literature search strategy is presented, followed by a theoretical framework and literature review of incarceration rates, parental incarceration impacts, formerly incarcerated African American father roles and relationships, and formerly incarcerated African

American fathers' incarceration and parent–child relationships. A summary and conclusion end this chapter.

## Literature Search Strategy

I conducted the literature review online, which included domains of formerly incarcerated African American males' outcomes, fathers' absence, and formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships. I used libraries in local institutes and electronic databases, primarily ProQuest, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and SocINDEX, as primary sources for the search. The keywords for the search included *African American father roles, father roles, father absence and related outcomes, African American father absence, (formerly) incarcerated African American, African American father absence and related outcomes, formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships, (formerly) incarcerated African American father and their children, attachment theory,* and *African American male theory.*

## Conceptual Framework

### Attachment Theory

Ainsworth (1973) and Bowlby (1973) defined attachment as a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. The central premise of the attachment theory is that a person's relationships throughout life are influenced by their first relationship with the primary caregiver, usually but not always the person's mother. Attachment is represented by specific behaviors in children, such as seeking closeness to the attachment figure when upset or threatened (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1973). Attachment is not always reciprocal; one individual may have an

attachment to another that is unshared. Further, attachment bonding refers to how a child develops socially, emotionally, and mentally (secure/insure, etc.; Doran, 2011). Attachment bonding also refers to ways a conscious mind reasons about a specific subject (socially, emotionally, and mentally, secure/insecure) by integrating attitudes, principles, standards, and other opinions. Relationship forming behavior refers to mental health disorders (e.g., attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, and bullying; Edwards & Shannon, 2008).

The theoretical framework for attachment theory was used for this study because it describes how a child could form a relationship based on the primary caregiver relationship. But if a child experienced the absence of the father due to incarceration, then the father has diminished influence on the bonding relationship of that child (Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Bretherton, 1997). A relationship can include forming secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized relationships (Bretherton, 1997). A father out of contact with his child due to being incarcerated will have little influence on his attachment relationship. The attachment bond refers to the emotional connection formed by wordless communication between a child and parent/caregiver. A child's ability to bond also depends on their experience and environment, affecting their ability to form a secure attachment bond. There may be circumstances that affect the secure attachment bond that is unavoidable, and the child is too young to understand what has happened and why. These feelings may lead to children seeking attention by acting out or displaying other extreme behaviors (Michalak et al., 2019). According to the attachment theory, secure attachment is essential to the child's well-being and future relationship building,

which are negatively affected by a father's incarceration (Murray & Murray, 2010). Further, in boys' cases, paternal incarceration has even more negative implications for the child's attachment and emotional well-being (Murray & Murray, 2010).

There are many different placement options for children with incarcerated fathers, and all have varying influences on their attachment with the current caregivers and incarcerated father such as the child's age, the level of secure attachment with the father before incarceration, having witnessed the father being arrested, and conditions surrounding visitations during the incarceration can influence the child's attachment with the father (Murray & Murray, 2010). Paternal attachment before incarceration might have a more substantial influence on the child's attachments during and after the father's incarceration (Murray & Murray, 2010). Adolescents have coped with parental incarceration by "deidentification from the incarcerated parent, desensitization to incarceration, and strength through control" (Johnson & Easterling, 2015, p. 244), which implies less attachment.

The absence of a father may lead children to experience anxiety and depression (Eliezer et al., 2012). Such absence leads to abnormal relationship development and stress on the children's part (Gobbi et al., 2015). Additionally, the negative impact of paternal incarceration occurs regardless of the father being resident at the time of being taken to prison (Geller et al., 2012). The quality of parenting behaviors is more important than quantity (Haskins, 2014). Paternal absence may not be as detrimental if the father spends quality time with the child, which is not often associated with incarcerated fathers, given their tendency to use aggression and other deviant behaviors. Apart from the loss of

a father due to incarceration, other factors contribute to the negative emotions and developmental influence paternal incarceration may have on children, including shame, stigma, and economic hardship (Haskins, 2014).

Aggression and attention difficulties are also experienced among children with incarcerated fathers (Geller et al., 2012; Haskins, 2014). Findings have indicated difficulties in school readiness on both cognitive and noncognitive levels (aggression, attention deficits or inattentiveness, group behavior, and social skills), which may continue into later schooling and possible placement in special education (Haskins, 2014). Increased aggression was reported to be more intense due to paternal incarceration than maternal incarceration (Geller et al., 2012; Haskins, 2014). Paternal incarceration also has more substantial effects compared to the effects of father absence for other reasons (Geller et al., 2012). The lack of bonding opportunities can lead to stress, anxiety, and suboptimal attachments issues on the child (Eliezer et al., 2012). They more frequently face violence, parental substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, and parental mental health issues. They are more likely to exhibit significant behavioral, social-emotional, and school-related problems.

The attachment theory was useful as a theoretical lens to view the study problem: The father's absence leads to difficulties in the child's part in forming attachments. Having an incarcerated father can be stressful and cause anxiety for a child (Bowlby, 1973; Geller et al., 2012; Murray & Murray, 2010). Therefore, the child may suffer double loss from attachment and establishing a bond with parents following paternal incarceration. Attachment theorists posit that an incarcerated father will have difficulty

influencing his child's attachment formulation, even after coming home (Geller et al., 2012; Turney, 2015). A child's early attachment patterns form the basis of later relationship behaviors developed to serve a particular function, such as maintaining attention or love (Bowlby, 1989). Attachment theorists have stated that African American males, like other males, form their relationship behaviors based on their early childhood bonding experiences (Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Bretherton, 1997).

**African American Male Theory**

Researchers have used the AAMT to posit that the African American male is distinct from other genders and ethnicities in American society; moreover, his perceptions, reactions, and desires will differ from those of other groups. That distinctiveness is due to the unique African American experience and African American males' positionality in American society. Bush and Bush (2013) first developed the theory. AAMT can be considered an offshoot of the critical race theory, which has been used to posit that a person's race is the primary factor in social interactions, both in individual relationships and perceptions by society (Bush & Bush, 2013). Moreover, AAMT's premise is that the experiences of African American boys and men can best be explored using an ecological systems approach, which considers the totality of the environment in which they live. In agreement with the critical race theory is the premise that this environment is shaped by their races and how society views them.

The AAMT incorporates the five interconnected environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1990). The AAMT has two categories: (a) an inner microsystem to capture components such as a person's biology, personality, perceptions, and beliefs and

(b) while the outer microsystem offers the space to consider the impact of such facets as the family, peers, neighborhood, and school environment. Additionally, the AAMT expands the mesosystem to demonstrate the connection between the inner microsystem's environments, the outer microsystem, and a sixth division and system added by the AAMT called the subsystem. The AAMT provides the space to consider the influence and involvement of such matters as the supernatural and spirit (Cajete, 1994; Some, 1993), the collective-unconscious will, collective-unconscious, and archetypes (Jung et al., 1964). The AAMT specifies the opportunity to reflect what regarded physicists describe as multidimensional levels of reality existing in parallel spaces (Kaku, 2005); the individual male level is in the microsystem and acts as a nuance of the systems in the archetype.

According to Bush and Bush (2013), race and racism, coupled with classism and sexism, have an overwhelming impact on every aspect of African American boys and men's lives. But the AAMT is not a reactionary theory. Its focus is not necessary to respond to cultural hegemony and racism but to unequivocally account for it. The AAMT works on the historical and current culture, consciousness, family, and community to determine what is and strive to achieve justice for African American boys and men.

**Synthesis of the Theories**

Researchers can use the AAMT to state the African American male experience is distinctive, even unique in American society (Bush & Bush, 2013). Attachment theorists have stated that African American males, like other males, form their relationship behaviors based on their early childhood bonding experiences (Bowlby, 1973, 1980;

Bretherton, 1997). Theorists of the AAMT have posited that African males' experiences are distinctive because of their cultural backgrounds (Bush & Bush, 2013). Based on the ecological systems framework, these backgrounds may include an even more significant impact than expected from parental absence due to incarceration (Bush & Bush, 2013). Therefore, the attachment theory combined with AAMT provided a robust theoretical framework for the present study.

## Review of the Literature

### Disproportionate Phenomena

Decision-makers are biased at all levels of the justice system, and the process has disadvantages to Black people (Subramanian et al., 2018). For example, the use of drugs is similar across racial and ethnic groups; however, Black people are arrested and sentenced on drug charges at much higher rates than White people. Black people are more likely to be stopped by the police, detained pretrial, charged with more serious crimes, and sentenced more harshly than White people (Fettig, 2018). Maintaining these racial disparities has a high cost for individuals, families, and communities to the injustice of a criminal justice system that disproportionately impacts Black people. These injustices profoundly and negatively affect formerly-incarcerated males' father–child relationship, employability, and attaining housing.

### Incarceration Rates

After the number of prisoners increased during the previous 2 years, the number of incarcerated parents has been reported as decreasing (Carson, 2015). The U.S. prison population experienced an overall decline of 21,200 prisoners down more than 1% from

the year's end in 2015 (Carson, 2018). The federal prison population decreased by 7,300 prisoners between 2015 to 2016, which was down almost 4%. This finding accounted for 34% of the total change in the U.S. prison population. State and federal prisons at year's end in 2016 had jurisdiction over 1.4 million prisoners sentenced to more than 1 year. The U.S. imprisonment rate declined 2% from 459 prisoners per 100,000 residents of all ages in 2015 to 450 per 100,000 in 2016. However, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics data in 2014 showed that the U.S. prison population was over 1.5 million (De Giorgi, 2016). When prisoners from local jails were included, this prisoner population was over 2.3 million. This total does not include the over 4.7 million individuals currently on parole or probation. Thus, over 7 million people are under some penal control, representing nearly 3% of the U.S. population. As of February 23, 2013, the total U.S. prison population was 93.5% male, 6.5% female, 59.5% European American, 37.1% African American (which was an over-representation relative to the total U.S. population), 34.9% Hispanic American, 1.8% Native American, and 1.6% Asian American (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2013).

**The Psychological Effects of Incarceration**

The psychological effects of incarceration may last long after release and influence the ability to establish relationships with family upon returning home (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). Fathers who must reestablish their parental roles with their children may find this problematic after a lengthy incarceration period. For instance, an incarcerated person must learn rules, explicitly stated by the institution, regarding how to

behave around other inmates (Haney, 2017). Further, there is a rigid and complex social code among prisoners; violating it, even unwittingly, can be fatal (Haney, 2017).

Incarceration can be viewed as much as a psychological punishment as a physical one. The loss of freedom and personal autonomy is usually the most challenging aspect of prison (Schnittker, 2014). A person who spends even a modest amount of time in prison is often changed for life (Murray et al., 2014). No person incarcerated for any significant length of time is immune to the psychological effects. Given the dangerous and violent nature of prisons, anyone who survives the experience must develop a watchful eye, which some may call paranoia in the outside world (Schnittker, 2014). Such psychological changes may impact the previously incarcerated person's ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships outside of prison. Sensitivity is needed when dealing with the sensitivities of rebuilding relationships with children (Schnittker, 2014).

The psychological distress from being imprisoned is often exacerbated by discriminatory treatment, particularly of African Americans (Assari et al., 2018). The inherent stressors of incarceration exacerbate the psychological impacts of having to survive a dangerous and unfamiliar environment. These factors include isolation, loneliness, boredom, and the effects of living in a confined space (Schnittker, 2014). The coping mechanisms of "successful" inmates—those who survive the experience relatively intact mentally and physically—include ways to keep one's mind occupied, forming relationships with other inmates, and making the most of what limited opportunities exist to interact with friends and family (Haney, 2017).

Incarcerated persons' coping mechanisms can include a "hardening" of one's emotions and attitudes, as showing emotion in prison can cause one to be targeted by predators (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). When a person reenters society, they may be stigmatized, labeled, and subjected to discrimination, and they may not have the psychological coping mechanisms needed (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). The near-paranoid attitude and mindset necessary to survive in prison may not be understood or welcomed when an inmate reenters society. Characteristics of this attitude and mindset include being overly watchful, reacting to minor noises, and being withdrawn and quiet (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). The psychological impact of imprisonment may permeate the released inmate's relationships outside the prison, which can negatively influence a father's efforts to reestablish a meaningful relationship with his children (Schnittker, 2014).

Therefore, researchers must recognize that the prisons' social world differs from the outside world, and survival in one requires many different skills than survival in the other. However, a formerly incarcerated individual may not discard one set of skills related to knowing how to survive in prison and master another related to surviving in society (Porter, 2014). The latter skills include taking care of oneself, such as looking after one's health. The psychological impacts of incarceration can become ingrained into the previously incarcerated person's personality and behavioral patterns, thus complicating the building and re-establishing relationships with children.

Prisoners have little independence or autonomy, and they fiercely guard what little they do have. They are fed, housed (however poorly), and receive medical care

(however inadequate). In contrast, after years in the system, they may be so unaccustomed to the type of greater societal independence and personal responsibility that is the norm which upon release, they do not know how to take care of themselves (Porter, 2014). This effect is often referred to as institutionalization, where a person has grown so accustomed to having basic needs met that they can no longer do that for himself, if released (NeSmith, 2014). This issue can also affect how equipped they are to reestablish and engage in healthy parent-child relationships.

Institutionalization can persist for years after an inmate is released. The worst problem for incarcerated fathers is that African American fathers and most other cultures are expected to take the initiative to take care of themselves and their families (Foster & Hagan, 2015). The stress fathers felt upon reassimilating into society can be significantly exacerbated by the additional belief that they cannot perform the responsibilities they should reassume. An institutionalized individual can have acquired a morbid affection for the perceived security of being within the institution. This affection may translate into feelings of being adrift and helpless when tasked with even simple functions, such as driving or grocery shopping (Foster & Hagan, 2015). Particularly germane to this study was that institutionalization could severely influence future parenting.

**Institutionalization**

Institutionalization refers to internalizing the rules, spoken and unspoken, of an institution where a person is confined. These rules are rarely congruent with those of the outside world, including the employment sector (Raphael, 2014). Raphael's (2014) theoretical discussion on the effects of incarceration, from a labeling theory perspective,

indicated the length of incarceration is negatively correlated to employment prospects. Many of the skills needed for employment, such as interacting with customers, can be "unlearned" while in the institution. This loss creates an area of lack that can create dissonance for the recently returned institutionalized person.

Institutionalization may lead to poor economic outcomes due to the loss of employment opportunities. Incarceration causes institutionalization, causing a person to be unable or poorly able to meet employment standards (Sykes & Maroto, 2016). Minorities, including African Americans, tend to be incarcerated more than the majority White population. The resultant institutionalization and the associated adverse effects make their economic prospects even more unfortunate than they would have been if they were White. When inmates were released, they were usually "tossed back" into society without training or coping skills; the only supervision they received was on parole, which was only to monitor their behaviors, not help them assimilate (Sykes & Maroto, 2016).

Focusing on the current study problem, researchers posited an institutionalized parent is often an imperfect parent (Moran et al., 2017). The skills needed to be a good parent are often stifled by institutionalization (Moran et al., 2017). Moran et al. (2017) conducted a 3-year study to determine the relationship between family visitations and re-offense among formerly incarcerated parents after being released from prison. In this qualitative research, Moran et al. conducted 32 in-depth interviews with inmates. Parents must create and impose rules for their children and follow the rules of their own. The effect of institutionalization blunts and truncates independent rulemaking (Moran et al., 2017). Moreover, when institutionalized, a person does not perceive any need to provide

themselves with life's necessities, which is a fundamental aspect of being in American society. Even if a parent relearns self-sufficiency after being released from incarceration, they may not be able to take the next step of being responsible for their children's welfare. This effect occurs even when the parent is aware and eager—even desperately so—to fill the parental role (Moran et al., 2017).

Kim (2016) conducted a review of the literature from 1970 to examine the influx of inmates in U.S. prisons. The more crowded prisons became, the less personal space an inmate had. The higher the effects of institutionalization on inmates, the more significant adjustments they had to make to adjust to the outside world after being released (Kim, 2016). These effects can induce agoraphobia, a fear of open spaces when the inmate is released and reenters the outside world (Kim, 2016). Though no studies have been conducted to measure the degree to which released prisoners have been institutionalized, many are released. Their struggles to reintegrate within society are well-documented and understood (Kim, 2016).

The specific effects of being institutionalized include withdrawing personally, refusing to accept personal responsibility, staying in a small physical space, being socially and emotionally passive, and experiencing other problems that influence the released prisoner's ability to deal with the outside world (Frazier et al., 2015). Based on longitudinal prison data set dating from 2000 from all 50 states in the United States, Frazier et al. (2015) used the hydraulic framework to show ways to reverse the trend of increased U.S. incarcerations. Readjustment is significant, but leadership has devoted few—if any—resources to fixing the issue, even though re-assimilating prisoners into

society represents a worthwhile social goal (Frazier et al., 2015). Fathers struggling with reintegration issues and having to reestablish relationships with their children may experience additional difficulties in reconnecting with their children due to social and economic stressors.

Upon being reintroduced into society, the formerly incarcerated person experiences joy and real-world challenges and barriers to successful reentry. Brunton-Smith and McCarthy (2016) explored the role of family ties in successful reentry. The findings indicated that family relationships are pivotal in successful reentry and reuniting with the family. Relationships seldom withstand extended incarceration periods. The returning father may face a family that broke emotional ties with him, as the mother may have found another romantic partner and became self-sufficient. Children who must live with other family members may be influenced by the father and not be as welcoming as once envisioned (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2016).

