

2017

African American Males' Lived Experiences of Fathering Following Incarceration

Sherece Shavel
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Sherece Shavel

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Walden University

2017

Abstract

African American Males' Lived Experiences of Fathering Following Incarceration

by

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MSW, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2004

BA, Seton Hall University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

May 2017

Abstract

In the United States, African American fathers are incarcerated at a disproportionate rate and have a poor prognosis of success. Although researchers have considered how crime, paternal abuse, poverty, and social disparities have affected African Americans, they have not adequately studied how formerly incarcerated African American fathers experience parenting. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to bridge this gap in knowledge by exploring the parenting experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers on parole. The research question focused on the parenting experiences of African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision following an incarceration. A criterion-based sample of 9 African American fathers from the Midwestern region of the United States completed 2 in-depth interviews. Interviews were analyzed using phenomenological techniques, resulting in 9 central themes focused on social objectification, survival, change, the agency of fatherhood, and parent-child relations. Despite difficulties and challenges, the quality of the fathers' lives hinged on the quality of their relationship with their children. The findings and recommendations from this study may advance positive social change by stimulating and guiding the efforts of human service practitioners working to develop culturally relevant interventions, and raising the awareness of advocates working to influence legislators toward comprehensive policy reform. The application of this study's findings may provoke community members to strengthen their support for African American fathers returning to the community following incarceration.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the two women that lived to be my life's inspiration.

To my late mother, Catherine Ann Adams, thank you for teaching me how to courageously persevere through the many challenges in life. You showed your strength and helped me spread my wings to fly, thank you! You are the reason I can live each day purposely optimistic. To my late grandmother, Mountrey Moore, thank you for believing in me and guiding me down the road of success. You taught me how to live fearless and modeled the value of lifelong learning, thank you!

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To my family, friends, and neighbors – thank you for being my cheerleaders and keeping me accountable every step of the way.

To all the personnel at the local public libraries, police stations, community settings, and Kansas Department of Corrections offices I encountered for this study – thank you for supporting me by offering space within your environment to advertise, pursue, and accomplish my research objective.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The penalty of imprisonment often introduces the consequence of community supervision that makes reintegration a rigorous activity. For formerly incarcerated fathers, the community reintegration process is particularly difficult because it involves recovery from prison and adaptation to former roles held in the family (Ramirez-Barrett et al., 2006; Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Marlow & Chesla, 2009; Miller & Spillane, 2012; Visher & Travis, 2011). The challenge of performing the activities of supervision and reintegration while reuniting with family presents a conflict that many formerly incarcerated fathers experience upon return to the community.

Another challenge that formerly incarcerated fathers face is the need to confront the social expectation to perform patterns of behavior associated with the identity and role of father. Researchers purport that formerly incarcerated fathers face challenges related to their identity and role because of socialized perceptions on parenting (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Jeffries, Mehghraj, & Hairston, 2001; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Schneider, 2002), the influence of stigma associated with race/ethnicity (Levy-Pounds, 2013; Pieterse & Carter, 2007; Welch, 2007; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000), the influence of stigma associated with incarceration and criminal justice involvement (Levy-Pounds, 2013; Miller & Spillane, 2012; Turney, 2014; Welch, 2007), and the process of community reintegration (Hirsch, Dietrich, Landau, Schneider, & Ackelsberg, 2002; Martinez, 2010; Pearson & Davis, 2003; Schneider, 2002; Visher & O'Connell, 2012). Yet, embracing the identity and role of father has been shown to counteract recidivism (Martinez, 2009). Researchers have found evidence confirming that family reunification

and restoration are primary factors in the reduction of recidivism for males reintegrating into society (CCJ, 2006; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005; Naser & LaVigne, 2006; Petersilia, 2005). The active presence and mutual connection of family is necessary to improve the success of these fathers post incarceration.

Formerly incarcerated fathers are also challenged by reports of an unfavorable attitude and opinion toward criminal justice involved fathers in cases throughout the United States. The practical operation and effect of legal statutes like the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 seemingly acquiesce to a negative or low regard for fathers with current and previous criminal history (Schirmer, Nellis, & Mauer, 2009). For example, the Supreme Court of New Jersey determined a ruling against the NJ Division of Youth and Family Services who sought to terminate the parental rights of a father on account of his extended period of incarceration (DYFS v. R.G. and J.G., 2014). Having the need to live through experiences affecting paternal identity and function escalates the difficulty formerly incarcerated fathers endure because of reintegration which reduces the likelihood of success after incarceration.

In the year 2006, public concern on the matter of parenting related to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated fathers experienced a boost in interest (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; McKay, Corwin, Herman-Stahl, Lindquist, Smiley-McDonald, & Siegel, 2010). The national appeal by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (Dion, Silman, Strong, & Santos, 2009), and other approaches alike encouraged increased

participation by human service professionals to address the identified concerns of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated fathers. Despite the increased interest, more community support is needed to realize an ongoing operation of accessible resources for fathers connected to the criminal justice system.

With scholarship and legislative attention seemingly focused primarily on the parenting needs and challenges of the maternal counterpart (Crowley, 2009; Dowd, 2012; Mason, 2012; O'Donnell, 2010), putting forth efforts to understand and respond to the parenting needs and challenges of formerly incarcerated fathers is essential (Jeffries, Mehghraj, & Hairston, 2001). I decided to focus my research on formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children because researchers have found that the impact of father absence is more severe among African Americans (Herman-Stahl et al., 2008; Perry & Bright, 2012; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman, 2014; Wildeman & Western, 2010; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). I decided to focus specifically on African American fathers who have been required to participate in community supervision because I could find no literature concerning these fathers lived experience. My research findings may provide insight to legislators, practitioners, and advocates about relevant interventions that would support current initiatives to advance father engagement among formerly incarcerated African American fathers under community supervision.

In this chapter, I present a summary of the applicable research literature and a statement about the research problem. I define the key concepts and terms, outline

boundaries of the study, and present potential contributions and implications for positive social change.

Background

Formerly incarcerated fathers receive minimal attention, but are an important population within the United States. Upon returning to the community, formerly incarcerated fathers have a high probability of being unemployed (Harris & Keller, 2005; Harrison & Schehr, 2004), in debt (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Huang Mincy, & Garfinkel, 2005; Roberts, 2001; Sachs, 2000), and estranged from family (Naser & Visher, 2006; Schneider, 2002). They often battle health concerns (Cuddeback, Scheyett, Pettus-Davis, & Morrissey, 2010; Fazel & Baillargeon, 2010; Hammett, 2006; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006), low self-esteem, fear, social stigma, and discrimination (Turney, Lee, & Comfort, 2013; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). Having a previous history of incarceration complicates the challenge of reintegration prompting an urgent need for many fathers to establish familial connection post incarceration (Dyer, 2005; Tripp, 2001). Family reunification and preservation for formerly incarcerated fathers may ensure subsistence and the completion of court-related mandates while under community supervision (Travis & Stacey, 2010). The impetus to understand the needs of formerly incarcerated fathers is expanding. However, employment, housing, education, and recidivism seem to overshadow the need to invest concentrated effort to explore beyond these fundamental community adjustment concerns.

Apart from the need to adjust to life in the community, formerly incarcerated fathers bear the effect criminal justice involvement has on the quality of relationship they

have with their children. The research conducted by LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, and Castro (2005) found that the parent-child relationship can deteriorate due to incarceration. Dyer (2005) found that various interruptions, such as incarceration and court appointed mandates after incarceration, impact the extent to which fathers become engaged with their children. Interruptions of this kind have been noted to alter or sway the opinions fathers adopt about themselves (Dyer, 2005; Tripp, 2001). Regardless of self-perception, formerly incarcerated fathers have a duty to nurture the parent-child relationship. The awareness of incarceration by the child may stifle efforts to actively participate in rearing responsibilities irrespective of the fathers' legal custody status.