Other life situations that may act as a barrier to reestablishing family relationships include life circumstances, such as finding suitable housing and employment, especially as an African American citizen (Ward & Merlo, 2015; Western et al., 2015; Western & Sirois, 2017). This may be complicated due to stigmatization (Tyler & Brockmann, 2017) and low educational level of the returning father (Ward & Merlo, 2015). Mental health issues may also be present and aggravated by substance abuse, which can act as a barrier to successful reentry and the uptake of the father role (Western et al., 2015). Before incarceration, the father may have displayed low self-control, which can be perpetuated while being incarcerated. Such behavioral tendencies may influence the father's ability to

refrain from maladaptive behavior, even when desiring future harmonious relationships and good citizen behavior (Malouf et al., 2013). Such barriers to reentry may negatively influence the returning fathers' ability to reestablish healthy relationships with their children.

**Parental Incarceration Impacts**

There are multiple impacts of parental incarceration. Miller and Barnes (2015) and Swisher and Shaw-Smith (2015) discussed how parent incarceration could lead to adverse life outcomes for children of the parent. Miller and Barnes (2015) used retrospective data from the Add Health program to study the impact of having an incarcerated parent in the children's lives. Parental incarceration was found to influence young adults' health, academic achievement, and ability to accept public assistance (Miller & Barnes, 2015).

Using the same data source, Swisher and Shaw-Smith (2015) reported the same children aged between 8 and 21 years old in Wave I and between 24 and 32 years old in Wave IV. The Wave IV respondents had to answer questions retrospectively on their parents' incarcerations. The findings indicated gender differences in the children's experiences of incarceration. In girls, the presence of sexual abuse before paternal incarceration resulted in the absence of depression developed during the father's incarceration. This finding is a pertinent reminder that conditions before paternal incarceration may influence the child's reaction to the father's absence (Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015). Miller and Barnes (2015) and Swisher and Shaw-Smith (2015) established the need to further explore paternal incarceration's effects, thereby supporting the need

for the current study. The researchers who reported on the variety of interlinking factors of parental incarceration and their influence on their children's behavior, relationships, and citizenship called for further multifaceted explorations of this complex phenomenon.

In a qualitative study of 45 children and single caregivers following the spouse's incarceration, Arditti and Savla (2015) discussed impacts, such as child trauma symptoms. The researchers indicated the need to understand that parental incarceration could be viewed as an enduring trauma with ongoing stress that influenced the incarcerated parent's child and family. The researchers found an essential factor that could moderate and buffer the effect of these adverse outcomes was the quality of the parent-child relationship.

A legal theoretical exploration by Uggen and McElrath (2014) and Bell and Cornwell (2015) indicated the need to maintain family ties to incarcerated parents. Bell and Cornwell's quantitative study included 47 males and 26 females from an Indiana prison. The inmates underwent the Family Matters course to develop a better understanding of the family unit. The course outcomes and assessment outcomes 3 months after the course indicated that a significant number of inmates had a deeper understanding and appreciation for their families (Bell & Cornwell, 2015). This issue included consideration for the parent-child relationship, as explored in the current study.

Miller and Barnes (2015) reported that out of over 2 million persons incarcerated in U.S. prisons, most are parents to children under 18 years old. There was a link found between parent incarceration and adverse life outcomes (Miller & Barnes, 2015). However, more information is needed regarding the longitudinal impact of incarceration

of fathers on their children. Utilizing the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data, Miller and Barnes (2015) explored the relationship between parental incarceration during childhood and later adult outcomes, with a focus on health, education, and economic outcomes in young adulthood. Findings indicated that parental incarceration was significantly related to issues their children faced in early adulthood, including reduced education levels, poor physical and mental health, and receipt of public assistance.

This incarceration influences the parent-child relationship and child outcomes. Roberts et al. (2014) explored the mental health and development of children exposed to a family member's arrest. Roberts et al. examined baseline data for 326 children ages birth through 11 years old who entered family-based care systems. Findings were that children exposed to the arrest of a family member experienced significantly more and different types of traumatic events than children not exposed to arrest. Findings indicated arrest exposure was significantly related to higher behavioral and emotional challenges after controlling for the child's age, gender, race/ethnicity, the household income, caregiver's education, parenting factors, and other exposures. Further analyses showed that internalizing and externalizing behaviors were linked to arrest exposure at all developmental levels. Swisher and Shaw-Smith (2015) explored these outcomes at the adolescent development level.

Swisher and Shaw-Smith (2015) explicitly investigated the impact of parental incarceration on adolescent outcomes. These authors reported that parental incarceration was linked to a plethora of adverse consequences for children and adolescents. Data

derived from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Findings were that parental incarceration was positively correlated to juvenile delinquency. Associations with adolescent depression were weaker and influenced more by gender and other factors, such as a history of being physically or sexually abused by a parent or other adult caregiver during childhood. The researchers found that if there was no sexual abuse, parental incarceration was linked to higher depression among girls. However, if sexual abuse was reported, parental incarceration was not linked with girls' depression (Swisher & Shaw-Smith, 2015). Thus, if the parent was abusive, being removed from the home improved child outcomes. This medium might imply that being without the parent served to protect the female from being sexually abused. Thus, in some cases, incarceration could improve children's well-being if the relationship with the parent was abusive.

Parent incarceration leads to a single-parent home, which can also be associated with adverse consequences. Arditti and Savla (2015) studied parental incarceration's impact to include child trauma symptoms found in single caregiver homes. These authors characterized parental incarceration as an enduring trauma with ongoing stress. Arditti and Savla focused on parental incarceration's impact, with mediating family processes of visitation and caregiving arrangement. The researchers used a comparison group design and 45 single caregiver and included child dyads. Participants were from similarly disadvantaged single caregiver families.

Arditti and Savla (2015) found that child and caregiver reports revealed that child trauma symptomology was significantly higher, where parental incarceration resulted in single caregiver families. Having an incarcerated parent was linked with more severe

visitation problems and children being raised by someone other than their biological parent. Parental incarceration significantly predicted child trauma symptoms. The improved quality of children's visitation positively mitigated parental incarceration's effects on child trauma symptomology, supporting the need to explore the father-child relationship further.

Thus, family ties and the father-child relationship are essential factors to consider when a parent is incarcerated. Bell and Cornwell (2015) studied the need to maintain family ties with incarcerated parents. These authors evaluated a family wellness course named the Family Matters designed for persons in prison which was grounded in family systems and attachment theories. The course focus was on the family as a system, and it taught participants communication and conflict management skills, behavioral change methods, and ways to heal relationships. Participants focused on improving one- or two-family relationships using experiential exercises, role-plays, letter writing, and telephone calls.

Bell and Cornwell (2015) evaluated six classes: four in a men's prison ($N = 47$) and two in a women's prison ($N = 26$). Findings were that participants developed an improved understanding of themselves and their families; they reported increased self-competence and self-esteem. Increased contact with one or more family members and improved relationships, particularly those with children, were also reported. Changes were maintained and improved at a 3-month follow-up. Thus, the importance of parent-child relationships and attachments was supported.

Uggen and McElrath (2014) further confirmed the need for this parent-child attachment; the researchers studied advances in understanding parental incarceration impacts. According to these authors, while incarceration could influence a child, the relationship between the parent and the child was also an influencing factor. There were families where relationships were close, regardless of imprisonment, and there were families where parents were not close to their children, regardless of incarceration.

Neither Bell and Cornwell (2015) or Uggen and McElrath (2014) focused on how these relationships might differ across different racial groups. Therefore, there is a need to study these relationships, specifically in African American men because of their incarceration disparity. If there is a difference between African American men and others, it may signify that the problem of higher rates of incarceration for them is even more significant than it appears.

In the search for answers about fatherhood after prison, Peniston (2014) asked the following questions in interviews with participants: What are the experiences of a father trying to reestablish his relationship with his young children after being released, how do fathers perceive communities' resources during the reunification process, and what are some resources a father can rely on as he goes through reunification? Peniston's interviews lasted for 45 minutes. Peniston used semi-structured, in-depth interview questions to capture the experience and the rich detail of their experiences. Seventeen questions were developed. The data collected focused on father-child interactions before and after the father's release from prison (Peniston, 2014). Peniston (2014) arranged for

each participant to have a follow-up interview 4 weeks after release. At this meeting, Peniston provided the participant with a list of community resources.

The data analysis that Peniston (2014) used, though flexible, had specific guidelines on efficient processes, principles, and data analysis strategies. The protocols followed six stages: (a) initial reading and contract noting; (b) identifying themes and labeling the same; (c) linking topics, as well as identifying thematic clusters; (d) providing a summary table; providing ongoing analysis with other cases; and (f) producing a mater table comprised of themes (Peniston, 2014). The study results indicated that fathers faced many challenges after being released (Peniston, 2014). Additionally, fathers grappled with reestablishing themselves while adhering to parole supervision and trying to restore and rebuild a relationship with his children.

Many fathers faced the situation regarding whether the mothers were on board to reestablish the father-child relationship (Peniston, 2014). If the mothers allowed incarcerated males to reconnect with their children, that reunification occurred. However, if the mother rejected reunification, reunification would usually not happen (Peniston, 2014). In conclusion, many fathers faced tremendous difficulties and factors beyond their control regarding their attempts to reconnect or remain connected with their children.

Additionally, some fathers also stated that if they fell behind on their child support payments, they might opt to delay reunification for fear of being reincarcerated (Peniston, 2014). Peniston (2014) stated future research was crucial and expressed a need for more serious study and program attention. Presently, few policies and services are available to address the needs of former prison inmates' fathers. Peniston stated that to

improve the father-child relationship, leaders of correctional institutions could consider placing more measures to maintain the father and child relationship. Additionally, the parole officer can be the missing link to connecting fathers to community-based services. Moreover, Peniston asked policymakers to consider funding fatherhood programs and services within the community.

**African American Fathers' Roles in Families**

Understanding the parent-child relationship in this study requires knowledge of the parent's role in the African American family. McAdoo and McAdoo (2002) reported early views of the dynamics of the father's roles for African Americans. Threlfall et al. (2013) and Murray and Hwang (2015) also further discussed these roles.

McAdoo and McAdoo (2002) presented an early view of the father's roles and dynamics for African Americans. As with all cultures, families have been influenced by many social factors and economic changes. Patterns in African American families tend to exist within supportive networks of extended kin and community support (McAdoo & McAdoo, 2002). Today, fewer men live with their families due to incarceration or other factors, and these men have lower health rates and higher unemployment rates (McAdoo & McAdoo, 2002).

More recently, Cooper (2015) discussed African American fathers and the father's importance in raising African American boys. Cooper noted that social experiences influenced African American men and boys. Researchers have focused on the harmful elements of African American parenting and neglected positive aspects. In terms of paternal interaction with children, especially boys, African American fathers

reported more caregiving and playing with their children. The social experiences of fathers can be found in their parenting behaviors, which may inform their children's parenting behaviors later. With increased deaths of African American male youths, society must understand these influences. These social experiences may result in well-being disparities regarding educational attainment and mental health. The negative impacts of the father's absence have been identified; conversely, fathers can have a positive impact on their children's lives (Cooper, 2015). The African American father's positive role must be recognized and further developed to overcome these negative social influences on educational attainment and health behaviors, including the untimely deaths of young African American males (Cooper, 2015). Program leaders who target positive parenting behaviors and bonding between African American fathers and their children are needed to overcome disparities.

McAdoo and McAdoo (2002) provided a view of the dynamics of father roles for African Americans, and Cooper (2015) noted how social issues impact these roles. Such roles include normal parenting functions and role models, which a formerly incarcerated father may find challenging. Threlfall et al. (2013) and Murray and Hwang (2015) further discussed the role of African American fathers.

Threlfall et al. (2013) studied the parenting role of the African American fathers living in urban poverty in a qualitative study to explore parenting roles and strategies used to raise children. The authors conducted focus groups and individual interviews with 36 fathers. Each father had contact with their child at least twice a month. Participants reported conventional views of fathering roles to include provider, nurturer, and teacher.

The fathers' greatest emphasis was on the need to be there for their children. Participants reported the existence of a hostile child-support system and the need to teach their children alternatives to avoid harmful practices and values found in urban neighborhoods and learn skills needed to prosper in mainstream society. Participants reported that their circumstances limited their desires to be responsible fathers.

The role of a father is well defined for most African American men. Murray and Hwang (2015) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the father roles of married African American men. The lived experiences of eight married African American fathers were the study's focus to gather views of father roles and responsible fathering behaviors. Issues included men's perceptions about their father roles and how father roles' historical characterizations influence these views. Participants reported role themes of leader, supporter, provider, disciplinarian, role model/sex role model, teacher/spiritual teacher, and guide. The social experiences of the African American community can influence perceived fatherhood roles. McAdoo and McAdoo (2002) studied the dynamics of father roles for African Americans, noting fewer men lived with their families due to incarceration or other factors. Threlfall et al. (2013) provided insights regarding African American fathers' parenting role, living in urban poverty, and found that fathers wanted the best for their children. Murray and Hwang (2015) supported this conclusion with findings from interviewing married African American fathers.

**Formerly Incarcerated African American Fathers**

There is a relative paucity of literature regarding formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships with their children after release. For example, Shavel

(2017) interviewed nine African American fathers incarcerated for 3 to 10 years; the study was restricted to noncustodial, nonresident fathers having a nonsexual offense history living in the mid-western United States. This study was a transcendental phenomenological study, exploring the lives of formerly incarcerated African American fathers who desired to parent their minor children while remaining obligated to community supervision. Shavel identified nine central themes that represented the formerly incarcerated African American fathers' parenting experiences under parole supervision. Shavel concluded formerly incarcerated African American fathers were part of a severely misunderstood culture, immersed in a legacy of struggle and pain, yet brilliant in having the tenacity, capability, and will survive.

The understanding of these persons' experiences is limited due to a lack of research. Researcher recommendations for future studies include the need to continue understanding the experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers who are on parole (Johnson & Stanford, 2002). Moreover, subsequent research suggests focusing on the mental, emotional, and behavioral connections of lives involved in parenting activities. Additionally, further researchers should explore the practice of teaching racial discipline to children, which is unique to African Americans' parenting behaviors due to the presence of racism, discrimination, and prejudice within the United States (Johnson & Stanford, 2002).

**African American Father Incarceration and Parent-Child Relationships**

The incarceration of the father impacts the father-child relationship. Mustaine and Tewksbury (2015) discussed this issue and used Wave 9 data of the 2011 Fragile

Families and Child Well Being Study to explore whether incarceration influenced discipline methods. This issue was crucial because it might influence father-child relationships. The relationship between the incarcerated father and his child is also influenced by the co-parent alliance between the father and other child caregivers. Loper et al. (2014) discussed parenting quality and fatherhood performance issues as also essential to consider the father-child relationship. Wakefield (2015), Lewis (2015), and Secret (2012) explored ways these issues were influenced by incarceration.

Mustaine and Tewksbury (2015) explored the question of whether incarcerated fathers' methods of child discipline were harsher and included physical punishment, thus potentially diminishing the parent-child relationship. The goal was to determine if incarcerated fathers were inclined to be harsher due to being hardened during incarceration. Other elements included demographics, mother interactions, range quality of exchanges with children, beliefs about a father's role, and parenting satisfaction levels. Mustaine and Tewksbury found that the anger and quality of father-child interactions were the most significant factors. Mustaine and Tewksbury indicated that father incarceration was not statistically related to methods of child discipline.

These findings indicated support for the need to understand attachment in father-child relationships and related factors more fully. For example, Loper et al. (2014) explored the outcomes of a co-parenting agreement between incarcerated parents and the child's caregivers. Loper et al. explored these outcomes with 57 incarcerated parents and their corresponding child caregivers. Each parent pair took part in the Messages Project. This project featured incarcerated parents' video-recording greetings to their children,

and these messages were mailed home. As part of the project, the researchers assessed perceptions regarding the co-parenting agreement utilizing the Parenting Alliance Measure and child contact levels with the incarcerated parents and caregivers. Loper et al. conducted and videotaped observations of expressions from prisoners of both positive and negative attitudes about the home caregiver. Results revealed a disparity between the incarcerated parents and the home caregiver, where more frequent phone contact and letter-writing to their children by the incarcerated parent was reported. Incarcerated parents also reported higher co-parenting cooperation with the home caregiver than reports provided by the home caregiver. Children who observed a positive co-parenting alliance between the incarcerated parent and home caregivers on the video recorded message had increased positive moods. Displays of negative or hostile attitudes toward the home caregivers were positively correlated to more negative moods. The importance of a healthy, robust, and positive co-parenting alliance between the incarcerated parent and the home caregiver was implied.

However, more optimism was expressed by the incarcerated parent than home caregivers. Wakefield (2015) explored paternal incarceration impacts on parenting quality. This author noted that the impacts of parental incarceration could be harmful to incarcerated fathers' children. These included adverse developmental, behavioral, and attainment outcomes, mental and behavioral challenges, substance use, lack of education, and social inequality. Data from the first and second waves of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods were used. Wakefield conducted a longitudinal survey of young children, adolescents ($N$ = 6,000) and primary caregivers. Results were

that paternal incarceration did not significantly impact positive parenting behaviors; however, parental incarceration significantly increased problematic parenting behaviors, including the areas of conflict resolution methods and discipline. As stated by Wakefield, "I find that paternal incarceration increases negative parenting behaviors and can result in serious physical abuse" (p. 923). Paternal incarceration harmed parenting quality, which led to poor child outcomes. Thus, Wakefield showed that parental incarceration resulted in poor parent-child relationships.

Lewis (2015) and Secret (2012) further explored parental incarceration and parent-child relationships. Lewis (2015) studied the impact of incarceration on formerly incarcerated African American fathers and fatherhood performance. Collected data originated from 109 surveys and 30 in-depth interviews. Findings were that dominant themes reported by participants included the need to be there for their children; an example for their children; and to provide their children with love, the meeting of basic needs, and protection. The prison environment and post-incarceration restrictions do not support fathers' ability to perform these roles or maintain a healthy relationship with their children. Lewis concluded that incarceration disrupted the father identity confirmation process. This factor resulted in relational strain, excessive damage to fathers and the children of these fathers, and poor parent-child relationships, further explained by the AAMT. These fathers also face many issues related to their race and culture.

Craigie et al. (2018) conducted an empirical study in which they utilize existing data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. The researchers asserted that a father's incarceration negatively influences family relationships. The impact of

incarceration often harms the father-child relationship, especially when there is little contact with the father during his incarceration. Craigie et al. focused their research on the father-child outcomes upon the father's return from prison. The study results indicated that children's reactions to their fathers return varied significantly and that there is not sufficient information as to why this is the case. One possible explanation might lie in the quality of the father-child relationship before the father's incarceration. Also, the experiences of the child during the father's incarceration might exert an influence on the child's views of the father, which could harm future relationships (Craigie et al., 2018).

The researchers concluded that more research is needed to find answers as to why children react differently to their father's release and how racial differences impact the children's reactions. Secret (2012) studied incarcerated fathers and nonviolent offenders' parenting capacity by considering race and child contact factors. The level and multi-dimensional nature of parenting capacity were explored, including personal and psychological qualities related to positive parenting behaviors. Secret's study sample included 196 incarcerated fathers from one state minimum-security facility. These nonviolent offender fathers reported their knowledge regarding parental empathy and corporal punishment, which was like that expected from the general population (Secret, 2012). Most could identify with and value their roles as a father. However, Secret (2012) found that most reported psychological difficulties, depression, and personal adjustment issues which negatively influenced their capacity for effective parenting and increased child-abusing behaviors. Race and child contact during incarceration was related to different parenting capacity dimensions. Thus, incarceration was shown to impact the

father-child relationship, further explained with attachment theory (Secret, 2012). More information is needed to comprehend the entirely African American father-child relationship between the formerly incarcerated father and his children, and the formerly incarcerated father and his father.

## Summary and Conclusions

Formerly incarcerated African American fathers may report typical father roles, such as provider, protector, and role model. They also report not always being able to fulfil these roles. Literature findings support the conclusion that a disproportionate number of African American males are found in prisons (Golinelli & Carson, 2013; Kerby, 2012; National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2016; Pew Center, 2008). Incarceration and father absence harm the father-child relationship (Ellis et al., 2012; Secret, 2012). However, a father who has contact with their child while in prison can positively influence the father-child relationship (Peniston, 2014).

The formerly incarcerated African American father and child relationship must be further explored to fill the literature gap regarding how this attachment manifests in the next generation of the formerly incarcerated African American fathers and their children. Therefore, the impacts of father absence in the lives of their children must be understood. The attachment theory and AAMT was used to help understand findings. This researcher filled a gap in understanding by focusing on formerly incarcerated African American males' father-child relationships.

In Chapter 3, the methodology is discussed. The nature of this study is a qualitative phenomenological study. I conducted interviews with participants to examine and describe these relationships. Data reflected formerly incarcerated African American fathers' relationships with their children and their fathers.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore formerly incarcerated African American fathers' perceptions on reestablishing relationships with their children. Exploring how incarcerated parents build and support relationships with their children may provide information on strategies for building stronger relationships between the formerly incarcerated African American fathers and their children (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). This chapter includes information on the research design and methodology such as how participants were selected and recruited. The interview protocol used as the instrument is also discussed. Finally, I address the ethical assurances necessary when dealing with human participants and issues of trustworthiness, such as reliability and validity.

## Research Design and Rationale

I used a phenomenological design to collect thick and rich descriptions about the participants' experiences (see Tolley et al., 2016) and answer the RQs:

- RQ 1: What meaning does the re-establishment of relationships with their children have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?
- RQ 2: What meaning does being a father have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?
- RQ 3: What is the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?

A qualitative design was most suited, as obtaining insight into the perceptions and experiences of previously incarcerated fathers about fatherhood and relationship building

with their children could only be obtained from individuals with first-hand experiences. Such personal experiences were not likely to be obtained through quantitative methods, as the complete experience might not have been adequately captured. A qualitative exploration allowed for in-depth interviews that yielded insight into fathers' experiences, perceptions, and feelings (see Sampson et al., 2014).

A quantitative design was inappropriate to explore the participants' perceptions and feelings, as the constructs under scrutiny were not considered measurable numerically through surveys or questionnaires. Quantitative researchers conduct objective evaluations of possible links, differences, or correlations between variables (Babbie, 2012; Patten, 2014). Other quantitative research designs—correlation, causal-comparative, and quasi-experimental—were considered but were found inappropriate, as they were not in alignment with the purpose of the study.

The underlying philosophical viewpoint of phenomenology is that knowledge is created and interpreted by people, and those individuals experiencing a situation uniquely give meaning to the experience (Yilmaz, 2013). Others' construction of reality must be put in context, requiring researchers to meet participants in their empirical worlds (Yilmaz, 2013). In phenomenological studies, researchers collect participants' in-depth, experiential stories to investigate and report on a phenomenon, thus thoroughly explaining the phenomenon articulated by participants with profoundly personal experiences (Davidsen, 2013; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). By eliciting the participants' descriptions, I gained access to the parents' original descriptions of their experiences and feelings of the situation (see Davidsen, 2013), which would be difficult

to access when using questionnaires or surveys (see Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the phenomenological design was deemed appropriate to study the phenomenon and address the RQs.

## Role of the Researcher

I as the researcher interviewed and asked follow-up questions about formerly incarcerated males' experiences post-incarceration parenting experience. I obtained a letter of cooperation to conduct the study from the directors and pastors of the organizations and churches. I then contacted each formerly incarcerated father about participating in the study. After they agreed to participate, I discussed the scope of the study and acquire their informed consent. Once each participant signed a consent form, there was an agreement to meet for an interview via Zoom. Data were collected using interviews, which are freely structured to allow an accepted flow and provide the participants time to collect their thoughts (see Tindall, 2009). I established rapport through regular conversation before conducting each interview to help alleviate hesitation and encourage participants to become comfortable with talking about themselves. I also bracketed feelings and thoughts throughout the process to minimize personal bias as a teacher and mental health therapist. Bracketing is used to separate biases and refer to them throughout a study (Van Manen, 2016). Further, I offered a peer debriefing workshop after the interview to reduce the risk to the validity. Participants gave their feedback about the interviews.

# Methodology

## Participant Selection Logic

The population was sampled from church congregations in metropolitan San Francisco, Oakland, and Sacramento, which had between 11% to 15% African American attendants. The church, as the first point of recruitment, reflected my assessment that church-going behavior could indicate openness to change of fatherhood behavior or contemplation of openness to change, such that the openness to the participant would make more open respondents. Thus, "seeking God" likely translated into openness and readiness to find and act on opportunities to enhance relationships and mend broken bonds.

I was not a member of any of these congregations. Recruiting samples came from churches in different metropolitan areas to reduce potential prosocial bias. Targeting different metropolitan areas had the potential to recruit a variety of participants, which would lessen the possibility of recruiting participants with pronounced prosocial predispositions, who might respond to the recruitment efforts due to their desire to comply with requests (Kaiser et al., 2015). I had no personal association with the relative communities/churches, eliminating any threats to sample validity. If the required number of participants was not achieved, I approached other places, such as Equal Justice Initiative-EJI.org, All of Us or None, Powerful Women International Connections, and the Legal Service Prisoners with Children. The participants were male, had children, and had been incarcerated within the past 5 to 10 years to be eligible for inclusion in the research. The sampling method was purposive.

### *Instrumentation*

### *Interviewing Protocols and RQs*

**RQ 1.**What meaning does the re-establishment of relationships with their children have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? The following questions were asked in conjunction with RQ 1:1. What does being a father mean to you?

2. How did you fulfill your role as a father during your incarceration?
3. Please talk (tell me) about being a father now that you are back at home.

**RQ 2.** What meaning does being a father have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? The questions following were asked in conjunction with RQ 2:1.

How would you describe your relationship with your children?

2. Please talk about your strengths in being a father.
3. What are your weaknesses in being a father?
4. What are your challenges to being a father?
5. In what ways were these challenges and weaknesses affected by your incarceration?

**RQ 3.** What is the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? The following questions were asked in conjunction with RQ 3:1. In what ways have you attempted to manage your relationship with your children since your release?

2. Please talk about the things you engaged in to renew and build a relationship with your children after your release.

3. What are your thoughts about re-establishing a relationship with your children?
4. What are your experiences about re-establishing a relationship with your children?

### *Follow-Up Questions*

After all primary and secondary questions were answered, I engaged in probing follow-up questions. Individual answers determined the path of follow-up questions. Each participant was queried to add rich detail to the interview results. The following were used to elicit further information:

1. Can you please tell me more about that?
2. Please explain what you mean by that.

I also gathered the sample demographics of age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Any other questions were used only to guide the interview, which lasted 45 to 60 minutes. Later, I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. Transcripts of the interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, as described in the following sections. Participants were debriefed and asked if they wished to receive the results of the study. Their contact information was retained until the transcription phase was complete in case I required clarification.

## Field Test

I constructed a preliminary version of the interview protocol. The instrument, not having been previously validated, was subjected to expert review for feedback. I contacted 10 experts in the field to provide input on the RQs. Two experts responded and

provided input. The first responder suggested that I could recruit participants not only from churches but also from men who did not attend church (i.e., probation and parole office). The second responder recommended revising the RQ 1 to read: How do formerly incarcerated African American males describe the experience (or meaning) of fatherhood as they transition from prison to civilian life? Then, in the interview guide, I inquired about the nature of their relationships with their children and how these relationships had changed. As a result, I modified RQ 1 to reflect the reviewer's comments.

## Procedures for Recruitment, Participating, and Data Collection

### *Recruitment*

I requested an opportunity to place recruitment posters and flyers at the identified churches to notify the upcoming research members. The study criteria were included in the recruitment material and a short description of what the research entailed. On the flyers, I requested that interested parties contact me through the email address or telephone number provided on flyers and posters. I called all interested parties to check for eligibility, and I sent the informed consent form to possible participants, either by post (with a self-addressed, stamped envelope) or email. If the required number of participants was not reached, then I arranged meetings with communities, groups, and other existing stakeholder entities, such as Legal Service for Prisoners with Children, to recruit participants. I placed the same recruitment flyers and posters at these venues.

This qualitative study had a homogeneous sample, with a focus on participants' similar experiences, beliefs, and backgrounds of participants. Snowball sampling was used if the needed participant pool of 15 was not achieved. The sample size of 11 was

sufficient for data saturation when using in-depth phenomenological research (see Moustakas, 1994). Data saturation refers to the point at which no more understanding can be gathered from collecting additional data (Moustakas, 1994). I strove to reach a sample size of at least seven participants; however, the reasonably complex inclusion criteria might have limited the sample size to 11.

Before initiating the interview, I reviewed the instruction on signing the consent form via Electronic Signatures (ESign) with the participant to ensure they understood and agreed with the contents thereof. I informed the participants by videoconference (Zoom) about the focus of the study and uses of The U.S. Federal ESIGN Act (Goodenough, 2021). This act defines an "electronic signature" as an electronic sound, symbol, or process attached to or logically associated with a contract or other record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record (Goodenough, 2021). Electronic signatures were used for signing offer letters, sales contracts, permission slips, rental/lease agreements, liability waivers, financial documents, and so on.

***Participation and Data Collection***

I took potential participants at their words when they stated they met the study inclusion criteria. I took the participant's contact information to email (or ground mail) a letter describing the study and requirements of the participants. I included an informed consent form, a DocuSign document. The document included my email address, contact information, and a choice of dates and times for video conference calls.

Before initiating the interview, I went through the participants' informed consent to ensure they understood and agreed with the contents. Participants were made aware of

their participation's voluntary nature and that they could withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer a question without explaining. I assured participants that no consequences would occur if they decided not to participate.

After the signing, I and participant commenced the interview via videoconferencing on a private Zoom website, with organizational consent obtained beforehand. Data were collected through two interviews in the form of personal narratives from each participant. Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19), each participant had the opportunity to have a follow-up interview conducted remotely via Zoom or telephone. The interviews were audio recorded.

A professional transcriptionist was used to transcribe the interviews; She signed a confidentiality agreement. I checked the transcripts for accuracy, listening to each audio file to verify line-by-line accuracy for each interview.

No interview was scheduled for more than one hour. I made every effort to respect the participants' comfort with the process done to promote openness and sufficient depth of their reflections, thus gaining a deep understanding of their experiences. Each interview, whether face-to-face or remote, was recorded using a digital handheld device as the interview was transcribed verbatim.

At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were thanked for their time and reminded of their rights to withdraw from the study at any point if they desired to do so. Additionally, a follow-up meeting was scheduled for member checking. Furthermore, the contact information for me, dissertation chair, and head of the Institutional Review Board was shared with each participant should any concerns arise.

**Data Analysis Plan**

Sampson et al. (2014) described the process of data analysis as one of making sense out of collected data and information. Data analysis in a qualitative study involves preparing the data by reducing them into themes through a coding process (Sampson et al., 2014). This study researcher utilized thematic analysis to analyze the data. Researchers have defined thematic analysis as a method for organizing through systematic means, such as using a data set to determine patterns of meanings or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is appropriate for a qualitative study exploring a phenomenon, not through mathematical or statistical means.

The interviewee questions' answers were transcribed, and those transcriptions were analyzed according to the Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations. The whole transcript was reviewed several times to gain an in-depth understanding of what the interviewees experienced. Axial coding was conducted, where relationships among the codes assigned were examined; an example of axial coding was grouping (i.e., when one theme was present, so were other or conversely, when one theme was present, others were not). The central step of coding the data was to reduce the data into meaningful segments and assign names for the segments (see Sampson et al., 2014).

After transcribing the interviews and coding the transcripts, the collected data were classified according to themes to prepare for analysis. NVivo 10 aided in this step. NVivo is a software enabling locating segments, making comparisons among codes, and creating reports for recording insights from the data analysis. These themes were given a rank based on the level of importance. This rank was dictated by a preselected criterion,

known as selective coding, known as the frequency of mention. The themes were presented by discussing each vis-à-vis the results of previous studies. Findings of previous studies, whether in support for or contrary to the themes generated in this study, were discussed and explained. I provided the experience and analytic ability, while the software program serves as the medium to support the process. After initial coding was compiled, the data were shared with participants to ensure creditability. Each participant's confidentiality was assured thorough pseudonyms and the removal of any identifiable characters.

Conspicuous information that would identify the participants due to the number of participants (i.e., church and school attending, age, probation facility and officer, and prison father assigned) was removed to ensure confidentiality further. The probation/parole mission was to provide support to the agency for certain information that had been obtained through an inquiry relevant to the current agency. As such, a condition of their cooperation was that I should share findings and interpretations, in a manner that respected the confidentiality and trust of the participants, in addition to ethical research procedures.

As themes emerged and commonalities were identified, data qualitatively different from other participants' responses were used in contrast and to broaden the discourse about father-child relationships. Discrepant cases were identified and explored with the participant to check possible bias. I discussed the discrepant information with the participant, without revealing it as such to create a broader understanding of father-child relationships and enhance the confirmability of the study.

## Issues of Trustworthiness

This section includes a discussion of the evidence supporting the trustworthiness of the study's results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified the following four elements of trustworthiness that include: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. All four are addressed in the following subsections.

### Credibility

A study's credibility is based on how its findings accurately represent the concern they are intended to describe (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used a protocol known as an expert-reviewed interview to strengthen this study's credibility. This protocol required that all participants' responses were recorded verbatim, and open-ended questions were used in the survey. This process ensured participants' responses were not constrained. I submitted the instrument for expert review and approval by two to four experts in the field to ensure the interview questions were crafted to generate full, accurate, and relevant responses from each participant.

### Transferability

A trademark of phenomenology speaks to the rich description of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2016); interpretative phenomenological analysis enlarges upon this aspect through transparency and contextualization (Tindall, 2009). Additionally, discrepant cases were explored and described to deepen and appreciate the data to endorse transferability. As discrepant cases occurred, the data were explained within the perspectives of the same participants' responses relative to the other participants within the study. For instance, if a theme appeared within the study about

specific ideology that inclined a participant to choose a father-child relationship that differed considerably from others within the study, contextualization of comparable themes within the same interview provided ways to connect emerging themes in a consequential manner (see Tindall, 2009).

**Dependability**

A study's dependability indicates the extent to which the same results will be achieved if other researchers repeat the study under the same conditions and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I enhanced dependability by including detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis protocols. Furthermore, I described the study results and data analysis procedures in sufficient detail for future researchers to replicate the study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the measure where a researcher can confirm that a study's results represent the participants' ideas and experiences, rather than the researcher's characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, the researcher must ensure gathering data that the researcher intended. This process was assured by describing the research steps in detail from start to finish. In addition, I used reflexivity by  by stepping back and considering results from an objective standpoint. I questioned whether any personal biases might have distorted or obscured the data or the analysis thereof. I provided an audit trail, ensuring the data analysis procedures, as well as coding, were thoroughly explained to assist with confirmability.

**Ethical Assurances**

I obtained Institutional Review Board approval before participant recruitment. I followed all school procedures and requirements. Additionally, permission to access the potential participants was obtained from each church, where recruitment occurred. The forms were attached as appendices to the study.

No inducements were offered for the participants to participate in the study. I clarified that no penalties would accrue to any person from refusing to participate or participating in the study. Furthermore, any participant could have withdrawn from the study at any time.

I referred the participants to the transcripts only by the assigned code number. Participants' contact data were destroyed after the interview transcripts were completed and, if necessary, checked with participants. No information was transcribed that might have inadvertently identified any participant.

I will keep all physical data on file in a locked file cabinet to which I have exclusive access. Electronic data will be kept on a password-protected computer to which I will have exclusive access. Physical data is to be destroyed, and electronic data is completely erased 3 years after completing this study.

I did not anticipate any ethical issues from my positionality in the study. Although I might have personal acquaintances in the church study sites, this possibility did not influence data collection. I also mitigated any bias by remaining aware of bias and being ready to compensate for bias (i.e., not eliminating bias).