Assuming a parental role can help formerly incarcerated fathers to become contributing members of the family unit and productive members of the community (Herman-Stahl et al., 2008; Martinez, 2010). Parenting helps to develop and improve participation in everyday household activities that sustain survival and enrich the quality of life for family members. These activities may include preparing meals, taking children to school, assisting with homework, purchasing clothes and shoes, looking after child in the absence of their mother, and other duties that are commonly known as parental responsibility (Jones & Mosher, 2013; Threlfall, Seay, & Kohl, 2013). Formerly incarcerated fathers who are actively involved in parenting activities can become a valuable resource on behalf of their child (i.e., expand connections of support within the community) (Doyle et al., 2015; Threlfall, Seay, & Kohl, 2013). Regardless of their history of criminal offense, formerly incarcerated fathers are endowed with influence and authority as a parent (Coles, 2009; Leap, 2015). No other function or role in the home or

community compares to the unique nature of being a father (Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014).

Advocates for child welfare and maternal rights argue that fathers, both incarcerated and free, must be responsible for the sustained well-being of their children. They insist that fathers make continuous monetary contributions suitable for legal enforcement (Burghes, 1991; Freeman, & Waldfogel, 1998; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010; Roberts, 2001; Thatcher, 1990). A formerly incarcerated fathers' inability to provide care through monetary means is minimally considered. The requirement to pay is also held by the same standard as mandatory fines and retributions as determined by the criminal court (Roberts, 2001; Schneider, 2002; Travis & Stacey, 2010).

Pearson and Davis (2003) concluded that child support laws obstruct the parent-child relationship. The capacity and ability for formerly incarcerated fathers to become actively involved in the lives of their children may be weakened because they need to meet child support orders while readjusting to life in the community (Dyer, 2005; Pearson & Davis, 2003). Deliberate and habitual avoidance to connect with children by fathers managing challenges of community reintegration after incarceration is likely, and perhaps a contradiction since family support is a means to combat recidivism (CCJ, 2006; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006).

The common intervention of community supervision may inadvertently lessen parental involvement due to legally imposed demands on fathers (Scott-Hayward, 2011). Generally, court-mandated community supervision is in the form of probation or parole participation involving regular reporting (meeting with probation or parole officers) and

drug testing. Failure to comply may lead to additional conditions, increase in time under community control, and even reincarceration (CCJ, 2006; Klingele, 2013). Either of these responses may impede the parent-child relationship especially if parental involvement was a challenge prior to incarceration (Snyder, Wormer, Chadha, & Jagers, 2009).

Reentry efforts that fall under mandatory court-regulated supervision often include social service programming (i.e., parenting and job skills training) professing to reform the targeted individual and ease acclimation over the course of a designated period of time (Geither, 2012). Regular participation in program activities is often interpreted as evidence of success in achieving reentry (Gideon, 2009; Travis III & Stacey, 2010). The evidence regarding who is most likely to benefit from social service programming or what effects such programming may have is lacking (Listwan, Cullen, & Latessa, 2006).

Formerly incarcerated fathers face a variety of obstacles that affect their reintegration experience. Although I conducted an extensive review of the literature pertaining to formerly incarcerated African American fathers, I could not find research on the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children while under mandatory community supervision. Gaining a deeper understanding of the parenting experience for formerly incarcerated African American fathers may help foster their success in the reintegration process, and achieve a workable balance regarding supervision and parenting.

Problem Statement

The challenges associated with community reintegration have a culture-specific effect on the reintegration experience of formerly incarcerated individuals and their probability for post incarceration success. The challenges and the impact of community reintegration for African American males is perceived to be worse than other groups (Herman-Stahl et al. 2008; Perry & Bright, 2012; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman & Western, 2010; Woldoff & Washington, 2008), and the prognosis is poor for post incarceration success (Dyer, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 2011; Tripp, 2001; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). Restrictions in and interruptions to the process of community reintegration may influence the level and quality of parental involvement (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2001; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). They may also influence one's perception of self in performing the father role (Dyer, 2005; Perry & Bright, 2012; Tripp, 2001; Woldoff & Washington, 2008).

Any disruption to the community reintegration process may have a direct impact on family dynamics, stability, reunification, and restoration (Dyer, 2005; Kenemore, & Roldan, 2006; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; McRae, 2009; Pleck, 2010). Because father absence is a grave concern within the African American community (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Perry & Bright, 2012; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman, 2014; Wildeman & Western, 2010; Woldoff & Washington, 2008), strengthening the relationship between parents and children is essential following incarceration. The parent-child connection is valuable for encouraging and positioning formerly incarcerated

fathers to experience a positive process of community reintegration (Nunez-Neto, 2008). It is also important for improving the quality of life experience for these children (Roberts, Coakley, Washington, & Kelley, 2014; Zhang & Fuller, 2012).

After an extensive search of the literature, I was unable to find studies whose authors specifically examined the lived experience of African American fathers following an incarceration with conditions of community supervision. However, I identified research involving African American males including African American fathers. I found studies involving African American males typically focused on incarcerated African American fathers (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Naser & Visher, 2006; Reid, 2011; Tripp, 2001), African American fathers with criminal justice history but who were not under supervision (Rocha, 2014; Roy, 2006; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Shivy, Wu, Moon, Mann, Holland, & Eacho, 2007; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009), non-criminal justice involved African American fathers (Fagan & Stevenson, 2002; Ives, Draper, Pattison, & Williams, 2008; Jones, 2010), African American fathers and the maternal counterpart (Edin, Tach, & Mincy, 2009; Hohmann-Marriott, 2008; Turney & Wildeman, 2013), African American fathers and their children (Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, Loney, & Brooks, 2010; Morman & Floyd, 2006), African American men as social fathers (Letiecq, 2007), formerly incarcerated African American men (Miller & Spillane, 2012), and African American men in society (Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014; Doyle, Pecukonis, & Lindsey, 2013).

The research I identified explored critical subjects including reintegration, disenfranchisement, parenting skills, the birth of a child, role performance, self-identity,

perceptions by children, education, employment, and other relevant concerns. The problem I have with the research that was identified is generally related to the participant sample and research focus. For instance, African American fathers may be included in research with fathers of other ethnicities (Turney & Wildeman, 2013; Visher, Bakken, & Gunter, 2013), or the research purpose was to explore the effect of incarceration (LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). Although the identified research has purpose and relevance, the absence of scholarship attending to the lived experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers while participating in community supervision is problematic. Researchers have concluded that post incarceration challenges are worse for African American men compared to other groups, and their probability of success is poor. For this reason, more scholarship is needed on the experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to community supervision.

Expanding present knowledge related to the parenting experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers is desirable and may be advantageous in reducing recidivism, father absence, family instability, and the keeping of destructive social barriers. Without an understanding of this experience, pessimistic views toward formerly incarcerated African American fathers and their ability to effectively function in the parenting role (Roy & Dyson, 2010; Schirmer, Nellis, & Mauer, 2009; Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006) may remain despite current social initiatives promoting a heightened level of paternal engagement (Dion, Silman, Strong, & Santos, 2009; Peterson, Fontaine, Kurs, & Cramer, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The available evidence related to persons with a history of incarceration reveals that there is an unfavorable effect of incarceration on the family relationship (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005; Naser & Visser, 2006; Turney & Wildeman, 2013; Woldoff & Washington, 2008) in addition to the prospect of post incarceration success being adversely calculated. The need to learn about the unique experiences of African American fathers assuming a parental role has been identified in the research efforts of present day scholars (Dyer, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 2011; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). The empirical knowledge that we currently have about the experience of criminal justice involved fathers brings forward important concerns. For example, Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005) discovered that helplessness, regret, and restraint to involvement with children was part of the parenting experience for middle-aged criminal justice involved fathers. Research conducted by Woldoff and Washington (2008) found that formerly incarcerated fathers are less involved with children in comparison to fathers with minimal to no criminal justice involvement history. The need to expand the base of understanding about the experience of parenting specifically for criminal justice involved African American fathers shaped my focus for this study.