## Summary

This chapter included an explanation of the procedures employed in the present qualitative phenomenological study. This chapter included an introduction to the research design and rationale for using open-ended interviews with a researcher-designed, expert-reviewed protocol. The role of the researcher was explained. The chapter included an explanation of the instrumentation used, including how it was developed. Procedures were described for participant recruitment, participant selection, and data collection. Moreover, I detailed the data analysis plan and thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. I further described data trustworthiness issues and methods to deal with predicted issues. The chapter closed with a discussion of ethical issues. Chapter 4 contains a discussion of the results of the study. Chapter 5 includes the implications, recommendations, and summary of the study.

# Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions formerly incarcerated African American fathers had on reestablishing relationships with their children, addressing RQs related to the meaning they had on the reestablishment of relationships, the meaning they had on being a father, and their lived experiences with incarceration release and fatherhood. Data were collected through one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with 11 African American fathers 18 and older who were formerly incarcerated and had one or more children under the age of 18 years while incarcerated. Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis procedure recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify codes, categories, and themes that indicated participants' perceptions of the experience of reestablishing relationships with their children. Before this study, little or no research had been conducted to examine how formerly incarcerated parents build relationships with their children. This study adds to the literature and may contribute to developing strategies for building stronger relationships between members of this population and their children. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings in this study. This chapter indicates the characteristics of the study sample and a description of the data. Next, the data analysis procedure is described, and then the analysis results are presented in detail, organized by RQ and theme. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

## Demographics

This section contains a description of the demographic characteristics of the study sample and the nature of the data collected in this study. The study population was

African American fathers 18 and older who were formerly incarcerated and had children under the age of 18 while incarcerated. The target population from which the sample was recruited consisted of members of the study population who were members of church congregations in church congregations in metropolitan San Francisco, Oakland, and Sacramento, California. Per the inclusion criteria in this study, all 11 participants were African American and male. They are referenced in this chapter using pseudonyms instead of their real names to protect the confidentiality of participants' identities. Table 1 indicates the remaining relevant demographic characteristics of the study participants.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

| Pseudonym | Age range | Participant was raised with a father? | Participant cared for his children after his release from incarceration? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bryant | | | Yes |
| Cannon | 26 – 46 | No | Yes |
| Darryl | 47 --52 | Yes | Yes |
| Henry | 47 – 65 | Partially | Yes |
| Huges | 26 – 46 | No | Yes |
| Mr. Z | 26 – 46 | No | Yes |
| Ray | 47 – 65 | Yes | Yes |
| Ron | 47 – 65 | No | Yes |
| Sean | 47 -- 50 | Partially | Yes |
| TJ | 18 – 25 | Partially | Yes |
| Ven | 47 – 65 | Partially | Yes |

Eleven participants provided data in this study through one-to-one, semi-structured interviews conducted by online videoconference over Zoom. The interviews were also audio-recorded over Zoom. The interview guide consisted of 12 open-ended questions. The sample size and data collection procedure were as planned in Chapter 3. Table 2 shows a summary of the data sources.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Data Sources*

| Pseudonym | Number of transcript pages in single-spaced, 12-point font |
|---|---|
| Bryant | 12 |
| Cannon | 4 |
| Darryl | 8 |
| Henry | 13 |
| Huges | 13 |
| Mr. Z | 4 |
| Ray | 8 |
| Ron | 11 |
| Sean | 18 |
| TJ | 8 |
| Ven | 4 |
| Total: | 103 pages |
| Average: | 9.4 pages |

## Data Analysis Procedures

This section contains a description of the data analysis procedure applied to the data. A purposeful, criterion-based strategy was used to recruit the sample to ensure that participants had the knowledge and experiences necessary to provide relevant data. After participants were verified as eligible to participate under the inclusion criteria during a preliminary screening phone call, they received the informed consent form as an emailed DocuSign agreement. The participants signed the agreement prior to their scheduled interview. At the time of the interview, before beginning to ask the questions in the interview guide, I reviewed the terms of informed consent with the participant to ensure they understood the terms and still voluntarily consented to participate. The one-to-one interviews were conducted over Zoom and audio-recorded using Zoom's integrated audio-recording feature. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by the professional transcription service Rev.com under a signed confidentiality agreement. I

verified the transcripts, listening to each audio file while reading the transcript to verify line-by-line accuracy. The six-step, inductive, thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was then applied to the data:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Initial, inductive coding
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing and refining themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Reporting the findings

**Step 1: Familiarization with the Data**

The first step of the analysis involved gaining familiarity with the data by reading and rereading the interview transcripts in full (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the transcripts were imported as source files into NVivo 12 software. Each transcript was then opened as a file within NVivo and read in the document display pane. Preliminary, handwritten notes were made regarding potential patterns in participants' responses as reminders of initial observations and insights during the second step of the analysis.

**Step 2: Initial, Inductive Coding**

Initial coding was inductive, meaning that codes were identified to correspond with patterns in participants' responses rather than being formulated prior to the analysis and then sought in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding began with another rereading of the data while referencing the preliminary notes made during Step 1. Coding involved labeling transcript excerpts that expressed a meaning potentially relevant to

describing participants' perceptions of the experience of reestablishing relationships with their children after their incarceration. Transcript excerpts were coded in NVivo by highlighting them and assigning them to nodes. Each node represented an initial, inductive code, and each was labeled with a brief, descriptive phrase that indicated the meaning of the data assigned to it. When different transcript excerpts expressed similar meanings, they were assigned to the same code. In this way, the data were coded inductively by clustering interview responses with similar meanings rather than by sorting the data into predefined categories.

As an example of the coding process, Bryant stated in an interview response, "To the best of my ability, I tried to stay present [in my children's lives during my incarceration] with letters, phone calls as often as I could." Bryant attempted to maintain a place for himself in his children's lives while he was incarcerated by communicating regularly by the means most readily available to him, including phone calls and letters. This excerpt was assigned to a node, and the node was labeled as phone calls and letters. Darryl also stated the following in an interview response: "Phone calls and letters was the only way" to communicate with his children during his incarceration. Similarly, in expressing how he communicated with his children during his incarceration, Mr. Z answered, "Letters and the phone." Darryl's and Mr. Z's responses were like Bryant's response, as all three indicated that the participants communicated with their children during their incarcerations via phone calls and letters. Therefore, all three responses were assigned to and grouped under the node of phone calls and letters.

As the remaining interviews were analyzed, the meaning summarized in that code label proved to be common across most participants' responses. Overall, eight participants expressed communication with their children by phone and letter during their incarcerations. Table 3 shows a list of the codes developed during Step 2, the number of participants who contributed to those codes, and the number of transcript excerpts assigned to those codes.

**Table 3**

*Data Analysis: Initial Codes*

| Code | *n* of participants contributing to code (*N* = 11) | *n* of transcript excerpts assigned to code |
|---|---|---|
| Making up for lost time | 10 | 10 |
| Loving guidance and modeling | 8 | 10 |
| A provider of love and basic needs | 8 | 9 |
| Letters and phone calls | 8 | 8 |
| Consistent communication | 6 | 6 |
| Finances and being a provider | 6 | 6 |
| Growing closer with time | 6 | 6 |
| Focus on strengthening relationship | 5 | 6 |
| Importance of being active and involved | 5 | 6 |
| Understanding the need for sacrifices and self-work | 5 | 6 |
| Active involvement a rewarding challenge | 5 | 5 |
| Purpose to instill values | 5 | 5 |
| Taking the initiative | 5 | 5 |
| Making up for lost time | 5 | 5 |
| Visits | 4 | 5 |
| Challenges forced personal growth | 4 | 4 |
| Enjoying the experience of being around | 4 | 4 |
| Listening and communicating | 4 | 4 |
| A better relationship | 3 | 5 |
| Record and experiences make fatherhood harder | 3 | 5 |
| Reaching out and being available | 3 | 4 |
| Impatience and sensitivity | 3 | 3 |
| Inability to provide | 3 | 3 |
| Made changes to life for children | 3 | 3 |
| Poor communication and time management | 3 | 3 |
| Strong before and after incarceration | 3 | 3 |
| Willingness to work hard and grow with children | 3 | 3 |
| Life changing impact | 2 | 3 |
| Relationship issues with mother as barrier | 2 | 3 |
| Poor communication with children's mothers | 2 | 2 |
| Setting a good example | 2 | 2 |
| Prioritization of fatherhood | 1 | 1 |
| Sending money | 1 | 1 |

**Step 3: Searching for Themes**

Searching for themes in the data involved clustering related codes into a smaller number of broader categories that indicated the overarching patterns in participants' responses (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first phase of searching for themes involved clustering related codes into categories, or subthemes. Initial codes were clustered into categories when addressing the same topic. For example, the code described under Step 2 of phone calls and letters was clustered with two other codes: (a) visits and (b) sending money. The three codes were identified as related because all indicated how the participants performed the father role while incarcerated. Therefore, the three codes were clustered into a category labeled fatherhood during incarceration. In NVivo, the codes were assigned as child nodes to a single parent node, which represented the category. Table 4 indicates how the 33 initial codes were clustered into 10 categories or subthemes.

**Table 4**

*Data Analysis Clustering of Related Codes into Categories*

| Category | Related codes clustered to form category |
|---|---|
| Incarceration-related barriers | Challenges forced personal growth; record and experiences make fatherhood harder; making up for lost time |
| Weaknesses | Impatience and sensitivity; inability to provide; poor communication and time management; poor communication with children's mothers |
| Relationship with children status | Growing closer with time; life-changing impact; strong before and after incarceration |
| Strengths | Loving guidance and modeling; willingness to work hard and grow with children |
| Experiences of relationship | Enjoying the experience of being around; focus on strengthening relationship; making up for lost time; understanding the need for sacrifices and self-work |
| Successes | Listening and communicating; made changes to life for children; reaching out and being available; taking the initiative |
| Fatherhood after incarceration | A better relationship, active involvement a rewarding challenge, importance of being active and involved |
| Fatherhood during incarceration | Letters and phone calls, sending money, visits |
| Father obligations | A provider of love and basic needs; prioritization of fatherhood; purpose to instill values |
| Challenges | Consistent communication; finances and being a provider; relationship issues with |

| |
|---|
| mother as barrier; setting a good example |

The second phase of searching for themes involved grouping interrelated categories into the major themes that were the major findings in this study (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). Categories were identified as interrelated when indicating different aspects of a single, overarching idea relevant to describing participants' experiences of reestablishing their relationships with their children after their release from incarceration. The logic of theme formation is discussed in relation to each of the individual themes in the results section of this chapter. Table 5 indicates the grouping of the 10 categories into the four final themes.

**Table 5**

*Data Analysis Clustering of Related Categories into Themes*

| Theme | Related categories clustered to form theme |
|---|---|
| Theme 1 – Meeting the obligations of fatherhood | Fatherhood during incarceration, fatherhood after incarceration, and father obligations |
| Theme 2 - Being a father after incarceration meant facing significant challenges | Incarceration-related barriers, weaknesses, and challenges |
| Theme 3 - Success in fatherhood after incarceration meant personal growth and hard work | Strengths and relationship with children status |
| Theme 4 - Taking the initiative in reestablishing or maintaining the fatherhood relationship | Successes and experiences of relationship |

**Step 4: Reviewing and Refining the Themes**

In the fourth step of the analysis, the themes were reviewed and refined (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process had four components. First, the themes were reviewed to ensure that each was sufficiently distinct to justify their presentation as separate themes. Second, the themes were reviewed to ensure that each was sufficiently cohesive to justify its presentation as a single idea rather than splitting it into two or more

smaller themes. Third, the data were reviewed to ensure that these were appropriately coded and categorized. Fourth, the major themes were compared with the original data to ensure these data accurately represented patterns in participants' responses.

**Step 5: Naming and Defining the Themes**

In this step, the themes that emerged during the previous four steps of the analysis were considered in relation to the RQs. Each theme was associated with the RQ that it addressed and defined to clarify its significance in relation to the question. The theme definitions are provided in the discussion of each theme in the results section of this chapter. Table 6 indicates the themes used to address the RQs.

**Table 6**

*Research Questions and Themes*

| Research question | Theme(s) used to address question |
|---|---|
| RQ1: What meaning does the reestablishment of relationships with their children have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? | Theme 1: Meeting the obligations of fatherhood |
| RQ2: What meaning does being a father have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? | Theme 2: Being a father after incarceration meant facing significant challenges<br>Theme 3 - Success in fatherhood after incarceration meant personal growth and hard work |
| RQ3: What is the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? | Theme 4: Taking the initiative in reestablishing or maintaining the fatherhood relationship |

**Step 6: Presenting the Findings**

The findings are presented in the Results section of this chapter, which is organized by RQ to demonstrate the alignment of the findings with the study objectives. Under the heading for each RQ, the results are organized by theme. Evidence for each of the findings is provided in direct quotes from the data.

## Trustworthiness

Procedures were used during data collection and data analysis to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data and findings. Trustworthiness was defined as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each is analogous to the quantitative constructs of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Credibility

Threats to credibility refers to the accuracy with which the findings in a study represent the reality they are intended to describe. Such threats include inaccurate recording or preservation of data, inaccuracies in the data itself, and inaccurate interpretations by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The accurate recording and preservation of the data were ensured through audio-recording the interviews, having a professional transcription company (Rev.com) transcribe the audio recordings verbatim under a signed confidentiality agreement, and conducting researcher-verification of the transcripts by listening to the audio files while reading the transcripts for line-by-line validation. Assurances of confidentiality were used, in part, to minimize participant anxiety about identity disclosure that might result in inaccuracies in responses.

Thematic analysis also assisted in minimizing the influence of any inaccuracies in participants' responses on the findings by creating themes that represented the perceptions of all or most participants, thereby minimizing the influence of individual participants' biases and errors. The potential for inaccuracies in my interpretations which might threaten the credibility of the findings was minimized through a member-checking

procedure. Each participant was emailed a summary of the codes, categories, and themes identified in his data, with a request that they reviewed and either verified accuracy or recommended corrections. All the participants verified the accuracy of my interpretations.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings in a study will hold true of other populations and settings. Transferability must be assessed by the reader on a case-by-case basis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Clear inclusion criteria for the sample were provided to enable the reader to make this assessment, and the sample was described to the extent consistent with the preservation of confidentiality. Rich, thick descriptions of the findings were provided in direct quotes presented in the results section of this chapter as evidence for all findings. The presentation of direct quotes contextualized the findings within the participants' perspectives and contexts by conveying participants' perceptions and experiences in their own voices.

**Dependability**

Dependability is the extent to which a study and its findings will be replicable in the same research context at a different time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Threats to dependability include unclear or incomplete descriptions of study procedures that would prevent readers from verifying the data's integrity. Dependability was strengthened in this study through the clear and complete descriptions of the study methodology, design, and procedures and rationales in Chapter 3. I also provided descriptions of the execution of the planned procedures in the present chapter.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the extent to which study findings represent the perceptions and opinions of the study participants rather than of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was strengthened in this study through the member-checking procedure, which enabled participants to verify that my interpretations of the data accurately represented their intended meanings. Confirmability was further strengthened through the inclusion of direct quotes from the data as evidence for all findings to enable the reader to verify the integrity of the analysis independently. Lastly, I used reflexivity by stepping back and considering the results from an objective standpoint. I also questioned whether any personal biases were distorting or obscuring the data or the analysis and attempted mindfully to suspend any such biases during all parts of the study.

**Alignment of Findings with RQs**

The alignment of the findings with the RQs was ensured in three ways. First, the interview guide was structured so that each RQ had a corresponding set of interview questions written to elicit data relevant to addressing it. This procedure promoted the alignment of the data with the RQs. Second, the data were analyzed inductively by clustering response excerpts according to similarity of meaning—a procedure that preserved the relevance of the RQ-aligned data to the RQs. Third, in the fifth step of the thematic analysis procedure, the themes were considered in relation to the RQs. The themes were named and defined to clarify their relevance to addressing the RQs. The following results section presented the themes under the relevant RQs to demonstrate the alignment of the findings with the RQs.

## Results

This presentation of the study results is organized by RQ. The themes identified as the major findings in this study are presented under the appropriate RQ. After the results are presented in detail in this section, the chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

### RQ 1

RQ1 was the following: What meaning does the reestablishment of relationships with their children have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? One of the themes identified during data analysis was used to address this question. The relevant theme was the following: meeting the obligations of fatherhood. The following subsection contains a detailed presentation of the theme.

#### *Theme 1: Meeting the Obligations of Fatherhood*

All 11 participants contributed to this theme. Theme 1 originated with the identification of a relationship between three categories, including father obligations, fatherhood during incarceration, and fatherhood after incarceration. These three categories were identified as related because each indicated how participants perceived and experienced the reestablishment of their relationships with their children after release from incarceration. The category of fatherhood during incarceration indicated that while participants were incarcerated, their interactions with their children were limited to phone calls and letters (in some cases, rare visits). The participants did not perceive themselves as able to fulfill the obligations they associated with fatherhood through those limited interactions. After participants' releases, reestablishing their relationships with their

children meant beginning through active involvement in their children's lives to fulfill the obligations they associated with fatherhood. These obligations included providing love, meeting children's basic needs, and instilling prosocial values.

**Category: Father Obligations.** The first category in this theme, father obligations, indicated the obligations that participants associated with fatherhood. These perceptions were significant because in the other two categories in this theme, the participants indicated that a key meaning of reestablishing their relationships with their children after their release fulfilled the perceived obligations of fatherhood that they could not meet while incarcerated. The obligations participants associated with fatherhood included meeting their children's basic material needs, providing love, and instilling prosocial values. Nine out of 11 participants reported that their perceptions of a father's obligations included providing love to children and meeting children's material needs. Huges associated fatherhood with expressing unconditional love for his children and receiving unconditional love for them. Huges stated that his father wanted him, but his father's lack of attention led to an experience of dissonance between verbal expressions of love and the lack of investment of time and energy as evidence of love. Therefore, Huges perceived fathers as obligated to succeed in expressing the love that his father had not expressed: When I grew up as a young adult . . . I'd never seen

> unconditional love, never felt it. Not from my mother, not from my father. So, I felt that if I had a child, then that child would love me unconditionally. And vice versa, I would love that child unconditionally. So, when I first became a parent, I think that was a big thing for me, just to have that, to experience it, to see if it's

real, to see if true, unconditional love existed. And for myself personally and everything, parenting gave me that opportunity.

The participants also focused on providing material support as an obligation they associated with fatherhood. Ven, said the following of a father's obligations: "He needs to take care of the children." Ray offered a similar response to Ven, stating that being a father "means being responsible, trying to provide for your children, to protect them." Darryl also agreed, stating that the obligation of a father was "being a provider." However, support did not always have to be material. Henry distinguished between financial and emotional support provided to his children, saying that a father should "support your daughter, your son. Just like I do now. I support them not in money, but in behavior, attitude. I'm always there for them. I'm always trying to give them some advice." Providing guidance was another obligation that the participants associated with fatherhood.

Five out of 11 participants stated that being a father entailed the obligation of instilling prosocial values in their children. Bryant agreed with other participants: "The love [expressing love to children] is important." He added that another obligation of fatherhood was to instill values: "I believe my children and all children need, deserve, and want an opportunity to re-instill or instill those social values in my children that were not done so because of my absence." When Bryant expressed what he meant by "social values" he wanted to instill in his children, he stated, "It means the reestablishment of the family structure." Darryl also described fathers as obligated to instill values in their children, saying that a father "is able to bring to the child his belief systems and his

morals and values." Darryl described a father's ability to instill morals and values in his children as dependent on "being present," in the sense of being physically present in his children's lives rather than being incarcerated. As shown, all 11 participants described their abilities to meet obligations they associated with fatherhood as prohibitively constrained by their incarcerations.

**Category: Fatherhood During Incarceration.** The second category included in this theme, fatherhood during incarceration, indicated that the participants' interactions with their children during their incarcerations were highly limited. Eight out of 11 participants stated that their interactions with their children during incarceration consisted primarily of letters and phone calls. In a representative response, Henry described the experience of being limited during his incarceration in the ways he could interact with his children: "I couldn't do much. I'm locked up. So, you know, I did call. I talked to them, told them I loved them. Things along them [*sic*] lines. It wasn't much that I could do because I'm incarcerated." TJ described his life choices to his son to caution him against making similar decisions, saying that during his incarceration he communicated with his son by "writing letters to him, always giving him good advice, attempting to give the best advice I had at the moment, to not repeat the first steps that I took, to end up in this situation I was in." Sean stated that he used phone calls to be a confidant to his children: "When it's allowed, able to call, talking is key. And another thing that I did to establish or strengthen my relationship with my children was to instill in him that they could talk to me about anything." The participants described letters and phone calls as insufficient for meeting the obligations they associated with fatherhood; however, TJ said that despite his

attempts to provide his son with good advice by letter, “He was growing up in a house without me, growing up without a role model.” In another representative response, Ray expressed the sense of constraint he associated with the limitations during his incarceration to his involvement in his children’s lives: “It was hard to interact with [my children] beyond just the correspondence. And that’s all I had available to me at the time, it was just letters.” For some participants, visits were more intimate than letters and calls, but Ray was incarcerated across the country from where his children lived. Thus, his children could not travel to visit him.

Four out of 11 participants received at least one visit from their children while incarcerated. An in-person visit increased the potential for connection between father and child, so these participants tended to describe visits as high-stakes interactions where their attention was focused on meeting fatherhood role expectations rather than spontaneous interactions. Darryl described his desire to perform the father role adequately during his daughter’s visit and the difficulty of doing so:

> Visits were far in between, but when I did get a visit, where my brothers and them brought my daughter up, I was very attentive and asking questions that a father would always ask, like “How was school? What do you want to be? Are you learning anything? What are you learning?” So, it’s just being in that moment, truly present. It’s hard, being inside of a visiting room with over 40 to 50 some more people running around, sitting at a little table. But it’s being attentive.

Sean corroborated Darryl’s perceptions, describing visits as a narrow window of time into which he felt pressured to condense all his fatherhood obligations. Sean said

that during visits, he showed his children physical affection: “When I was allowed to visit, I hugged a lot. I hugged a lot. I kissed them a lot.” Sean used visits with his children during his incarceration to teach them: “I utilized part of their visits as a school. I taught them how to read and write in a visitor room. I taught them the process of thinking. Not being told what to think.” Sean also played with his children during visits to contribute to his children’s emotional development: “I played the games with them and the other things, but it was more of an emotional thing for me to help develop their emotions and their own sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.” Thus, Sean condensed a significant number of the obligations he attributed to fatherhood into his visits with his children. However, he expressed that it was an inadequate substitute for being present in his children’s lives continually: “I overcompensated because I wasn’t physically present.”

One participant out of 11 provided partly divergent data, indicating that he attempted to provide for his children financially while incarcerated. Cannon said, “During my incarceration, whatever money I could make in there, I would usually send it out. I sent it out to the kids’ moms. Just whatever I could do from in there.” Thus, during their incarcerations, all participants attempted to meet the obligations they associated with fatherhood while experiencing prohibitive constraints.

**Category: Fatherhood After Incarceration.** The third category associated with Theme 1, fatherhood after incarceration, indicated that the participants associated reestablishing their relationships with their children after incarceration with beginning to fulfill the fatherhood obligations they could not meet due to incarceration. All 11 participants stated that they could reestablish relationships with their children by

fulfilling their fatherhood obligations through active involvement in their children's lives. Ray expressed the relationship between his release from incarceration and his ability to reestablish his relationship with his children by being actively involved in their lives: "You need to be at home with the children to import your values, and to be able to attend to their little needs, and likes, and little hurts, and whatever they might be experiencing." Bryant stated the following of becoming actively involved in his children's lives: "That's my opportunity, not to undo anything, but to bring clarity to my absence and how it's important for us to begin to reestablish, rebuild trust in this relationship, and to grow together as we march forward." Part of Bryant's active involvement in his children's lives after his release involved being transparent with them: "I've laid my soul bare for my children to explain to them what I was going through, what I did, why I did what I did." Bryant expressed that reestablishing his relationships with his children meant fulfilling the obligations of fatherhood through active involvement: "Coming home, I have an opportunity to not only be present, but to be constantly interacting in their lives." Darryl was incarcerated for 30 years, beginning before his daughter was born, and when he was released, he started another family, limiting the attention he could provide to his daughter. He said that he became actively involved in his adult daughter's life, even though he could not meet all her needs:

> It was me trying to be as close as I could, but she had a lot of demands. And I couldn't fulfill them the way she wanted me to fulfill them. But I was always, once again, trying to be attentive and focus, because I just got home after 30 years. And you're getting pulled in so many directions. It was hard.

For Darryl, being actively involved in his daughter's life also meant allowing her to express her anger at him for his 30-year absence and the choices that led to it: "I done got cussed out, I done got called names, but I didn't take it personal, because I know it was coming from hurt and abandonment more than it was something she felt in her heart for her father." Like Darryl, Sean expressed that reestablishing his relationships with his children after his incarceration meant negotiating with their anger over his absence, but he worked to fulfill his obligations as a father through active involvement ("nurturing and building"):

> My own children still have their own issues from me being gone their whole lives, so we're still nurturing and building relationships. We have moments where we have disconnected because we didn't have this side of it, because I wasn't able to fulfill so many things. Even though they are adults now, they still have those childhood needs that need to be met by me and sometimes I'm able to fulfill that. It's a job and it's a continuous process.

In summary, Theme 1 originated with identifying a relationship between the categories of father obligations, fatherhood during incarceration, and fatherhood after incarceration. The category of father obligations indicated that the participants perceived the obligations of fatherhood as including expressing love for their children, providing for their children, and instilling prosocial values in their children. The category of fatherhood during incarceration indicated that the participants perceived themselves as unable to fulfill their fatherhood obligations prior to their release because of restrictions with communicating with their children by occasional letters, phone calls, and visits. The

category of fatherhood after incarceration indicated that participants could, after their release, fulfill their perceived fatherhood obligations via active involvement in their children's lives. Overall, this theme indicated that the meaning the participants assigned to reestablishing their relationships with their children post-release was that of fulfilling the fatherhood obligations they could not meet while incarcerated.

**RQ 2**

RQ2 was the following: What meaning does being a father have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? Two of the themes identified during data analysis were used to address this question. The first RQ2 theme was the following: being a father after incarceration meant facing significant challenges. The second RQ2 theme was the following: success in fatherhood after incarceration meant personal growth and hard work. The following subsections are more detailed presentations of these themes.

***Theme 2: Being a Father After Incarceration Meant Facing Significant Challenges***

All 11 participants contributed to this theme. Theme 2 originated from identifying a relationship between three categories: challenges, incarceration-related barriers, and weaknesses. The category of incarceration-related barriers indicated that after release, the participants experienced significant barriers to involvement in their children's lives associated with their criminal records and histories of incarceration. The category of challenges indicated that some obligations the participants associated with fatherhood were difficult to perform because of external barriers. The category of weaknesses indicated that some fatherhood obligations were difficult to perform because of internal barriers. The relationship between these categories was that all three indicated that part of

the meaning of fatherhood for participants entailed struggling to overcome significant external and internal barriers to the adequate performance of fatherhood roles.

**Category: Incarceration-Related Barriers.** All 11 participants indicated that challenges they encountered because of their incarcerations made fatherhood roles more difficult to perform after their release. Struggling with these barriers was part of the meaning of fatherhood for the participants. Five out of 11 participants stated that the active involvement in their children's lives that they missed while incarcerated meant that fatherhood was more challenging after their release. Bryant described compensating for his prior absence as one of being "behind." Bryant stated that a challenge faced after his release was "the loss of time, that loss of time removed me from those experiences that were relevant and were very important to my children's growth and development. That put me behind the eight ball, so to speak." Ray described his absence during his incarceration as causing damage to his relationship with his children, with the consequence that fatherhood involved addressing that damage:

> I was away from my children for five years, and it was like not having a hand, or not having a leg. If you can imagine not having your leg and you're on crutches, and not having your hands, and not having your fingers. So that's really how mothers and fathers relate to their children, it's like being a part of them. And so, when you're taken away from that scenario, it's really damaging to you and it's very damaging to the family as well. Because you're not there for them, and it's hard for them to understand why you're not there.

Four out of 11 participants expressed that after taking their incarcerations as evidence that they did not make the right choices, they needed to make significant changes in themselves to be better people and fathers. TJ described living through his incarceration and returning to his family as a process that required significant, purposeful, and personal growth:

> I had to actually be patient enough with myself, to first learn how to forgive myself, and I saw my error. That took years. Then patience when you know that, okay, I'm fed up with being fed up, so now I got to do something about it, to put myself in a better position, so now I'm conscious that I'm striving to get out, to my family, to do that what I know that I was supposed to do. And that takes some patience, then that's the work.

Three out of 11 participants expressed that having been incarcerated made fatherhood more difficult. When Cannon was incarcerated, he left all his possessions in the care of his son's mother; during his absence, she lost everything he owned. Thus, he could not provide for his children financially upon his release: "I got out with nothing, and I lost everything I had while I was in there. Everything. I didn't have anything when I got out. Any clothes, my cars were gone. My house was gone." Huges expressed that his criminal record made it more difficult for him to provide for his children: "Even though my incarceration was decades ago, I had felony convictions on my record, which slowed me down in my career paths, where I could have been a lot further had those not been there." Therefore, the participants encountered barriers associated with past incarcerations that became part of the meaning of fatherhood for them.

**Category: Challenges.** All 11 participants indicated that part of the meaning of fatherhood after their release entailed facing external challenges that impeded their fulfillment of obligations they associated with fatherhood. Six out of 11 participants felt an obligation to provide for their children financially, but they found it challenging to do so. Ron described being a provider as difficult: "It's a challenge sometimes to be a financial support." Henry said that being a financial provider for his children was challenging in the years after his release: "Money. Money. It's not a challenge now, but it's money. Because even now, they always need, you know, and they will have money but still ask me for money." Cannon had custody of his young son after his release, which raised challenges because he needed to work to support his son, but he could not afford childcare: "I needed to get some money. I needed to work. But I also needed someone to be able to watch him." Cannon overcame this challenge by getting his son into a Head Start program.

Six out of 11 participants reported that maintaining the regular, frequent communication that they considered necessary for active involvement in their children's lives was challenging, often because it was remote. Bryant struggled to communicate with his children on a regular basis, in part because neither of them lived in his state:

> The one challenge that I work hard every day to overcome is to be consistent with my phone calls. My daughter now lives in [a different state]. My son is still in [another state]. I work hard to overcome the distance barrier . . . We still have some things that we have to work out. However, the challenge of space and time is one that I see myself constantly battling and learning new ways to overcome.

Darryl described the challenge of trying to stay in close contact with his daughter when living far apart: "I'm trying to catch up, and in a lot of ways I am because I've been gone so long. [But] I don't have time, a lot of time, to be able to see my daughter in person." Thus, distance was a challenge to maintaining the consistent communication and active involvement in their children's lives that these participants considered as one of the obligations of fatherhood.

Two out of 11 participants reported that having negative relationships with their children's mother or mothers was a challenge that impeded their ability to meet their own standards for being a good father. Cannon stated, "My challenges would be the relationships that I have with their moms . . . Sometimes, I wouldn't even be in touch with them because their moms would be mad, or doing whatever she was doing." As indicated previously, Cannon overcame this challenge in relation to his young son by winning custody. External barriers that made significant challenges a part of the meaning of fatherhood included financial constraints, circumstantial communication barriers, and conflict with children's mothers.

**Category: Weaknesses.** All 11 participants indicated that part of the meaning of fatherhood after their release entailed facing internal barriers or weaknesses that impeded their fulfillment of obligations they associated with fatherhood. Three out of 11 participants chose to characterize their perceived inability to provide for their children financially as a personal weakness rather than a circumstantial barrier. In a representative response, Ray used the word "inability" in relation to his perceived incapacity to retain employment, referring to the following: "My inability to stay employed, and to be [my

children's] provider that I should have been as a dad. Well, that's what fatherhood entails, you have to be a provider, protector." Thus, although six out of 11 participants identified financial difficulties as consequences of external barriers such as having a criminal record, three out of 11 participants attributed financial constraints to personal limitations.

Three out of 11 participants referred to time management as a weakness. Huges had five children with whom he maintained relationships. He also ran his own nonprofit, but he attributed the dearth of time he had to spend with his children to a perceived weakness in time management rather than to excessive demands on his time. Huges stated, "I often wish I have more time to spend with each child to be more intentional on doing that. So, time management is one [weakness]." Thus, time management as a weakness involved the perception that the participant could find more time for their children did not do so because of limitations in willpower or planning.

Three out of 11 participants described sensitivity to perceived slights and signs of disrespect as a weakness they faced as part of the meaning of fatherhood. Sean spoke of this weakness: "My weakness is my sensitivity because one of the things that I recognize is that even though children don't intend, they hurt you. That's what children do. So, my sensitivity makes it hurt me." Henry's sensitivity to perceived disrespect caused tangible consequences in his relationship with his daughter when he broke off contact with her for a period because "I couldn't accept being disrespected like that under any circumstances." Henry stated that the enforced separation was difficult, but he implied that he continued to feel it was justified: "That part right there was the most challenging,

is to separate from your child. You know you love them, but their head is so hard they're not going to listen to you." Henry appeared to phrase these responses as descriptions of his daughter's negative behaviors and their reasonable consequences. However, Henry gave these responses when asked about his weaknesses as a father after his release, indicating that he understood his sensitivity to disrespect as a limitation.

Two out of 11 participants described poor communication with their children's mothers as a weakness, contrasting with responses of two participants identifying negative relationships with their children's mothers as an external barrier. As noted in relation to the present theme under the category of challenges, Cannon perceived his children's mothers' anger toward him as an external barrier that inhibited his performance of fatherhood obligations. Asked specifically about his weaknesses as a father, however, Cannon appeared to take responsibility for the women's anger toward him: "My weakness would be my communication with their moms. Because I'm not really good at communicating with and relationships just with women, I guess." Bryant described his jealousy and insecurity surrounding his prior absence from his children's lives as straining his relationship with their mother, who he perceived as a rival for his children's affection and loyalty: "I believe my weakness is always worrying about what if. Suppose they don't gravitate to me like I gravitate to them. How would it look? How would I be perceived?"

In summary, the participants reported that part of the meaning of fatherhood entailed struggling with significant external and internal barriers to performing perceived fatherhood obligations. Most participants reported that they could fulfill providing for

their children financially because of external barriers, such as having a criminal record, or perceived internal barriers, such as an inability to retain a job. The perceived imperative to compensate for their prior absence from their children's lives through a heightened level of active involvement was a challenge related to their incarcerations. Barriers, such as living far apart from their children, also impeded the heightened active involvement some participants felt obligated to perform. Weaknesses or internal barriers that participants struggled with included oversensitivity to disrespect, inadequate time management, and negative relationships with the children's mothers.

### *Theme 3: Success in Fatherhood After Incarceration Meant Personal Growth and Hard Work*

All 11 participants contributed to this theme. This theme originated with identifying a relationship between two categories: strengths and relationship with children status. The category of strengths indicated that the participants perceived themselves as having significant and hard-won characteristics that contributed to their success in being fathers to their children after their release. The category of relationship with children status indicated that all participants perceived themselves as having an overall positive relationship with their children. The identified relationship between these two categories was that both were associated with the participants' perceptions that they succeeded as fathers, with relationship with children status indicating their perceptions of their success and strengths indicating their perceptions of how they achieved their success.