Moynihan (1965) positioned the institution of slavery as the cause of deterioration within the African American community and the African American family. The poor trajectory of African American males within the criminal justice system (Dyer, 2005;

Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 2011; Woldoff & Washington, 2008) and the trajectory of African American children with incarcerated parents (Dishion, Owen, & Bullock, 2004; Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Kolvin, Miller, Fleeting, & Kolvin, 1988) influences the perception that African American males have a higher rate of absence from the family unit. The evidence presented to validate these claims, reviewed further in chapter 2, advances present knowledge and understanding of the condition, quality of life, and existing potential of males within the African American community. A continuous generation of knowledge about males within the African American community may strengthen and maintain a movement towards useful actions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) that shift the state of the African American community and its male members.

This present study was conducted to examine the parenting experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to mandatory community supervision using a qualitative phenomenological research design. The use of qualitative research provided an opportunity for participating formerly incarcerated African American fathers to give an account of the parenting experience in their own words. Phenomenology, a specialized method of data analysis, was used to extract the meaning ascribed to the experience of parenting as expressed by each father participant. My overall intent for this study was to support and promote the growth of knowledge concerning the parenting experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to mandatory community supervision. Additionally, my intent was to contribute to the future development of culturally relevant intervention models and strategies for

assisting formerly incarcerated African American fathers in returning to the community, provide insight and influence in the formation and implementation of family welfare policy, and to support the work of family reunification and restoration efforts involving formerly incarcerated African American fathers.

Research Question

What are the parenting experiences of African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision following an incarceration?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

A theory may be represented more than one way in qualitative research to satisfy the purposes of inquiry. The philosophical perspectives of phenomenology and social constructionism is used in this study as the theoretical framework to focus the research investigation and to explain the behavior and attitudes of research participants. Groenewald (2004) described phenomenology and illustrated its use as a structural process in work focused on the phenomenon of talent and co-operative education. Similarly, I use phenomenology as a systematic structural process. The use of phenomenology as a method of inquiry kept my efforts focused on the essence of lived experience (Dahlberg, 2006; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Osborne, 1990; Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 1990). In this study, I used social constructionism as the theoretical application attending to the phenomenon. Using social constructionism to explain behavior and attitudes set my attention on the knowledge the father participants had about their reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1985; Hoffman, 1990).

As an overall lens, I used phenomenology and social constructionism to explore the parenting experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers participating in community supervision. The use of phenomenology and social constructionism helped guide my development of the research problem highlighting the need to learn the meaning and reality of parenting for the father participants. The research question I developed for the inquiry was formulated to capture the meaning and reality of lived experience as expressed by the father participants.

The use of phenomenology and social constructionism is appropriate as the theoretical framework for this study because each method respectively caters to how an individual interprets the world in which they live. The father participants' experience of parenting was documented using the data collection techniques of qualitative interviewing. The experience of parenting was different for each father participant. An account of the experience, as expressed by the father participants, was influenced by a social construction of reality point of view. Further explanation regarding the history and application of the theoretical framework is shared in Chapter 2.

Researchers indicated that incarceration interferes with, and negatively impacts the progressive experience of the parent-child relationship (Dyer, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; McRae, 2009; Pleck, 2010). The findings from a few studies have shown the difference in relationship outcomes with resident and non-resident fathers (Edin, Tach, & Mincy, 2009; Hohmann-Marriott, 2009; Turner & Wildeman, 2013; Zhang & Fuller, 2012), as well as in regards to other factors like age, race, culture, socioeconomic status, social support network, and relationship with the

maternal counterpart (Castillo & Sarver, 2012; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). In that, I conducted this study assuming a discouraging influence of incarceration and reintegration on the parent-child relationship. The individuals that volunteered to participate in this study was expected to articulate an incompatible consciousness of incarceration and community reintegration through their expression of lived experiences of parenting following an incarceration. An attempt to justify the expectation of discouragement and incompatibility is offered in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

My understanding about the characteristics uniquely attributed to qualitative research in the tradition of phenomenology shaped the rationale for its selection and use. The perspective of phenomenology is a descriptive approach to inquiry that requires yielding focus to the lived experience of an actively socialized human being (Burch, 1989; Gray, 2013; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Moran, 2000). Lived experience, as defined by Van Manen (2007), is “experience-as-we-live-through-it in our actions, relations and situations” (pg. 16). The pursuit of a revelation of meaning in the lived experience of everyday life makes phenomenology a captivating method of reflective questioning with a sense of wonder (Van Manen, 2014). Intentional focus on describing the real meaning of a lived experience classifies as the transcendental type of phenomenology (Creswell, 2014; Husserl, 2003); the specific approach I used to inform this study’s research question. Attention is given to provide an understanding of transcendental phenomenology in Chapter 2.

Considering that I attempted to learn and describe the constructed meaning of lived experience for formerly incarcerated African American fathers, my election of phenomenology was appropriate and preferred. The description of understanding about the meaning ascribed to the father participants' experience in parenting was derived by way of experiential evidence (Moran, 2000; Osborne, 1990). The idea of experiential evidence can be explained as an "awareness of matters in the most clear, distinct, and adequate way possible" in relationship to the phenomenon in question (Embree, 2001, pg. 6). The phenomenon I investigated in this study was parenting. For the purposes of this study, parenting is defined as the activity and interaction of developing and educating children (Berg-Neilsen, Vikan, & Dahl, 2002; Hoghughi, 2009).

The use of phenomenology has advanced and complemented this study's research purposes given the following allowances of the design tradition.

- Phenomenology allows focus on the essential meaning of individual experience (Lopez & Willis, 2014; Ritzer, 2007)
- Phenomenology allows investigation on the relational awareness of meaning between objectivity (i.e. external or material reality) and subjectivity (i.e. internal or experience, understanding, feelings) (Dahlberg, 2006; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994).
- Phenomenology allows for a disinterest in generalizations appealing to a fixed concentration on achieving a retrospective description of parenting through an understanding of consciousness (Gray, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

- Phenomenology allows for a description of the manner which parenting is experienced by formerly incarcerated African American fathers as opposed to determining whether the parenting style or parenting practices of formerly incarcerated African American fathers are “good” or “bad” (Moran, 2000).
- Phenomenology allows for an inductive collection of data to generate thick, rich descriptions of experience from the perspective of the formerly incarcerated African American father participant (Gray, 2013).
- Phenomenology aids the researcher and the research process by guiding the way in which to think about, collect, analyze, describe, and report data gathered (Anfara & Mertz, 2015).
- Phenomenology has interests compatible with social constructionist theory that embraces self-generation of knowledge and an attitude of openness to the phenomenon of parenting and its constructed meaning (Burr, 2015; Hycner, 1985).

The father participants in this study were engaged in the qualitative interviewing process using standardized open-ended and semi structured open-ended techniques. The procedures of transcendental phenomenology that function to acquire the essence of experience (i.e. epoche, transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, etc.; Beyer, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Luft, 2002; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994), explained more clearly in Chapter 2, were exercised to organize and analyze all data gathered. The organization and analysis of data was accomplished using the lens of social

constructionism to describe the experience of parenting as created by the formerly incarcerated African American fathers who participated in this study.

Definitions

Bracketing: See Epoche.

*Community supervision: An inexpensive systematic approach to the delivery of criminal sanctions for low to moderate risk offenders where the methods of probation and parole are used to circumvent penal institutionalization and the effects associated with the experience; a practical community-based approach for reintegrating offenders and decreasing the probability or tendency to reoffend (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008); conditions of a restrictive order to be carried out in community (Egan, 1995). Synonymous with *Community Corrections* and *Mandatory Community Supervision* in this study.*

*Epoche: A suspension of prior knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, understandings, judgments, etc. to embrace a new way of looking at the world (Husserl, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Synonymous with *Bracketing* in this study.*

Fathering: Marked by a pattern of behaviors and practices performed by the paternal relation for the purpose of developing children (Coleman & Ganong, 2009). Fathering in this study will be defined as meaningful behaviors of interaction with children that involves play, development, support, discipline, and other activities expressly qualified as fathering by research participants.

Horizon: Aspects of experience that are not known by way of perception, but are considered possibilities of experience that can be known by continuing acts of perceiving

and reflection (Moran, 2000); an overall context (Hycner, 1985); phenomenological concept of world (Luft, 2002).

Imaginative variation: The creation of structural descriptions; how the phenomenon is experienced in the world (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Incarceration: Extended absence from the community due to institutional confinement for a continuous period of three or more years from the time of arrest (Flanagan, 1995).

Mandatory release: A condition of release that is allowed when an incarcerated individual meets the time of an originally imposed sentence with an accrued sum of good time credit. The accumulated good time credit becomes the remaining portion of the original sentence served under the status of community supervision (Ditton & Wilson, 1999; Solomon, Kachnowski, & Bhati, 2005).

Noema: The object of consciousness described phenomenologically and dependent upon the conscious act of perceiving (Magill, 1990).

Noesis: The activity of our consciousness that includes cognition, feelings, will, and attitudes (Magill, 1990).

Parole: An accepted method used in community corrections for the purpose of community supervision to manage the process of restoring and integrating formerly incarcerated individuals back into the community (Hanser, 2010); an early release condition imposed by a governing authority generally known as a parole board who

grants and approves the sanction of parole that requires community monitoring under the direct supervision of a parole officer (Egan, 1995).

Parent: The biological relationship between an adult and a child (Hoghghi, 2009, pg. 5).

Parenting: Purposive activities aimed at ensuring the survival and development of children - the activity of development and educating (Hoghghi, 2009, pg. 5). Parental everyday behavior towards offspring including parent's cognition, emotions, and attributions toward their child, as well as parenting attitudes and values (Berg-Neilson, Vikan, & Dahl, 2002, pg. 531).

Phenomenology: The observation and description of phenomena through an understanding of consciousness (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Osborne, 1990; Zahavi, 2003).

Reentry: See *Reintegration*.

Reintegration: The facilitation of assistance to individuals returning to the community for the purpose of returning to a state of normalcy that offers and provides access to financial, educational, cultural, medical, civic, and recreational activities and services available within the community; assistance with maintaining positive relationships for support that includes reunification and stabilization of family-based relationships (McGregor & McConnachie, 1995; Nunez-Neto, 2008; The Quaker Council for European Affairs [QCEA], 2011). Synonymous with *Social Reintegration*, and *Community Reintegration* in this study.

Textural-Structural Synthesis: An effort to blend the textural and structural descriptions by composing a statement that presents the meanings and essences in the context of time and place from the perspective of the research participant (Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994)

Transcendental phenomenology: A systematic approach aimed at describing the meaning of experience from a new fresh perspective (Finlay, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenological Reduction: The generation of textural descriptions relevant to the phenomenon being studied (Finlay, 2012; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Social constructionism: The generation of knowledge and understanding of the human world shaped by our seeing and experiencing the world through human interaction and activity (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985; Heath, 2007).
Synonymous with *Social Construction* in this study.

Assumptions

The perspectives of naturalistic inquiry, interpretive inquiry, and social constructionism were influences for this study. The assumptions of naturalistic inquiry support the idea of having multiple realities, with multiple parts interrelated and mutually influencing, that shift and differentiate the very nature of reality (Guba, 1981; Smith, 1984). In that, research takes place in the real-world or a natural setting that is particularly known and familiar to the research participant. The perspective of naturalistic inquiry assumes that the researcher and that which is researched is mutually dependent. The primary instrument of data collection and analysis in the naturalistic paradigm is,

therefore, the researcher (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991; Merriam, 2002; Smith, 1984). Without the researcher, that which is to become known cannot be discovered, and the knowledge that is hidden cannot be discovered without the pursuing efforts of the researcher. The perspective of naturalistic inquiry assumes that generalizations are impossible, and therefore research investigations seek to establish transferability between contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba, 1981; Malterud, 2001).

The position of interpretive inquiry is that an individual's world is of importance and he/she cannot disassociate self from the experiences therein (Flick, von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). The world as perceived by participants is therefore described and, in respect to Husserl's phenomenological perspective, was interpreted as expressed by participants to discover how the meaning of experience influences one's decisions (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The interpretive paradigm is set forth to understand the meaning of a lived experience without the expression of that experience controlled to fit into a predetermined system (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). However, as pointed out by Van Manen (1990), the interpretive model of research in the phenomenological tradition is guided by procedures and techniques that lead the researcher to his/her purposeful end. The assumptions of interpretive inquiry uphold the expert knowledge of the researcher as useful and valuable to the research investigation because it authenticates or makes valid the need for the specific scholarly pursuit for knowledge (Koch, 1995; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Van Manen, 1990).

The philosophical view of social constructionism holds the position that the knowledge of reality is constructed (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen,

1985), and all creation of fact is only meaningful within the context or framework it is situated (Andrews, 2012; Patton, 2015). Therefore, the construction of reality is a subjective creation, product, or article of the multifaceted exchanges within our social world (Gergen, 1985; Hoffman, 1990; Patton, 2015). The perspective of social constructionism holds that the reality individuals construct about their world and experience is true in accord and in agreement with the perceptions of others (Andrews, 2012; Patton, 2015). From the standpoint of social constructionism, one's experience of the world will produce different perceptions, meanings, and constructions of reality conforming to event, time and place (Burr, 2015; Lock & Strong, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Bearing in mind the evidence of present research, four key assumptions may be maintained concerning the disclosure of research participants that can fundamentally affect the significance of this study. First, this study could have made the assumption that all research participants engaged would convey adverse effects on experience associated with incarceration and reintegration as evidenced by statements related to beliefs, values, and decisions made concerning parenting involvement. As evidenced by Woldoff and Washington (2008), incarceration poses a negative impact on parental engagement for African Americans. As well, the events of incarceration and reintegration produce outcomes related to unemployment and under-employment (Pager, 2003; Pager, 2007; Western, 2006), poverty and homelessness (Gardner, Tuchman, & Hawkins, 2010; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010), challenges with health and mental health (Cuddeback, Scheyett, Pettus-Davis, & Morrissey, 2010; Turney, Wildeman, & Schnittker, 2012), a decrease in community and civic engagement (Clear, 2008; Lee,

Porter, & Comfort, 2014; Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006), social discrimination and stigmatization (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Welch, 2007), familial strain (Naser & Visser, 2006; White, 2006; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009); and challenges with paternal identity and involvement (Dyer, 2005; Tripp, 2001; Vesneski, 2011). For these reasons, such an assumption can be upheld.

Second, the events of incarceration, reentry, reintegration, family reunification, and the experience of various cultural, political, and social structures would influence the behaviors, and attitudes of fathers in relation to parenting. For instance, the enforcement of child support obligations may deter formerly incarcerated African American fathers from parenting involvement due to financial insecurity (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Hatcher & Lieberman, 2003; May, 2004). The behaviors and attitudes of fathers may perhaps be influenced by the socialized representation of African American males that debilitate paternal self-identity and alter valued relational exchanges within society (Hall, 2001; Kim, 2014; Welch, 2007). Perhaps behaviors and attitudes of fathers are influenced by perceptions of being parented and responding to the duty of parenting shaping the messages African American fathers convey that ultimately becomes an intergenerational dialogue (Gordon, Nichter, & Henriksen, 2012; Roy, 2006). The condition and quality of life experience within the community advise the behaviors and attitudes embraced by African American fathers in relation to parenting (Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2004). The consequences around active criminal justice involvement exacerbate the already existing plight African American men have in regards to life and living within the community

(Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014; Wilson, 2011). The above-noted assumption can be upheld considering these reasons.

Third, an assumption could be made that all research participants engaged would express time-specific limitations, miscalculated, and unforeseen interferences related to parenting involvement. Circumstances including intensity and duration of community supervision, changes to supervision requirements, reincarceration due to technical violation (Ostermann, 2013; Travis & Stacey, 2010), and other factors contribute to this assumption. Vesneski (2011) outlined the criteria for parental rights termination as outlined by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Veneski confirmed criminal conviction and parental incarceration as an established condition for parental rights termination. The termination of parental rights is likely an interference particularly for residents of Kansas; a state with a minimal duty to provide assistance with reunification following termination (Revised Kansas Code, 2014). For the reasons noted, such an assumption can be upheld.