**Category: Relationship with Children Status.** All 11 participants indicated that they had established or reestablished strong, positive relationships with their children. The positive nature of their relationships with their children was part of the meaning of fatherhood. Six out of 11 participants reported that their relationships with their children were positive at time of study but building those positive relationships had taken time after their release. Bryant indicated that his efforts to build positive relationships with his children were successful but not immediately:

> I would describe my relationship with my children in the beginning of me coming home as turbulent, confusing, standoffish, because they hadn't had that opportunity to get to know me beyond letters and phone calls and letters. Now I'm home, and it's changed the whole paradigm. When, once again, I laid bare my soul and told them there was nothing off limits with them, they could actually ask me anything, it laid the foundation for truth, mutual respect. We shed tears, and there was angry words. There was blame. However, once they had the opportunity to hear the other side of the coin and to see the sincerity in my words, we began to grow closer and closer to each other. Today I love my relationship.

Three out of 11 participants reported that their relationships with their children were strong before their incarcerations, and through their deliberate efforts, they sustained those strong relationships. In a representative response, Mr. Z spoke like Bryant of being transparent with his children, but in Mr. Z's experience, transparency sustained the relationship between himself and his children rather than rebuilding it:

> Communication was the main key and being honest about [the reasons for my incarceration] when [my children] were ready. I was honest with them . . . It came to a point to where it was time to do it. I did it and communicated. We haven't skipped a beat, and there's no resentment.

Two out of 11 participants indicated that their positive relationships with their children had changed their lives profoundly. Huges stated the relationship he began to have with his daughter during his incarceration and then strengthened afterwards brought about a change in his character: "My daughter, she changed my life . . . She softened my heart . . . when I held her, I was like, oh my God. And she changed my life to respect women, because I'm like, that's somebody's daughter." Thus, all participants perceived themselves as having succeeded in building positive relationships with their children, and the positive nature of those relationships was part of the meaning of fatherhood.

**Category: Strengths.** All 11 participants expressed that the positive relationships with their children part of the meaning of fatherhood were formed in part through their significant strengths as fathers. Eight out of 11 participants stated that their greatest strength as fathers entailed providing their children with loving guidance and role-modeling. Darryl stated, "Guidance is my strength." Other participants specified that the nature of the guidance they provided was to be a prosocial member of the community, as when TJ stated, "I'm trying to show [my son] how to actually care for your community and your family, all of it." Ray stated that the prosocial guidance he was strong in providing to his children was informed by an understanding of history and racial injustice:

> I would say would definitely be one of my strengths is to look at the history. I read a lot, and the way that the African American men and women have been affected in this country, I think I tried to inform my children of what it means to be African American in America, and the pros and cons of being African American in a country where you have white supremacy and a bunch of other negative connotations.

Three out of 11 participants said that their strengths as fathers was in their ability to undergo personal growth and to work hard to do so. Mr. Z stated that his personal growth and willingness to work hard as a father were associated with the absence from his childhood of a model for fatherhood:

> Since I haven't had a father, I think that's a strength because that's all I wanted to have, I now can do those things as a father. If I did have a father, I'd probably do the same things that he has taught me or brought me up. But being there, I didn't have that. There's a lot of things that I could look back at [and resent]. But that's not what I'm going to do, how I'm going to raise my kids.

In summary, the participants indicated that part of the meaning of fatherhood after their release from incarceration was the positive nature of the relationships they had worked to build or sustain with their children. The participants achieved their positive relationships with their children through the hard work of being transparent and open to criticism, as well as through intentional, personal growth. For all participants, having a positive relationship with their children meant a purposeful, sustained effort to meet the obligations they attributed to fatherhood. As discussed in relation to the previous themes,

those obligations included providing love, providing support, and instilling prosocial values.

**RQ 3**

RQ3 was the following: What is the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? The theme that emerged during data analysis to address this question was the following: taking the initiative in reestablishing or maintaining the fatherhood relationship. The following subsection is a discussion of this theme.

***Theme 4: Taking the Initiative in Reestablishing or Maintaining the Fatherhood Relationship***

All 11 participants contributed to this theme. Theme 4 originated with the identification of a relationship between two categories, including successes and experiences of relationships with children. The category of experiences of relationships with children indicated the nature of the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for participants. The category successes indicated the perceived aspects of fatherhood that participants could perform more effectively after their release from incarceration. The similarity identified between these two categories was that both indicated how fatherhood was experienced after release, and the positive lived experiences of fatherhood depended on the participants' taking the initiative to reestablish or maintain their relationships with their children.

**Category: Experiences of Relationships with Children.** Consistent with their responses regarding the meaning of fatherhood in relation to strengths and relationship

with children status, all 11 participants reported that their lived experiences of fatherhood after their release were positive. Ten out of 11 participants stated that the positive experience of fatherhood after their release was associated with making up for time lost with their children during their incarcerations. Ray spoke in a representative response of doing activities with his children that he could not do while incarcerated:

> We do more things together [after my release], we do the things together now that we couldn't do when I was away. I tried to emphasize the need for education. I helped them with their homework. We go on different excursions, educational-type experiences, things that we do that, like I said, we couldn't necessarily do when I was in prison.

The 10 participants who spoke of making up for lost time after their release indicated that they took the initiative to reach out to their children. When they encountered barriers to building and maintaining positive relationships with their children, they adapted their approaches until they found an effective means of sustaining meaningful contact. Ron referenced the purposeful nature of his efforts to spend time with his children ("make a point"): "I'll make a point as a father to go take them to a lunch or dinner or spend time with take them fishing we do things together." Huges spoke of "fighting" through legal and practical obstacles to remain in close contact with his children: "I didn't care what the fight was going to be. I was going to be resilient for my children. So, I fought through all of that because I wanted to have time [with my children], value time, more." TJ spoke of adapting his means of engaging with his children as needed to remain a "hands-on" father:

> I have to make the effort, and I have to see the result. And at time, it might take weeks, sometimes it takes months, sometimes it takes years. But it's the continued effort, and then just being patient, and wait and see what your result is. So not waiting around, not doing nothing, but just change your tactics.

Five out of 11 participants discussed focusing their efforts on strengthening their relationships with their children. Darryl said that his having another family tended to pull him away from his adult daughter from whom he was away for 30 years during his incarceration, but "my thought is, building a stronger connection with my daughter where she doesn't feel like she's alienated in any way from me due to me having another family."

Five out of 11 participants stated that their experiences of having a relationship with their children after their release involved accepting the need for sacrifices and purposeful, personal growth. Sean discussed needing to overcome his sensitivity to perceived slights or signs of disrespect from his children, stating that when he failed to do so, "there comes that moment where that sensitivity kicks in. It's like, 'Man, I can't keep doing this. You can't keep hurting me. So now I'm taking it personal.' And this puts a strain on [the fatherhood relationship]." Sean said the following of the experience of fatherhood after his release: "Just seeing my child, man, that's a huge thing. My child seeing me is a huge thing." However, Sean added that fatherhood after his release involved significant uncertainty and the potential for conflicting expectations, factors that could contribute to his perception of slights from his children:

> No one knows what to expect once we're released from prison, or once I was released from prison, no one knew what to expect. The children had their own idea of what's going to take place because, "My dad's home," and the father has in his mind his own idea what's going to take place because, "Daddy's home." Then it doesn't necessarily work that way.

Ray said the following in relation to his need for purposeful, personal growth after his release: "I have a lot of work to do on myself, and I want to be able to be that bridge over troubled water for my children and my family. They are going to need that." Thus, Ray associated his need for personal growth with increasing his capacity to protect his family, while Sean associated it with making his expectations for his relationships with his children more flexible and realistic. Notably, all participants characterized themselves as initiating the changes and interactions on which their positive relationships with their children depended.

**Category: Successes.** All 11 participants indicated that their lived experiences of fatherhood after their release involved significant successes. Five out of 11 participants referred to taking the initiative when building or maintaining relationships with their children as one of their successes. Ron described his successful efforts to reestablish his relationships with his children as "purposeful and mindful acts":

> My thoughts on reestablishing relationships for incarcerated individuals is to make a point to spend time with the children. Make a point to be involved in their lives. Make a point to listen and be available . . . it's a very purposeful and mindful act, on my behalf, anyway . . . Make a phone call. You don't just touch

> base. Say that I love you all the time, statements like that . . . my thought with reestablishing relationships is to be there for the smallest, tiniest things that may seem insignificant to a dad, to a father, but very significant to the child.

In describing his perception of his success when taking the initiative to reestablish his relationships with his children, Bryant corroborated Ron's response, stating that the father needed to take the initiative: "I believe it's very important for any father to do all the things he needs to do, regardless of if they make him uncomfortable, to do all the things within his power to reestablish a relationship with his children." Thus, the participants perceived their taking the initiative when reaching out to their children as the success on which their positive, post-release experiences of fatherhood were predicated.

Four out of 11 participants spoke of their success listening to and communicating with their children after their release. Darryl provided a representative response, stating that his experiences of fatherhood after his release depended, to a large extent, on his success communicating and building rapport with his daughter:

> I communicate about what I'm doing, speak about my accomplishments, and I listen to her, my daughter, to see if I can give any advice. But most of the time, I just learn how to listen and be an ear for her. So that has helped us build our relationship even stronger. I think it started off rocky, but then in the end, it has grown to be a daughter-and-father-type relationship. So that's what I have done. I stay communicating and stay listening to her when she needs to talk.

Three out of 11 participants discussed their success in a specific form of initiative: intentionally reaching out and being available to their children. TJ stated that his success

making himself open and emotionally available to his children involved purposefully breaking the habits of reticence and self-effacement he learned in prison:

> When you're inside, by being incarcerated, you're trained to make it through, mind your business, don't be seen in a way that'll draw attention to you, that could cause you harm. Because you're trying to make it through . . . Now I have to step outside of what I've been conditioned into, what I've been trained to do . . . every day, on a day-to-day basis, I've put myself outside of my comfort zone.

Consistent with other responses where the participants referenced a perceived need for personal growth, three out of 11 participants reported that one of the successes experienced after their release entailed making changes to themselves to become better fathers. TJ's just-quoted response implied self-change as a basis for becoming emotionally available to his children. Ray spoke of undergoing a program of self-improvement through education to make himself more capable of providing for his children financially:

> I took a whole management class when I was in prison. I managed to get my GED while I was in prison. I went on and I got a certificate for welding, pipe welding, which is something that I've utilized since my incarcerated days. I managed to get certified at two different refineries in free society. And I've been able to make a decent living and to care for the needs of my children.

In summary, the participants indicated that their lived experiences of fatherhood after release from incarceration involved taking the initiative to reestablish or maintain positive relationships with their children. For almost all participants, the lived experience

of fatherhood after release was characterized by their successful efforts to make up for lost time by doing the activities with their children that they could not do while incarcerated. About half of the participants reported that they took the initiative, in part, by focusing purposefully on strengthening their relationships with their children. The participants also took the initiative improving themselves to remove internal barriers to bonding with their children. Additionally, the participants took the initiative making extensive, adaptive efforts to communicate with their children frequently and meaningfully. Most participants attributed their positive experiences of fatherhood after their release from incarceration to their taking the initiative recognizing and negotiating barriers to strong father-child relationships.

## Summary

Three RQs were used to guide this study. RQ1 was the following: What meaning does the reestablishment of relationships with their children have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? One of the themes identified during data analysis was used to address this question. The relevant theme was the following: meeting the obligations of fatherhood. Although the participants were incarcerated, their interactions with their children were limited to phone calls; letters; and, in some cases, rare visits. The participants did not perceive themselves as able to fulfill obligations they associated with fatherhood through those limited interactions. After the participants' release, reestablishing their relationships with their children meant beginning through active involvement in their children's lives to fulfill the obligations they associated with

fatherhood. These obligations included providing love, meeting children's basic needs, and instilling prosocial values.

RQ2 was the following: What meaning does being a father have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? Two of the themes identified during data analysis were used to address this question. The first RQ2 theme was the following: being a father after incarceration meant facing significant challenges. The participants reported that part of the meaning of fatherhood entailed struggling with significant external and internal barriers to performing perceived fatherhood obligations. Most participants reported that they could not fulfill the obligation of providing for their children financially because of external barriers, such as having a criminal record, or perceived internal barriers, such as an inability to retain a job. The perceived imperative to compensate for their prior absence from their children's lives through a heightened level of active involvement was a challenge related to their incarcerations. Barriers, such as living far apart from their children, also impeded the heightened active involvement some participants felt obligated to perform. Weaknesses or internal barriers that the participants struggled with included oversensitivity to disrespect, inadequate time management, and negative relationships with the children's mothers.

The second RQ2 theme was the following: success in fatherhood after incarceration meant personal growth and hard work. The participants indicated that part of the meaning of fatherhood after their release from incarceration was the positive nature of the relationships they had worked to build or sustain with their children. The participants had achieved their positive relationships with their children through the hard

work of being transparent and open to criticism, as well as through intentional, personal growth. All participants perceived that having a positive relationship with their children meant a purposeful, sustained effort to meet the obligations they attributed to fatherhood. As discussed in relation to the previous themes, those obligations included providing love, providing support, and instilling prosocial values.

RQ3 was the following: What is the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? The theme that emerged during data analysis to address this question was the following: taking the initiative in reestablishing or maintaining the fatherhood relationship. The participants indicated that their lived experiences of fatherhood after release from incarceration involved taking the initiative to reestablish or maintain positive relationships with their children. Most participants stated that the lived experience of fatherhood after release was characterized by their successful efforts to make up for lost time by doing the activities with their children that they could not do while incarcerated. About half of the participants reported that they took the initiative by focusing purposefully on strengthening their relationships with their children. The participants also took the initiative improving themselves to remove internal barriers to bonding with their children. Additionally, the participants took the initiative making extensive, adaptive efforts to communicate with their children frequently and meaningfully. The participants attributed their positive experiences of fatherhood after their release from incarceration to their taking the initiative recognizing and negotiating barriers to strong father-child relationships. Chapter 5 includes discussion, interpretation, implications, and recommendations based on these themes.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

I conducted this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore formerly incarcerated African American fathers' perceptions on reestablishing relationships with their children, addressing a gap in the literature. RQ 1 related to the meaning they contributed to the reestablishment of the relationship with their children. One of the themes identified during data analysis was meeting the obligations of fatherhood. Theme 1 originated from identifying a relationship between the categories of father obligations, fatherhood during incarceration, and fatherhood after incarceration. Although participants were incarcerated, their interactions with their children were limited to phone calls, letters, and, in some cases, visits. Participants did not perceive themselves as able to fulfill the obligations they associated with fatherhood through those limited interactions. Participants perceived fatherhood after incarceration as entailing providing love, meeting children's basic needs, and instilling prosocial values.

RQ2 was "What meaning does being a father have for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?" Two themes identified during data analysis were used to address this question: Being a father after incarceration meant facing significant challenges, and success in fatherhood after incarceration meant personal growth and hard work. Theme 2 originated from identifying a relationship between the categories of challenges, incarceration-related barriers, and weaknesses. Theme 3 originated from identifying a relationship between the categories of strengths and relationship with children status. Participants reported that part of the meaning of fatherhood for them entailed struggling with significant external and internal barriers to performing perceived

fatherhood obligations. Most participants reported that they could not provide for their children financially. Participants also faced barriers, such as living far apart from their children. Weaknesses or internal barriers included oversensitivity to disrespect, inadequate time management, and negative relationships with the children's mothers. Participants also indicated that part of the meaning of fatherhood was the positive nature of the relationships with their children established through being transparent and open to criticism. This relationship was established using a purposeful, sustained effort to meet the obligations of providing love, providing support, and instilling prosocial values.

RQ3 was the following: What is the lived experience of incarceration release on fatherhood for formerly incarcerated African American fathers? One theme emerged during data analysis: taking the initiative in reestablishing or maintaining the fatherhood relationship. Theme 4 originated from identifying a relationship between the categories of successes and experiences of relationship with children. Participants took the initiative to reestablish or maintain positive relationships with their children. They characterized fatherhood after release based on making up for lost time by doing the activities with their children that they could not do while incarcerated. About half of the participants reported that they took the initiative, in part, by strengthening their relationships with their children; improving themselves to remove internal barriers to bonding with their children; and making extensive, adaptive efforts to communicate with their children frequently and meaningfully.

This chapter contains a review of the results based on others' findings to address any similarities or differences. The limitations of the study follow the interpretation of the

outcomes. The recommendations for future research are also discussed, followed by the implications and conclusion of the study.

## Interpretation of the Findings

This section contains an interpretation of the findings compared to the literature in Chapter 2. The first theme, meeting the obligations of fatherhood, was used to answer RQ 1. The second and third themes were related to answering RQ 2: Being a father after incarceration meant facing significant challenges, and success in fatherhood after incarceration meant personal growth and hard work. Finally, RQ 3 was answered by the fourth theme: taking the initiative in reestablishing or maintaining the fatherhood relationship. These findings are discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

### RQ 1

The first theme, meeting the obligations of fatherhood, was based on the categories of father obligations, fatherhood during incarceration, and fatherhood after incarceration. The findings from this theme were similar to previous research (Craigie et al., 2018; Lewis, 2015). Four out of 11 participants received at least one visit from their children while they were incarcerated. An in-person visit increased the potential for connection between father and child, so these participants tended to describe visits as high-stakes interactions. Their attention was focused on meeting fatherhood role expectations rather than on spontaneous interaction. For example, Henry described the experience of being limited during his incarceration: “I couldn’t do much. I’m locked up. So, you know, I did call. I talked to them, told them I loved them. Things along them lines. It wasn’t much that I could do because I’m incarcerated.” This finding was

supported by research indicating that the prison environment and post-incarceration restrictions did not support fathers' ability to perform fatherhood roles or maintain a healthy relationship with their children, disrupting the father's identity confirmation (Lewis, 2015). Research further indicated that incarceration often harms the father–child relationship, especially when there is little contact with the father during his incarceration (Craigie et al., 2018).