Finally, each of the research participants in this study identified self as a formerly incarcerated African American father. Although formerly incarcerated African American fathers connect the meaning of parenting to role-modeling and mentoring (Dill et al., 2016; Jones, 2010; Roy, 2006), this study could have made the assumption that the meanings attributed to the parenting experience would be, at a minimum, partially shaped by the incarceration experience.

All four of the assumptions can be upheld for this study given the reasons noted. However, with the need in phenomenology to suspend prior knowledge, beliefs, attitudes,

understandings and judgments, each of the noted assumptions were abandoned in an attempt to manage the data with an awareness that is unbiased.

Scope and Delimitations

The research question for this study initially focused on the lived experience of fathers without concern for age, race/ethnicity or culture. It was initially assumed that the lived experience of fathers would focus solely on the performance of parenting activities given the current advocacy and social drive toward increased paternal presence and involvement with children. A different perspective was gained about the lived experience of fathers following an incarceration after reviewing the literature. As evidenced by existing scholarship, the challenge of community reintegration is perceived worse for African American males, and the impact of father absence is more severe within the African American community (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Perry & Bright, 2012; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman & Western, 2010; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). With this understanding, the scope of the research was established to discover the lived experiences of parenting for African American fathers following an incarceration. The new focus for this study required a change to the research question to identify the goal of targeting formerly incarcerated African American fathers as opposed to criminal justice involved fathers of other cultures or ethnic groups.

The length of time served within an institutional setting was part of the acceptance criteria for voluntary participation in this study. Initially, the length of time served was characterized as long-term incarceration being marked by a period of 3 or more years within a correctional institution. The common viewpoint regarding long-term

incarceration, made known through literature review, differs from the initial position taken for this study. For example, long-term incarceration was marked by a confinement of more than 5 years by Flanagan (1980), more than 6 years for MacKenzie and Goodstein (1985), and more than 8 years for Wormith (1986). In recent times, Yang, Kadouri, Revah-Levy, Mulvey, & Falissard (2009) conducted a qualitative study with long-term incarcerates and defined long-term incarceration as 10 or more continuous years of imprisonment since the time of arrest. The initial position taken regarding long-term incarceration was rejected considering the perspectives offered in the literature. Use of the phrase “long-term incarceration” was abandoned and replaced by the term “incarceration” that also required an amendment to the research question. Incarceration for this study was marked by a period of continuous confinement for 3 or more years from the time of arrest.

The Midwest region of the United States was established as the targeted locale to draw eligible participants for this study. The Kansas City metropolitan area of the state of Kansas was exclusively chosen as the location of focus due to Kansas having an active involuntary parental rights termination policy and a disproportionate number of African American males involved in the states’ criminal justice system. Because the convictions of post incarceration supervisees are predominantly non-sexual in nature, all persons having served time for offenses of a sexual nature were excluded from this study.

Parenting as a phenomenon is generally perceived as a common human experience. The unique experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to mandatory community supervision is likely to not

correspond with the general population. In this study, I used purposeful sampling to specifically identify the father-type targeted. The results were explained using social constructionism which is the conscious generation of knowledge and reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985; Gergen & Hosking, 2006; Hoffman, 1990). The findings may not be transferable to the general population because they are based on participants' interpretation of their parenting experience within a social context of criminal justice system involvement. However, the rich descriptions of experience obtained from the formerly incarcerated African American fathers are open to judgment for application with a comparable population and as well in other settings. Further, the transferability of this study is not found in the findings specifically, but in using social constructionism to advance research with formerly incarcerated African American fathers. Social constructionism can be included in research with formerly incarcerated African American fathers in the context of familial and community engagement, mental health, employment, social participation and access, race and equality, health or education.

Limitations

The strengths of qualitative research are also accompanied by weaknesses. One strength of qualitative research is found in its design with the discovery of meaning as its most prized asset. For this study, the meaning and reality of parenting was based solely on the perceptions of participants as opposed to being the result of statistical analysis. The participants in this study were the primary data source and were engaged in the research process under natural conditions to produce in-depth descriptions of their experience. The data collection method, qualitative interviewing, was time-consuming

and required extensive probing to arrive at comprehensive conclusions (Maxwell, 2009). The analysis and interpretation processes were quite laborious because they required meticulous effort to arrive at a meaningful understanding of the data.

Qualitative research is subjective and requires the establishment of reliability and credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Maxwell, 2009; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). To assure reliability, consistency of the research process, all steps taken to accomplish the research goal was documented by way of an audit trail (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2006; Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2003; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013) involving a subsequent dependability audit (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). The in-depth interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). Each transcription created was checked for accuracy and corrected upon the identification of error (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). Careful attention was given to assure consistency in coding with safeguards to minimize inappropriate adjustments, shifts, or changes to established coding during the process of data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To establish credibility, peer debriefing, member checks, and thick descriptions were used to effectively articulate research findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba, 1981; Morrow, 2005; Toma, 2011). The father participants were asked to review the descriptions and themes developed from the interviews (Cho & Trent, 2006; Guba, 1981; Patton, 2015; Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

In qualitative research, bias on the part of the researcher threatens the authenticity of findings due to the injection of his/her own culture, values, history, beliefs, and

experiences (Bowen, 2005; Koch & Harrington, 1998; Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012).

The credibility in this sense was established by continuous self-reflection and self-awareness through the practice of reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2003; Flick, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The practice of reflexive journaling along with performing a confirmability audit helped to maintain transparency and assure the trustworthiness of findings (Flick, 2014; Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012; Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). In addition, the dissertation methodologist reviewed the process of analysis in order to help ensure its fidelity (Bowen, 2005).

This study was also limited because I focused specifically on African American fathers. Only those participants whose actual time served in a correctional setting within a range of 3 to 10 years was chosen. The standard used excludes formerly incarcerated fathers who were sentenced to serve time within the chosen range but were granted early release. This study was limited to non-custodial non-resident fathers having a non-sexual offense history living within an urban community of the mid-western United States.

Significance

Social service programs, family support networks, and formerly incarcerated fathers may find the work of this study important because it reveals hidden realities of parenting while obligated to community supervision. This subject deserves more research contribution from the scholarly community to enact change. Advocacy conversations and efforts may be provoked after the publication of this study; a benefit worthy of anticipation.

According to the CCJ (2006), reintegration following an incarceration is challenging because of the need to achieve a favorable state of stability and normalcy. It is difficult for the parent-child relationship to grow while the parent is incarcerated and examination of the relationship after incarceration is necessary. Understanding the impact community supervision has on parental involvement and activity may aid in the development of improved models and strategies for assisting formerly incarcerated fathers while living in the community. The result of studies in this area may help human service professionals integrate reformed formerly incarcerated fathers in work against juvenile delinquency. An increase of knowledge in this area may support the existence of family restoration efforts in individualized mandatory supervision plans drafted prior to an offender's release. The findings from research in this area may also provide evidence about the extent institutional parenting education activities translate in the community.

The evidence confirming the importance of family in the reentry process (CCJ, 2006; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005; Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Petersilia, 2005) does not dismiss or lessen the challenges formerly incarcerated fathers must negotiate in managing parental responsibilities against community supervision. Gaining an understanding of the parenting experience as related to the injection of court-mandated obligations will be beneficial to program design and implementation catering to the population of formerly incarcerated persons. In addition, understanding the influence of court-related obligations in the initial stages of reentry and the impact it has on parental involvement for formerly incarcerated African American

fathers will aid practitioners in their efforts to contribute to the adjustment process for both parent and child.

Implications for Social Change

The need to confront threats of supervision violation on technical conditions and the realized obstacles related to parenting are implications for social change, practice, and advocacy on behalf of formerly incarcerated fathers. Professionals and program developers may act as social change agents by using cultural diversity to improve parental involvement for formerly incarcerated fathers considering system-wide challenges. Human service practitioners may (a) teach formerly incarcerated fathers effective parenting strategies and offer support in parenting activities that are expressly difficult, (b) establish parenting mentors that cater to the cultural context of formerly incarcerated fathers, and (c) assist program developers in designing and duplicating programs proven effective and efficient.