Though previous research supported this theme, some findings differed from research. For example, five out of 11 participants stated that being a father entailed instilling prosocial values in their children. Bryant agreed with other participants in stating, "The love [expressing love to children] is important," and he added that another obligation of fatherhood was to instill values: "I believe my children and all children need, deserve, and want an opportunity to re-instill or instill those social values in my children that were not done so because of my absence." These findings contradict the findings that incarcerated parents would have issues coping as they would harden their emotions and attitudes, as showing emotion in prison can cause one to be targeted by predators (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). The participants in this study did not seem to have hardened emotions toward their children, as they often discussed love and the need to provide emotional support to their loved ones.

These same findings were continued when Darryl described fathers as obligated to instill values in their children, saying that a father "is able to bring to the child his belief systems and his morals and values." Notably, Darryl described a father's ability to instill morals and values in his children as dependent on "being present" in the sense of

being physically present in his children's lives, as opposed to being incarcerated. This finding mirrored some findings from an attachment theory study, where researchers indicated adverse effects on parent–child bonding when fathers were not present (Geller et al., 2012). The fathers in this study seemed aware that their lack of presence influenced their children adversely. One participant showed this awareness of the need to be present for their children. Sean condensed a significant number of the obligations he attributed to fatherhood into his visits with his children, but he expressed that it was not an adequate substitute for being present in his children's lives continually: "I overcompensated because I wasn't physically present."

For Darryl in this study, being actively involved in his daughter's life also meant allowing her to express her anger at him for his 30-year absence and the choices that led to it: "I done got cussed out, I done got called names, but I didn't take it personal because I know it was coming from hurt and abandonment more than it was something she felt in her heart for her father." Other fathers in this study did not encounter such anger. These different reactions mirrored findings by other studies that showed that children reacted to their fathers being incarcerated in various ways, though there is insufficient information about why these differences occurred (Craigie et al., 2018).

Similar findings can also be understood based on the AAMT (Bush, 2013) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1989). The relational strain, excessive damage to fathers and the children of these fathers, and poor parent–child relationships are further explained by the AAMT (Lewis, 2015). These African American fathers faced many issues related to their races and cultures. In the current study, TJ reported that he described his own life

choices to his son to caution him against making similar decisions, saying that during his incarceration, he communicated with his son by "writing letters to him, always giving him good advice, attempting to give the best advice I had at the moment, to not repeat the first steps that I took, to end up in this situation I was in." Bryant wanted to establish "social values" that entailed reestablishing "the family structure." This finding is supported by the AAMT, as Bush (2013) stated the theory could show African American fathers' spiritual, social, educational, and psychological development and status due to the era of slavery and how slavery has had a lasting impact on the African American father's experiences in modern society. Thus, the participants' reactions to wanting to instill good values in their own children might derive from the issues they faced as African Americans. Other research has also suggested formerly incarcerated African American fathers are part of a severely misunderstood culture, immersed in a legacy of struggle and pain yet brilliant in having the tenacity, capability, and will to survive (Shavel, 2017). The participants of this study showed their will to survive as fathers properly raising their children.

Regarding the attachment theory, Bowlby (1980) and Main et al. (1985) stated that children develop expectations and model those based on their parents' availability and responsiveness. The fathers in this study seemed aware of this issue, and they struggled to address their children modeling certain behaviors, as TJ and Bryant reported. Moreover, Huges stated that his father had wanted him but that his father's lack of attention to him led to an experience of dissonance between verbal expressions of love and the lack of investment of time and energy as evidence of love. The attachment theory

also supports this finding. Attachment theorists have stated that African American males, like other males, form their relationship behaviors based on their early childhood bonding experiences (Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Bretherton, 1997). Huges perceived fathers as obligated to succeed in expressing the love that his father had not expressed to him.

**RQ 2**

The following second and third themes were related to answering RQ 2: Being a father after incarceration meant facing significant challenges, and success in fatherhood after incarceration meant personal growth and hard work. Research supported these findings while showing some disagreement as well. Most participants reported that they could not fulfill the obligation of providing for their children financially because of external barriers, such as having a criminal record, or perceived internal barriers, such as an inability to retain a job. This finding mirrored other research that showed participants faced multiple barriers to financial success (Lewis, 2015). The prison environment and post-incarceration restrictions do not support fathers' ability to perform fatherly roles, such as financially providing for their children or maintaining a healthy relationship (Lewis, 2015). Other researchers agreed with this assertion, showing that the worst problem for incarcerated fathers was that African American fathers and virtually all other cultures were expected to take the initiative to take care of themselves and their families (Foster & Hagan, 2015). However, incarceration causes institutionalization, causing a person to be unable or poorly able to meet employment standards (Sykes & Maroto, 2016). Six out of 11 participants reported that they felt an obligation to provide for their children financially but found it challenging to do so due to the influence of being

incarcerated on their lives. Ron described being a provider as difficult in stating, “It’s a challenge sometimes to be a financial support.” Researchers supported this assertion, showing that institutionalization often stifled the skills needed to be a good parent (Moran et al., 2017).

Weaknesses or internal barriers that participants struggled with included oversensitivity to disrespect, inadequate time management, and negative relationships with the children’s mothers. These findings were supported by research (Peniston, 2014; Wakefield, 2015). Some research showed that fathers might use abusive tactics with their children picked up from being incarcerated (Wakefield, 2015). As stated by Wakefield (2015), “I find that paternal incarceration increases negative parenting behaviors and can result in serious physical abuse” (p. 923). Paternal incarceration harmed parenting quality, which led to poor child outcomes. Thus, Wakefield showed that parental incarceration resulted in poor parent-child relationships. The comments by three out of 11 participants described sensitivity to perceived slights and signs of disrespect as a weakness they faced as part of the meaning of fatherhood. This sensitivity was picked up in prison. Henry’s sensitivity to perceived disrespect caused tangible consequences in his relationship with his daughter when he broke off contact with her for a period because “I couldn’t accept being disrespected like that under any circumstances.” Henry developed a behavior from incarceration that might have influenced his relationship with his daughter, as Wakefield (2015) implied was a possibility.

Moreover, the finding of the participants having issues with the mothers of their children was supported by research. Peniston (2014) found that many fathers faced

whether the mothers were on board to reestablish the father-child relationship (Peniston, 2014). In this study, two out of 11 participants reported that having a negative relationship with their children's mothers was a challenge that impeded their ability to meet their standards for being a good father. Cannon stated, "My challenges would be the relationships that I have with their moms . . . Sometimes I wouldn't even be in touch with them because their moms would be mad or doing whatever she was doing." Peniston (2014) showed findings that agreed with this assertion: If the mothers allowed incarcerated males to reconnect with their children, that reunification occurred; however, if the mother rejected reunification, reunification would usually not happen.

Three out of 11 participants reported that their relationships with their children were strong prior to their incarceration and that, through their deliberate efforts, they were able to sustain those strong relationships. In a representative response, Mr. Z spoke like Bryant of being transparent with his children, but in Mr. Z's experience, transparency sustained the relationship between himself and his children rather than rebuilding it. The finding that the relationship before incarceration mattered for the parent-child relationship after incarceration was also supported by research (Craigie et al., 2018). Craigie et al. (2018) indicated that children's reactions to their fathers' returns varied significantly, with one possible explanation deriving from the quality of the father-child relationship before the father's incarceration. Also, the child's experiences during the father's incarceration might influence the child's views of the father, which could harm future relationships (Craigie et al., 2018).

These findings can also be explained based on the AAMT (Bush, 2013) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1989). Most participants reported that they were unable to fulfill the obligation of providing for their children financially because of external barriers, such as having a criminal record, or perceived internal barriers, such as an inability to retain a job. Four out of 11 participants expressed that after taking their incarceration as evidence that they did not make the right choices, they needed to make significant changes in themselves to be better people and fathers. TJ described living through his incarceration and returning to his family as a process that required significant, purposeful, personal growth, with the challenge of accomplishing this growth being part of the meaning of fatherhood. This finding is supported by both theories, as the attachment theory shows the need for parents to understand their children's attachment levels as those levels influence how such children react to life (Bowlby, 1989). The participants in this study showed awareness of such issues, reacting with desires to change themselves for the better. Regarding the AAMT, the participants of this study were possibly influenced by their race. Shavel (2017) concluded that formerly incarcerated African American fathers were part of a severely misunderstood culture immersed in a legacy of struggle and pain; however, I found that such fathers were brilliant in having the tenacity, capability, and will to survive, as shown by the fathers in this study. In conclusion, many fathers faced tremendous difficulties and factors beyond their control regarding their attempts to reconnect or remain connected with their children (Peniston, 2014), mirroring the current study's findings.

**RQ 3**

RQ 3 was answered by the fourth theme: taking the initiative in reestablishing or maintaining the fatherhood relationship. All 11 participants contributed to this theme. Theme 4 originated with identifying a relationship between two categories, including successes and experiences of relationships with children. For 10 out of 11 participants, the positive experience of fatherhood after their release was associated with making up for the time they lost with their children during their incarceration. This finding is important regarding the attachment theory, as Haskins (2014) pointed out that time was a factor in parenting, but the quality of parenting behaviors was more important than quantity. Paternal absence may not be as detrimental if the father spends quality time with the child, which is not often associated with incarcerated fathers, given their tendency to use aggression and other deviant behaviors. However, the fathers interviewed in this study seemed patient regarding the need to take time to address issues with their children. The 10 participants who spoke of making up for lost time after their release all indicated that they took the initiative to reach out to their children. When they encountered barriers to building and maintaining positive relationships with their children, they adapted their approaches until they found an effective means of sustaining meaningful contact. This adaptation by participants may be attributed to the AAMT, where African Americans were shown as resilient due to an innate quality that drives them to self-determination (Harris & Ferguson, 2010). Supporting this finding, five out of 11 participants stated that their experiences of having a relationship with their children after their release involved accepting the need for sacrifices and purposeful, personal

growth. Ray said in relation to his need for purposeful, personal growth after his release, "I have a lot of work to do on myself, and I want to be able to be that bridge over troubled water for my children and my family. They are going to need that."

Ray associated his need for personal growth with increasing his capacity to protect his family, while Sean associated it with making his expectations more flexible and realistic regarding his relationships with his children. Differing from this finding, Secret (2012) found that most incarcerated fathers reported psychological difficulties, depression, and personal adjustment issues that negatively influenced their capacity for effective parenting and increased child-abusing behaviors. Such personal adjustments were reported as beneficial by participants in this study. However, the finding also mirrors other research, where results indicated that fathers faced many challenges after being released (Peniston, 2014). The participants in this study also seemed aware of the need to enhance the parent-child bond, which mirrored other research. For example, Arditti and Savla (2015) found an essential factor that could moderate and buffer the effect of these adverse outcomes was the quality of the parent-child relationship.

## Limitations of the Study

Several limitations occurred in this study. The design and methodological weaknesses were limitations, as qualitative studies were not designed to gather numerical data for statistical comparison (see Yilmaz, 2013). Moreover, qualitative studies do not typically have large sample sizes (Yilmaz, 2013); thus, the sample size of the study was a limitation. The participants in this study narrated their experiences and perceptions, which might have been influenced by their desires and recollection of specific situations.

I asked follow-up questions to augment the participants' narratives and further enhance the data collected.

There were no variables directly manipulated. Additionally, results were derived from existing groups. Thus, all findings were provided descriptively. However, this design did allow for gathering detailed data. This method offered the opportunity for a new level of understanding of a topic and related issues.

Additional study limitations were the transferability of the findings. The sample selected for this study was pulled from an available volunteer pool. Because the sample consisted of volunteers from one geographic location, findings might not be transferable to all African American formerly incarcerated father populations in other geographical locations. Characteristics, such as age, were assessed to mitigate the influence of potential confounding variables. I addressed the effects of interviewing, such as fears of interview findings being shared with others, by substituting identification numbers for names on all materials to ensure participants' confidentiality. Biases that could have adversely influenced the study outcomes (including researcher interpretations) were addressed by returning all data findings and conclusions to participants for verification of accuracy, trustworthiness, and dependability.

## Recommendations

In this study, data were collected through one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with 11 African American fathers between the ages of 18 and older who were formerly incarcerated and had one or more children under the age of 18 years while incarcerated. Future researchers may want to replicate this study with a larger sample size than 11

participants. Moreover, future researchers can limit demographics to smaller age ranges to see if differences occur among younger versus older incarcerated fathers. Such researchers can also gather data from different geographical locations to see if differences appear in the findings. Future researchers can change the focus to other minorities to see if the attachment theory applies differently to those of different races who are incarcerated fathers.

Quantitative studies can also be conducted on this subject. Researcher can compare statistical data about lengths of incarceration and children's success rates in schools to see if their fathers' time in prison influenced their success in schools. In another iteration of this study, qualitative research can still be conducted but with the researcher interviewing the children of the incarcerated father instead of the fathers themselves, as done in this study. Moreover, researchers can interview the mothers of the children who have incarcerated fathers to see their views of the same situation. It may also be interesting to interview both mothers and incarcerated fathers to see if their views differ greatly from one another.

## Implications

I addressed an under-researched area, providing insights into the father-child relationships of African American formerly incarcerated fathers. Future researchers may use the findings to address the influence of incarceration on the African American family. This issue is of social significance and interest because many African American fathers experience incarceration-related adverse relationship outcomes (Charles et al., 2019; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011; Wildeman & Western,

2010). From a broad-spectrum perspective, this study's results showed the importance of the early childhood environment, specifically the father-child relationship environment. Understanding how formerly incarcerated males build relationships with their children can contribute to positive social changes. Knowledge about the types of support needed to help an African American father who has been incarcerated may improve their abilities to build stronger relationships with their children upon release. This result may lead to improving the lives of the formally incarcerated men and their children. Psychologists, educators, program developers, and researchers may use this information when trying to improve father-child relationships of formerly incarcerated fathers, as well as improving the relationship build/rebuilding experience between and outcomes for these fathers and their child(ren).

This researcher filled gaps in the literature regarding how these individuals built and supported meaningful relationships with their children. By exploring how African American formerly incarcerated fathers built and supported relationships with their children, this study showed information on the development of techniques to build stronger relationships between incarcerated parents and their children. This study is important because it shows an assessment of a group with the highest U.S. incarceration rates (Golinelli & Carson, 2013) and whose incarceration has devastating effects on the social and economic aspects of their communities (Johnson & Easterling, 2012).

Additionally, this study's findings can have implications for policy in social structures, such as the criminal justice system. The societal cost of incarcerating individuals includes their families; therefore, researchers should evaluate those effects.

Findings from this study showed important insights for establishing healthy parent-child bonding and relationships in general.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of the experience of reestablishing relationships with their children among formerly incarcerated African American fathers. Prior to this study, little or no research had been conducted to examine how formerly incarcerated parents build relationships with their children. The study included 11 participants who were African American and male. Most participants reported that they could not fulfill the obligation of providing for their children financially because of external barriers, such as having a criminal record, or perceived internal barriers, such as an inability to retain a job. However, for all participants, having a positive relationship with their children meant a purposeful, sustained effort to meet the obligations they attributed to fatherhood. Consistently, participants attributed their positive experiences of fatherhood after their release from incarceration to their taking the initiative in recognizing and negotiating barriers to strong father-child relationships.

Although formerly incarcerated African American fathers may report typical father roles, such as provider, protector, and role model, they report not always being able to live up to these roles, as shown in this study and others. Literature findings showed support for the conclusion that a disproportionate number of African American males are found in prisons (Golinelli & Carson, 2013; Kerby, 2012; National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2016; Pew Center, 2008). Incarceration and

father absence harm the father-child relationship (Ellis et al., 2012; Secret, 2012). However, a father who has contact with their child while in prison can positively influence the father-child relationship (Peniston, 2014). Because of such findings, future researchers should continue to study this subject as it holds far-reaching consequences for society.

References

Ainsworth, M. S. (1973). The development of infant–mother attachment. In B. Caldwell & H. Ricciuti (Eds.), *Review of child development research* (Vol. 3, pp. 1–94). University of Chicago Press.

Ainsworth, M. S., & Bowlby, J. (1991). An ethological approach to personality development. *American Psychologist*, *46*(4), 333–341. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.46.4.333

Allard, P. (2012). When the cost is too great: The emotional and psychological impact on children of incarcerating their parents for drug offences. *Family Court Review, 50*(1), 48–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-1617.2011.01427.x

Arditti, J. A., & Savla, J. (2015). Parental incarceration and child trauma symptoms in single caregiver homes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 24*(3), 551–561. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9867-2

Assari, S., Miller, R. J., Taylor, R. J., Mouzon, D., Keith, V., & Chatters, L. M. (2018). Discrimination fully mediates the effects of incarceration history on depressive symptoms and psychological distress among African American men. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, 5*(2), 243–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-017-0364-y

Babbie, E. R. (2012). *The practice of social research* (13th ed.). Wadsworth.

Bell, L. G., & Cornwell, C. S. (2015). Evaluation of a family wellness course for persons in prison. *Journal of Correctional Education, 66*(1), 45–57. http://ceanational.org/

Bertram, W. (2019, March 19). *New report, mass incarceration: The whole pie 2019,*

*provides annual "big picture" view of confinement in the U.S. with 7 new infographics.* https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/03/19/whole-pie/

Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. II)*: Separation, anxiety and anger*. Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. III)*: Loss, sadness and depression*. Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1989). The role of attachment in personality development. In S. I. Greenspan & G. H. Pollock (Eds.), *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory* (pp. 229–270). International Universities Press.

Bradbury, T. N., & Kamey, B. R. (2010). *Big theories of intimate relationships.* W. W. Norton and Company.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bretherton, I. (1997). Bowlby's legacy to developmental psychology. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 28*(1), 33–43. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025193002462

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1990). Ecology systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Annals of child development* (Vol. 6, pp. 187–249). JAI Press.