Formerly incarcerated fathers may be held to legal conditions like restitution and child support in addition to community supervision. Advocates in favor of establishing available and accessible opportunities to aid the success of formerly incarcerated fathers may engage the legislative process to realize social change. For instance, advocates in support of formerly incarcerated fathers may lobby for policy incentives that encourage active parenting involvement and honor efforts toward satisfying legal obligations like child support (Hatcher & Lieberman, 2003; Turetsky, 2007). Advocates may support and promote exemption of demands that pose added strain to the reintegration process and perhaps inevitably result in reincarceration. Additionally, community members

supporting the positive reintegration of formerly incarcerated fathers may raise awareness on the relational effects system imposed barriers have on community adjustment, pro-social identity and role function.

The termination of parental rights can be a devastating blow to a formerly incarcerated father choosing to pursue reform (Travis, McBride & Solomon, 2005). Prior to incarceration, fathers may have vital roles in the care and support of their children (Schneider, 2002; Travis, McBride & Solomon, 2005). The termination of parental rights due to incarceration or felony conviction, per implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and Kansas Statute 38-2269, will not only sever the legal obligation of the father to care and support the child, but as well create a significant wedge in the developing parent-child relationship (Solomon-Fears, 2009).

Kansas Statute 38-2269, a derivative of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, may not have a great impact of harm in all circumstances, but for instances where the policy is unjustly imposed, it is perhaps devastatingly damaging to the parent and the child partly due to its invasive nature (Schneider, 2002). I posit that the provisions outlined in both legislations were intended to have positive implications primarily for the child and as well as for the state; minimizing state risk for accounts of child abuse and neglect. The implementation of these policies increased the demands on states regarding child welfare and exacerbated complications regarding social services practice in the field (Travis, McBride & Solomon, 2005). Amendment of such legislation, as mentioned above, may be advantageous to the structure and development of community, family, and

significantly supportive of release and recidivism efforts being tackled by the gamut of client-focused professionals working in the field (Travis, McBride & Solomon, 2005).

Finally, bringing reform issues to the forefront may stimulate community members to embrace and/or support assimilation efforts reducing acts of discrimination and prejudice. As a social work professional my role may be to guide formerly incarcerated fathers in efforts to identify and understand acts of discrimination that present barriers to development. I may offer efforts to process formerly incarcerated fathers through realities of discrimination in order to exercise self-determination and attain self-actualization. On the other hand, my role may be to disseminate information regarding research findings and policy milestones to mental health practitioners, pre-release coordinators including the monitors of parole supervision, educators, and the employment community. Active and ongoing public support for positive community reintegration will help to intensify the influence necessary to assure that formerly incarcerated fathers receive the assistance they need and the essential use of qualified skilled professionals is accentuated. Despite all judgment, formerly incarcerated fathers are human beings that deserve just treatment and equal access to resources that will promote responsible fatherhood and law abiding citizenship.

Summary

The high rate of incarceration in the United States created an inevitable reality of criminal justice involved fathers. Most fathers among the population of criminal justice involved males will return to the community expected to resume a life exhibiting pro-social norms. The challenges associated with a return to the community are believed to

impact a father's ability to maintain an exceptional level of parental engagement particularly if required to negotiate multiple legal obligations.

The consequence of incarceration and the process of community reintegration hinders formerly incarcerated African American fathers' involvement in the parenting activities of their minor children (Woldoff & Washington, 2008). The lived experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers is believed to be shaped by one's involvement with the criminal justice system in addition to numerous social interactions with others in the community. Our current base of knowledge is deficient regarding the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers serving time under the conditions of community supervision. New discoveries about the parenting experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to community supervision enhances our current understanding and aids the process to restore, reunite, and nurture the parent-child relationship.

The reason for conducting this study was to capture the meaning and reality of parenting from the perspective of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to community supervision. I used qualitative interviewing to gather information-rich descriptions from the father participants which informed the research question for this study. The remaining is a synopsis of the chapter that follow outlining the details of the research process.

In Chapter 2, the theoretical framework for this study which involves transcendental phenomenology and social constructionism is explained. A review of the literature is provided to put forward the concerns related to incarceration, reintegration,

community supervision, and parenting that impact the lives of African American fathers connected to the criminal justice system. The findings of previous studies are outlined to illustrate relevant challenges faced by African American males connected to the criminal justice system shaping a discussion on the impact these challenges have on fathering.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The attitudes and views held by criminal justice involved fathers influences their parenting behaviors which affect the overall condition of families and communities (Wronka, 2008). Based on my review of the literature, there is little known about the parenting experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers who are required to participate in a community supervision program. In this study I examined the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children while under community supervision. I seek to raise the awareness of legislators, practitioners, advocates, and community members on the meaning and reality of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to community supervision.

In this chapter, a synopsis of the literature establishing the relevance of the problem is shared in addition to the literature search strategies I used in conducting my research. A description of the theoretical framework for this study is given including the rationale for its present application. An overview of scholarly discussion regarding the attitudes and influences of African American fathers and the impact of criminal justice system involvement on the male parenting role is provided.

Literature Search Strategy

A review of existing literature was necessary to understand and acknowledge scholarly perspectives on the theories chosen to focus inquiry and to explain the information obtained by research participants. The review of existing literature enabled

me to learn and incorporate scholarly insights on fathering, incarceration, community reintegration, and parental involvement in general. I used the following research engines and databases while conducting my literature review: Academic Search Complete, SocINDEX with Full Text, PsychInfo, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, SciVerse, Criminal Justice Periodicals, PsycARTICLES, ScienceDirect, Credo Reference, SAGE Online Journals, Wiley Online Library, DeepDyve, Questia, and SAGE Knowledge. I used resources of the following university libraries: the University of Saint Mary, Rutgers State University of New Jersey, Seton Hall University, and Walden University.

Following are the terms, phrases, and combinations of terms that I used to access scholarly works relevant to this study: *offender, criminal offender, ex-offender, parole, probation, reintegration, reentry, father, parenting, parent role, community corrections, parole conditions, parental involvement, formerly incarcerated fathers, ex-offender + parenting, ex-offender + parenting + involvement, ex-offender + parenting experience, community + reintegration, fathers + incarceration, community corrections + fathers, reentry + parenting, ex-offender + fathers + parenting, ex-offender + attitudes + parenting, ex-offender + father + parenting + attitudes, ex-offender + parental involvement, ex-offender + family, reintegration + community, ex-offender + society, ex-offender + community corrections + society, felon + parental rights, African American men + fathering, racial identity + fathering, paternity + child support, stigma + reintegration + African American men, offenders + health + African American men, African American + spirituality, social construction, social theory + social construction,*

phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, Husserl, and in-depth interview + phenomenology. I established search alerts through Walden Library and Sage Publications for notification on newly available material applicable to this study. Additionally, scholarly sources were discovered by review of the reference lists of scholarly works of interest to this study.

Theoretical Foundation

The perspectives of transcendental phenomenology and social constructionism were used to provide the theoretical basis for my examination of the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to post release supervision. Phenomenology, in general, focuses on the essence of a lived experience. Referred to as the study of essences, phenomenology is concerned not with cause or interpretation, but with observation and description of phenomena through an understanding of consciousness (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Osborne, 1990). Use of phenomenology shaped the framework for understanding the meaning of experience about fathers following an incarceration. In particular, the perspective of transcendental phenomenology became the systematic structure aimed at describing the meaning of the formerly incarcerated fathers lived experience in parenting.

Social constructionism, correspondingly, was used to examine the unique socially and culturally fashioned worldviews that affects the essence and meaning of experience. The presentation of social constructionism as a secondary framework is given in further detail following a review of transcendental phenomenology and its application to this study.

The development of phenomenology happened on account of an intense and passionate quest to realize a universal ontology for all a priori sciences (Husserl, 1962). The philosophical movement toward phenomenology inspired scholars to embrace the work and attitudes of a host of philosophers including Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Paul Ricoeur, Martin Heidegger, Franz Brentano, and Jean-Paul Sartre (Audi, 1995; Moran, 2000). Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician turned philosopher, has been acknowledged and praised for being the father of phenomenology and chief of the phenomenological movement that illustrated a love for both philosophy and scholarship (Borchert, 2006; Giorgi, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl viewed science as being in jeopardy of failing to remain practically sound and sought to reestablish knowledge, credibility, order, and usefulness for a sound view of human existence (Magill, 1990). Husserl emphasized the human experience, declaring it significant and of particular priority in comparison to experimental knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). For Husserl, the uniqueness of human existence is reason enough to distinguish understanding of the human experience separate from the physical world.

As Husserl matured, his philosophical position regarding phenomenology underwent transition leading to the birth of a transcendental perspective influenced by the work of Rene Descartes. The publication of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900/01) is understood to represent the period when he adopted transcendental phenomenology as a philosophy (Beyer, 2013; Luft, 2002; Moran, 2000). Transcendental phenomenology attempts to balance both objective and subjective approaches to human existence to capture the very origin of an experience.

Although transcendental phenomenology involves a number of elements, the examination of lived experiences of fathering following an incarceration will focus on the element of essences as produced by way of phenomenological analysis and transcendental-phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 2003). Phenomenological reduction, as put forth by Husserl (1917), is the technique required to achieve a thoroughly refined state of awareness absent of all mental contamination comprised of presupposition and preconceived knowledge. The process of transcendental-phenomenological reduction begins with *epoche* which requires a deliberate suspension of prior knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, understandings, judgments, etc. in order to embrace a new way of looking at the world (Husserl, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). The investigative function of *epoche* drives researchers toward an examination of the world by training our consciousness to see and identify what we see then articulating it descriptively (Moustakas, 1994). Following the dismissal or exclusion of all bias, transcendental-phenomenological reduction realigns our awareness to view the world that has been simply reduced to phenomena with fresh new eyes, leading back to the very root of the meaning attributed to the world according to our experience of it (Moustakas, 1994).

The origin of the transcendental philosophy begins with Descartes meditative path and representation of the ego, with the ego denoting intellectual processes. Descartes (1960) concluded that the essence of experience is grounded in having an existence of consciousness – a being with the nature and capacity to think. In support of Descartes, Husserl stood on the idea that human mental acts are intentional and clarified this certainty presenting his concepts of *noesis* and *noema*. The activity of our consciousness,

also referred to as mental or ego acts, is distinguished noesis. Noesis is literally perceiving and includes cognition, feelings, will and attitudes (Magill, 1990). Noesis is real and fundamentally necessary in the discovery of essences. For example, the seeing of a balloon is recognizing that the balloon exists. On the other hand, noema, the object described phenomenologically, is characterized as unreal and dependent upon perceiving (noesis). Noema has being, but is made up entirely of essences that do not change, and remain either solo or together with other essences prior to any experience (Magill, 1990). Noema is void of reality but has essential being attributed to it by the structure, properties, and qualities that encompass acts of perceiving.

The relation between the perceiving and the object brings forth its essence. To clarify further, “an essence is, simply, a phenomenon’s style, its way of being, and thus the essence cannot be separated from the phenomenon that it is the essence of” (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 18). The seeing of a balloon, for example, recognizes that the balloon exists, but to attain that the balloon is colorful and soft actualizes the balloon into an experience of consciousness. The quality of the balloon, colorful and soft, owes its actuality in consciousness to noesis – the act of perceiving (Magill, 1990). As put forth by Husserl (2003), the balloon, for example, is perceived as a whole unit of essences and the identity of it is only one part of an overall experience. The balloon is, therefore, one piece of the conscious understanding of an experience. Fathering perceived as a unit, in keeping with Husserlian thought, has specific ingrained traits that together form an experience. The specific character, uniqueness, or style of fathering, is a trait of

consciousness with its essence possessing open possibilities that are ready and waiting to be explored (Dahlberg, 2006; Husserl, 2003).

Further, the relation between noesis and noema, perceiving and that which is perceived, brings forth its essence. For Husserl, essences are the intentional character of the objects themselves seen in the experiences of the everyday world (Dahlberg, 2006; Moran, 2000). Within experiences objects are presented or regularly reoccur in a diversity of appearances (i.e. perspectives, occasions, seasons, ages, degrees, etc.), “each is a unity of a multiplicity with ever-shifting manners of appearance, a unity of its particular perspectives, its particular differences of a subjective here and there” (Husserl, 2003, p. 14). Unity in regards to an object is according to its presentation of appearance (Husserl, 2003) in an intentional experience inevitably comprised of its essence. Because we live in a world of essences (Dahlberg, 2006; Husserl, 2003; Moran, 2000; Vagle, 2014), our examination of intentional experiences – identifying the relationship consciousness [our awareness] has toward objects [what exists in the world] - clarifies the quality of its intended meaning (Dahlberg, 2006; Husserl, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014).

Phenomenology, in its various forms, has been applied across a broad spectrum of professional disciplines investigating an extensive array of problems. Scholarship embracing phenomenology may integrate the orientation philosophically, as a model for inquiry, as a theoretical framework, an analytical perspective, or framework in research methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Patton, 2015). The work offered by Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, and Khurana (2009) exercises a research method grounded in the

orientation of phenomenology. Wilkinson et al. utilized phenomenological analysis to arrive at the meaning of fatherhood for 416 males between the ages of 16 and 24 years. The participants of this study were deemed qualified under criteria that includes having a history of violent offending, and current residence within one of two specified inner-city neighborhoods inside the New York City area. The research conducted by Wilkinson et al. (2009) is relevant to this study solely on the basis of its use of phenomenological analysis which will be applied to bring forth the essences of fathering following an incarceration.

Since the wake of its popularity, the transcendental approach to phenomenological inquiry has been applied to research in a range of professional fields including education (Cilesiz, 2009; Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Mottern, 2013; Premberg & Lundgren, 2006; Wattchow, 2004), health and medicine (Chan, Levy, Chung, & Lee, 2002; Coward, 1990; Kluge, 2002; Martins, 2008; Williams, Moffatt, & Franks, 2004), business and employment (Berglund, 2007; Conklin, 2011; Gibbons, Woodside, Hannon, Sweeney & Davison, 2011; Gordon, 2011), and counseling (Pretorius & Hull, 2005; Rupprecht, 2011). The use of transcendental phenomenology in research with formerly incarcerated fathers on parole appears to be absent in the literature.

Social Constructionism, the second theory chosen for this study, is principally the sociology of knowledge. Based in a postmodern theoretical perspective, social constructionism is generally concerned with the generation of knowledge and understanding of the human world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hoffman, 1990; Patton,

2015). The philosophy prescribed to social constructionism supports the idea that any understanding of the world is shaped by a seeing of the world through human interaction and activity (i.e. communication, family, culture, etc.), and therefore challenges the very basis of common knowledge (Gergen, 1985). The human social relationship is fundamental to the construction of knowledge and reality as it is to be crafted in consciousness (Gergen & Hosking, 2006). The perspective of social constructionism must not be confused with social constructivism, although commonly used interchangeably (Patton, 2015). Both constructionism and constructivism are founded in the creation of knowledge within a social context. However, constructivism places emphasis on the act or experience of learning as a result of social interaction, holding value, validation, and esteem to one's imitable encounter with the social world; constructionism places emphasis on the cultural artifacts that are created as a result of social interaction shaping the seeing and feeling of things, contributing to a definitive interpretation of the world (Gergen, 1985; Hoffman, 1990; Patton, 2015). The relationship between human thought and its corresponding social situation, basic concern for the sociology of knowledge, delivers an impression of human experience that supports the use of the social constructionist perspective in this study.