Brunton-Smith, I., & McCarthy, D. J. (2016). The effects of prisoner attachment to family on re-entry outcomes: A longitudinal assessment. *The British Journal of Criminology, 57*(2), 463–482. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv129

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2014). *Prisoners in 2013*. http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov

Bush, E. C. (2013). Introducing African American male theory (AAMT). *Journal of African American Males in Education, 4*(1), 6–17. http://journalofafricanamericanmales.com/

Bush, L. V., & Bush, E. C. (2013). God bless the child who got his own: Toward a comprehensive theory for African-American boys and men. *Western Journal of Black Studies, 37*(1), 1–13. https://education.wsu.edu/wjbs/

Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountains: An ecology of indigenous education*. Kivaki.

Carson, E. A. (2015). Prisoners in 2014 (NCJ 248955). *Bureau of Justice Statistics.* https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p14.pdf

Carson, E. A. (2018). Prisoners in 2016 (NCJ 251149). *Bureau of Justice Statistics.* https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16.pdf

Cassidy, J., & Shaver, R. R. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research and clinical applications* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Charles, P., Muentner, L., & Kjellstrand, J. (2019). Parenting and incarceration: Perspectives on father-child involvement during reentry from prison. *Social Service Review, 93*(2), 218–261. https://doi.org/10.1086/703446

Codd, H. (2013). *In the shadow of prison: Families, imprisonment and criminal justice.* Routledge.

Cooper, S. M. (2015, August). Reframing the discussion on African-American fathers: Implications for positive development of African American boys. Social experiences and well-being disparities that impact African-American men and

boys. *CYF News: American Psychological Association.* http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/newsletter/2015/08/african-american-fathers.aspx

Craigie, T.-A., Praff, E., & McDaniel, M. (2018). *Father re-entry & child outcomes.* https://www.urban.org/research/publication/father-reentry-and-child-outcomes

Davidsen, A. S. (2013). Phenomenological approaches in psychology and health sciences. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 10*(3), 318–339. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2011.608466

De Giorgi, A. (2016). Five theses on mass incarceration. *Social Justice, 42*(2), 5–30. http://www.socialjusticejournal.org/

Doran, R. M. (2011). *What does Bernard Lonergan mean by 'donversion'?* Lecture presented at the University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. https://lonerganresource.com/pdf/lectures/What%20Does%20Bernard%20Lonergan%20Mean%20by%20Conversion.pdf

Edwards, O., & Shannon, R. (2008). An attachment and school satisfaction framework for helping children raised by grandparents. *School Psychology Quarterly, 23*(1), 125–138. https://doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.23.1.125

Eliezer, K., Yahav, R., & Or Hen, K. (2012). The internalization of the "father" object among young men and its relation to separation-individuation patterns, anxiety, and depression. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal, 29*(4), 323–344. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-012-0261-5

Ellis, B. J., Schlomer, G. L., Tilley, E. H., & Butler, E. A. (2012). Impact of fathers on

risky sexual behavior in daughters: A genetically and environmentally controlled sibling study. *Development and Psychopathology, 24*(1), 317–332. https://doi.org/10.1017/s095457941100085x

Federal Bureau of Prisons. (2013). *Quick facts about the bureau of prisons*. http://www.bop.gov/news/quick.jsp

Fettig, A. (2018, May 1). Report to the United Nations on racial disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System. *The Sentencing Project.* https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/

Foster, H., & Hagan, J. (2015). Punishment regimes and the multilevel effects of parental incarceration: Intergenerational, intersectional, and interinstitutional models of social inequality and systemic exclusion. *Annual Review of Sociology, 41*(1), 135–158. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112437

Frazier, B. D., Sung, H.-E., Gideon, L., & Alfaro, K. S. (2015). The impact of prison deinstitutionalization on community treatment services. *Health & Justice, 3*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-015-0021-7

Gault-Sherman, M. (2012). It's a two-way street: The bidirectional relationship between parenting and delinquency. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 41*(2), 121–145. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9656-4

Geller, A., Cooper, C., Garfinkel, I., Schwartz-Soicher, O., & Mincy, R. (2012). Beyond absenteeism: Father incarceration and child development. *Demography*, *49*(1), 49–76. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-011-0081-9

Gifford, J. E., Kozecke, L. E., Golonka, M., Hill, S. N., Costello, E. J., Shanahan, L., &

Copeland, W. E. (2019). Association of parental incarceration with psychiatric and functional outcomes of young adults. *JAMA Network Open, 2*(8), e1910005. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.10005

Gobbi, G., Low, N. C. P., Dugas, E., Sylvestre, M.-P., Contreras, G., & O'Loughlin, J. (2015). Short-term natural course of depressive symptoms and family-related stress in adolescents after separation from father. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 60*(10), 417–426. https://doi.org/10.1177/070674371506001002

Golinelli, D., & Carson, E. A. (2013). Prisoners in 2012: Advance counts. *Bureau of Justice Statistics.* https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=264542

Goodenough, O. R. (2021). integrating smart contracts with the legacy legal system: A US perspective. In *Blockchain, law and governance* (pp. 191-203). Springer, Cham.

Haney, C. (2017). The consequences of prison life: Notes on the new psychology of prison effects. In *Psychology and law* (pp. 157–180). Routledge.

Hansen, M. (2013). *Black prisoners are given longer sentences than Whites, study says.* https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/black_prisoners_tend_to_serve_longer_sentences_than_whites

Harris, W., & Ferguson, R. (Eds.). (2010). *What's up with the brothers? Essays and studies on AA masculinities.* Men's Studies Press.

Haskins, A. (2014). Unintended consequences: Effects of paternal incarceration on child school readiness and later special education placement. *Sociological Science, 1*,

141–158. https://doi.org/10.15195/v1.a11

Haskins, A. R., & Turney, K. (2018). The demographic landscape and sociological perspectives on parental incarceration and childhood inequality. In C. Wildeman, A. R. Haskins, & J. Poehlmann-Tynan (Eds.), *APA Bronfenbrenner series on the ecology of human development. When parents are incarcerated: Interdisciplinary research and interventions to support children* (pp. 9–28). https://doi.org/10.1037/0000062-002

Hunt, T. K. A., Caldwell, H. C., & Assari, S. (2015). Family economic stress, quality of paternal relationship and depressive symptoms among AA adolescent fathers. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 24*(10), 3067–3078. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0112-z

Johnson, E. I., & Easterling, B. A. (2012). Understanding unique effects of parental incarceration on children: Challenges, progress and recommendations. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 74*(2), 342–356. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00957.x

Johnson, E. I., & Easterling, B. A. (2015). Coping with confinement adolescents' experiences with parental incarceration. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 30*(2), 244–267. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558414558593

Johnson, R. L., & Stanford, P. (2002). *Strength for their journey: 5 Essential disciplines African-American parents must teach their children and teens.* Moon Broadway Harmony.

Jung, C. G., Von Franz, M. L., Henderson, J. L., Jaffé, A., & Jacobi, J. (1964). *Man and*

*his symbols* (Vol. 5183). Dell.

Kaiser, F. G., Otto, S., & Schuler, J. (2015). Prosocial propensity bias in experimental research on helping behavior: The proposition of a discomforting hypothesis. *Comprehensive Psychology, 4*, Art. 49.CP.4.11. https://doi.org/10.2466/49.cp.4.11

Kaku, M. (2005). *Parallel worlds: A journey through creation higher dimensions, and the future of the cosmos.* Doubleday.

Kerby, S. (2012, March 13). The top 10 most startling facts about people of color and criminal justice in the United States. *American Progress.* http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2012/03/13/11351/the-top-10-most-startling-facts-about-people-of-color-and-criminal-justice-in-the-united-states/

Kim, D.-Y. (2016). Psychiatric deinstitutionalization and prison population growth: A critical literature review and its implications. *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 27*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403414547043

Lewis, D. (2015). *Incapacitated fatherhood: The impact of incarceration on African American fathers* [Doctoral dissertation, Loyola University Chicago]. Loyola University Chicago Repository. https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1644

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). Sage.

Loper, A. B., Phillips, V., Nichols, E. B., & Dallaire, D. H. (2014). Characteristics and effects of the co-parenting alliance between incarcerated parents and child caregivers. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 23*(2), 225–241.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-012-9709-7

Main, M., Kaplan, N., & Cassidy, J. (1985). Security in infancy, childhood, and adulthood: A move to the level of representation. Growing points of attachment theory and research. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 50*(1/2), 66–104. https://doi.org/10.2307/3333827

Malouf, E. T., Schaefer, K. E., Witt, E. A., Moore, K. E., Stuewig, J., & Tangney, J. P. (2013). The Brief Self-Control Scale predicts jail inmates' recidivism, substance dependence, and post-release adjustment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 40*(3), 334–347. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213511666

McAdoo, H. P., & McAdoo, J. L. (2002). The dynamics of African American fathers' family roles. In H. P. McAdoo (Ed.), *Black children: Social, educational, and parental environments* (Vol. 2, pp. 3–11). Sage.

McCusker, K., & Gunaydin, S. (2015). Research using qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods and choice based on the research. *Perfusion, 30*(7), 537–542. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267659114559116

Michalak, J., Mander, J., & Heidenreich, T. (2019). Implementation and dissemination of mindfulness-based interventions. *Mindfulness, 11*(2), 275–278. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-01250-3

Miller, H. V., & Barnes, J. C. (2015). The association between parental incarceration and health, education, and economic outcomes in young adulthood. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 40*(4), 765–784. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-015-9288-4

Moran, D., Hutton, M. A., Dixon, L., & Disney, T. (2017). "Daddy is a difficult word for

me to hear": Carceral geographies of parenting and the prison visiting room as a contested space of situated fathering. *Children's Geographies, 15*(1), 107–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2016.1193592

Morenoff, J. D., & Harding, D. J. (2014). Incarceration, prisoner reentry, and communities. *Annual Review of Sociology, 40*(1), 411–429. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145511

Morsy, L., & Rothstein, R. (2016). Mass incarceration and children's outcomes. Criminal justice policy is education policy. *Economies Policy Institute.* https://www.epi.org/publication/mass-incarceration-and-childrens-outcomes/

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Introduction to phenomenology.* Routledge.

Murray, F., & Hwang, S. H. (2015). Perceived father roles of married African American men: A phenomenological study. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(8), 1185–1204. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/

Murray, J., Blokland, A., Farrington, D. P., & Theobald, D. (2014). Long-term effects of conviction and incarceration on men in the Cambridge study in delinquent development. In D. P. Farrington & J. Murray (Eds.), *Labeling theory: Empirical tests* (pp. 209–235). Transaction.

Murray, J., & Murray, L. (2010). Parental incarceration, attachment and child psychopathology. *Attachment & Human Development, 12*(4), 289–309. https://doi.org/10.1080/14751790903416889

Mustaine, E. E., & Tewksbury, R. (2015). Fathers' methods of child discipline: Does incarceration lead to harsh and physical punishment? A research note. *American*

*Journal of Criminal Justice, 40*(1), 89–99. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-014-9238-6

National Institute of Corrections. (2020, May 27). *Offender reentry/transition*. https://nicic.gov/offender-reentry-transition

The National Reentry Resource Center. (2021). *Family engagement.* https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/topics?topic%5B0%5D=83

The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated. (2016). *Fact sheets.* https://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/resources/fact-sheets/

NeSmith, R. C. (2014). Tough on crime or tough luck for the incarcerated-exploring the adverse psychological impacts of mandatory minimum sentencing and pushing for action. *Law & Psychology Review, 39*, 253–266. https://www.law.ua.edu/lawpsychology/

Patten, M. L. (2014). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials*. (9th ed.). Pyrczak.

Peniston, D. A. (2014). *Incarceration and father-absence: An exploration of fatherhood after prison* (Publication No. 3668994) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Dallas]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Perry, A. R., & Bright, M. (2012). African American fathers and incarceration: Paternal involvement and child outcomes. *Social Work in Public Health, 27*(1-2), 187–204. https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2011.629856

Pew Center. (2008). *On the states. One in 100:Behind bars in America 2008.* www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=35904

Pew Charitable Trust. (2010). *Charitable trust, collateral costs: Incarceration's effect on economic mobility.* https://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf

Porter, L. C. (2014). Incarceration and post-release health behavior. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 55*(2), 234–249. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146514531438

Raphael, S. (2014). The effects of conviction and incarceration on future employment outcomes. In D. P. Farrington & J. Murray (Eds.), *Labeling theory: Empirical tests. Advances in criminology* (Vol. 18, pp. 237-262). Transactional Publishers.

Roberts, Y. H., Snyder, F. J., Kaufman, J. S., Finley, M. K., Griffin, A., Anderson, J., Marshall, T., Radway, S., Stack, V., & Crusto, C. A. (2014). Children exposed to the arrest of a family member: Associations with mental health. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 23*(2), 214–224. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9717-2

Rutter, M. (1995). Clinical implications of attachment concepts: Retrospect and prospect. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 36*(4), 549–571. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1995.tb02314.x

Ryo, E., & Peacock, I. (2018). A national study of immigration detention in United States. *Southern California Law Review, 92*(1), 1–68. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Emily_Ryo/publication/331305867_A_National_Study_of_Immigration_Detention_in_the_United_States/links/5d09c32d458515ea1a70b0ea/A-National-Study-of-Immigration-Detention-in-the-United-States.pdf

Sakala, L. (2014). *Breaking down mass incarceration in the 2010 Census*. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html.

Sampson, D. G., Ifenthaler, D., Isaias, P., & Spector, J. M. (2014). *Digital systems for open access to formal and informal learning.* Springer, Cham.

Schnittker, J. (2014). The psychological dimensions and the social consequences of incarceration. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 651*(1), 122–138. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716213502922

Secret, M. (2012). Incarcerated fathers: Exploring the dimensions and prevalence of parenting capacity of non-violent offenders. *Fathering, 10*(2), 159–177. https://doi.org/10.3149/fth.1002.159

Shavel, S. (2017). *African American males' lived experiences of fathering following incarceration* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

Shlafer, R. J., & Poehlmann, J. (2010). Attachment and caregiving relationships in families affected by parental incarceration. *Attachment & Human Development, 12*(4), 395–415. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730903417052

Some, M. (1993). *Ritual: Power, healing, and community*. Swan and Raven.

Sparks, S. D. (2015, February 24). Parents' incarceration takes toll on children, studies say. *Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/leadership/parents-incarceration-takes-toll-on-children-studies-say/2015/02

Sroufe, L. A. (2005). Attachment and development: A prospective, longitudinal study from birth to adulthood. *Attachment & Human Development, 7*(4), 349–367.

https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730500365928

Swisher, R. R., & Shaw-Smith, U. (2015). Paternal incarceration and adolescent well-being: Life course contingencies and other moderators. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology, 104*(4), 929–959. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4883585/

Subramanian, R., Riley, C., & Mai, C. (2018). *Divided justice: Trends in Black and White jail incarceration, 1990-2013.* Vera Institute of Justice.

Sykes, B. L., & Maroto, M. (2016). A wealth of inequalities: Mass incarceration, employment, and racial disparities in U.S. household wealth, 1996 to 2011. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2*(6), 129–152. https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2016.2.6.07

Threlfall, J. M., Seay, K. D., & Kohl, P. L. (2013). The parenting role of African American fathers in the context of urban poverty. *Journal of Child Poverty, 19*(1), 45–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2013.764846

Tindall, L. (2009). J.A. Smith, P. Flower and M. Larkin (2009), Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 6*(4), 346–347. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880903340091

Tolley, E. E., Ulin, P. R., Mack, N., Robinson, E. T., & Succop, S. M. (2016). *Qualitative methods in public health: a field guide for applied research.* Wiley & Sons.

Turney, K. (2015). Liminal men: Incarceration and relationship dissolution. *Social Problems, 62*(4), 499–528. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spv015

Turney, K., & Goodsell, R. (2018). Parental incarceration and children's wellbeing. *The*

*Future of Children, 28*(1), 147–164. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26641551

Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2013). Redefining relationships: Explaining the countervailing consequences of paternal incarceration for parenting. *American Sociological Review, 78*(6), 949–979. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122413505589

Tyler, E. T., & Brockmann, B. (2017). Returning home: Incarceration, reentry, stigma and the perpetuation of racial and socioeconomic health inequity. *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics, 45*(4), 545–557. https://doi.org/10.1177/1073110517750595

Uggen, C., & McElrath, S. (2014). Parental incarceration: What we know and where we need to go. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 104*(3), 597–604. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44113401

Van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Routledge.

Wakefield, S. (2015). Accentuating the positive or eliminating the negative? Paternal incarceration and caregiver-child relationship quality. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology, 104*(4), 905–927. https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc/

Wakefield, S., & Wildeman, C. (2011). Mass imprisonment and racial disparities in childhood behavioral problems. *Criminology & Public Policy, 10*(3), 793–817. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2011.00740.x

Ward, K. C., & Merlo, A. V. (2015). Rural jail reentry and mental health. *The Prison Journal, 96*(1), 27–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885515605473

Western, B., Braga, A. A., Davis, J., & Sirois, C. (2015). Stress and hardship after prison. *American Journal of Sociology, 120*(5), 1512–1547. https://doi.org/10.1086/681301

Western, B., & Sirois, C. (2017). *Racial inequality in employment and earnings after incarceration* (Working paper, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA). https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/brucewestern/files/racial_inequality_in_employment_and_earnings_after_incarceration.pdf

Wildeman, C., & Western, B. (2010). Incarceration in fragile families. *The Future of Children, 20*(2), 157–177. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2010.0006

WordHippo. (2020). *What is another word for role? Role synonyms*. https://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/another-word-for/role.html

Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research traditions: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences. *European Journal of Education, 48*(2), 311–325. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12014