The philosophical perspective of social constructionism has a contentious history that, in its beginning, involved the scholarship of nineteenth-century innovative German intellectuals. The onset of the sociology of knowledge is believed to have primarily emerged from the studies produced by Karl Marx (1818-1883) on consciousness and the social environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In his work, *A Contribution to the*

Critique of Political Economy (1904), Marx described his journey through intellectual inquiry and concluded that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness” (pg. 11-12). Marx’s interpretation of economic relations and community is a credited source for the establishment of the sociology of knowledge and its principle thought, the quality or state of being aware is established and governed by a common collective existence with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pg. 5-6).

Although described briefly, Marxist views on the sociology of knowledge lacked popularity and support as positions and ideas held by nineteenth-century German thinkers in opposition to the Marx’s doctrine surfaced (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Max Scheler (1874-1928), highly respected trailblazer on the sociology of knowledge, was first to use the phrase *sociology of knowledge* and offered a philosophical understanding with his most notable principle, knowledge of existence as a member of society is a priori to individual experience (Becker & Dahlke, 1942; Berger & Luckmann, 1966), genetically preceding the development of self-consciousness and self-value (Becker & Dahlke, 1942). The significance of society in Scheler’s sociology of knowledge is presented by Becker and Dahlke (1942):

Foremost is the social character of all knowing. Second, the perspective of social interests determines the selection of the objects of knowledge only, not its content, and still less its validity (a point that Scheler continually stresses). Third, the structure of society determines in part the forms of the mental processes through which knowledge is reached, though he insists that all functional thought-

forms be secured by grasping the essence – *Wesenserfassung*, not socially determined – of the objects themselves (pg. 319).

Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), also recognized as a chief pioneer in the move toward a sociology of knowledge, was first to enact an investigative focus on the subject. In the year 1922, Mannheim presented his doctoral thesis, *Structural Analysis of Epistemology*, investigating the participation of society as a basis for knowledge (Mannheim, 1952). In a later work, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1936), Mannheim continued his exploration in the sociology of knowledge asserting that,

The world is known through many different orientations because there are many simultaneous and mutually contradictory trends of thought (by no means of equal value) struggling against one another with their different interpretations of “common” experience. The clue to this conflict, therefore, is not to be found in the “object in itself” (if it were, it would be impossible to understand why the object should appear in so many different refractions), but in the very different expectations, purposes, and impulses arising out of experience (pg. 241).

The scholarship of Marx (i.e. conception originates in human activity), Scheler (i.e. knowledge is given in society before experience), and Mannheim (i.e. conception is influenced by its social environment), as given for particular example, has made a significant contribution to human social behavior situated in the environment. The conversation on the subject also includes praised scholars such as Edmond Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) Theodor Geiger (1891-1952), Maurice

Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Thomas Luckmann (1927-Present), Peter L. Berger (1929- Present), and Ken Gergen (1935-Present). To offer an exhaustive history and definition of social constructionism is to go against the goal of this discussion that is to affirm the application of social constructionism as used in this study. Moving in that direction, it is fitting to reference the works of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann who together advanced the conversation on the sociology of knowledge. In their systematic exposition, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966), Berger and Luckmann offered a broad spectrum approach to the sociology of knowledge to incorporate that which is acceptable knowledge in the relational certainty of human existence. The influences of key scholars in the movement toward a sociology of knowledge, such as Scheler and Mannheim, was acknowledged by Berger and Luckmann and is unmistakably detected through the principles and conclusions offered in their work. Providing interpretation on the everyday life, Berger and Luckmann assumed the following principles and conclusions that are particularly relevant to this study:

- Human mental perception or awareness always has object focus (pg. 20).
- Our mental perception or consciousness can fluctuate in and out of different realities that generate an experience of internal disturbance or upset characterized as a shock (pg. 21).
- The most important experience of others is face-to-face interaction characterized by reciprocal typifications that determine actions and become anonymous the farther they are from the face-to-face situation (pg. 30-34).

- Knowledge of everyday life is socially distributed yet unequally shared (e.g. shares with all, shared with some, not shared at all). "I share my professional expertise with colleagues, but not with my family, and I may share with nobody my knowledge of how to cheat at cards" (pg. 46).
- The accumulation of various types of experiences establishes a social stock of knowledge to be used in everyday life that is communicated generationally and differentiates reality by degrees of familiarity. The social stock of knowledge also supports and shapes typifications to be used in everyday life (pgs. 41-46).

My understanding of the everyday life as presented by Berger and Luckmann was the benchmark used to describe the parenting perceptions held by the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study. Research with fathers, on fathering, father involvement, father identity, etc. has been realized using social constructionism, or some derivation, to establish a theoretical basis or a conceptual understanding of analysis and interpretation. Variation in the use of social constructionism seems to be widespread. In that, efforts to discover research comparable to this study proved to be quite challenging. A social constructionist approach to examining the lived experiences of fathers following an incarceration was unfounded; however, research conducted by Ratele, Shefer, and Clowes (2012) apply social constructionism in a way that is generally relevant to this study.

Using the social constructionist framework, Ratele, Shefer, and Clowes (2012) applied discourse analysis to exact how meaning is created toward the communicative

use of the “absent father”, and “bad father” language on fatherhood. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 males residing in Cape Town South Africa who were either biological or social fathers in their community. The context of the constructed meanings for fathering experiences was understood to be socially influenced by the region’s history of apartheid, unemployment, poverty and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa, gender inequality, the burden of HIV/AIDS, and violence-related mortality (Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012). Other than the interviewing approach to research, the work completed by Ratele, Shefer and Clowes utilizing social constructionism parallels this study in assuming the influences of race and civil inequality, discrimination, stigmatization, marginalization, poverty, community unrest, and other factors of concern.

I applied transcendental phenomenology and social constructionism together to describe the parenting experiences of African American fathers following an incarceration in the context of community reintegration. Social constructionism provided some degree of comprehension on a father’s transition from incarceration to the community. For example, an experience of shock, as presented by Berger and Luckmann (1966), occurs as a result of conscious movement from one reality to another. Regardless of the different spheres of reality present in consciousness, what emerges is a clear attentiveness to the reality of everyday life that is ordered and objectified prior to appearance, “the here of my body and the now of my present” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pg. 22). As an uncomplicated illustration, fathers returning to the community following an incarceration with conditions of supervision exercise activities that are

ordered and actualized in advance of arrival. Public transportation such as taxi or train, existing prior to arrival in the community, may be used as tools to accomplish activity that perhaps sets the order for which each activity will make sense and generate meaning in the reality of everyday life. Fathers, in this illustration, may present an experience of everyday life based on the “world within my reach” creating an attentive consciousness determined by what he does, have done or plan to do (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pg. 22). Thus, the activity of being becomes his reality of everyday life.

Lastly, the experience of being is socially created (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2015; Levy, 2014). The raising of a child, fathering in particular, is a phenomenon (Adamsons, 2016; Adamsons & Palkovitz, 2014). Therefore, the experience of fathering is a socially created phenomenon derived from an environmental context solely understood by the individual constructing the true situation that exists in his world, the reality of everyday life (Martins, Pinto de Abreu, & Barbieri de Figueiredo, 2014). To arrive at the essential meaning of individual experience is the intent pursued with the use of transcendental phenomenology. My use of transcendental phenomenology may lead to a fresh new view of fathering, producing a pure description of its reality as presented in the world of African American fathers following an incarceration with conditions of community supervision.

Fathering is not strictly biological (Coleman & Ganong, 2009; Ives et al., 2008; Lamb et al., 1987), but contingent on social and historical processes that shape the individuals’ perceptions of parenting (Dick, 2011; LaRossa, 2007). The use of social constructionism will help explore the unique socially and culturally fashioned

worldviews that have an effect on the essence and meaning of experience. As a combined framework, transcendental phenomenology and social constructionism may allow observation of the objective and subjective material of experience to arrive at a description and overall meaning of the everyday reality of African American fathers parenting experience following an incarceration while obligated to community supervision.

Literature Review

The system of criminal justice is understood to be a contributing factor for the experience of homelessness, housing instability, unemployment, low educational achievement, and other dilemmas pertinent to assimilation and adjustment to life after imprisonment. Such conditions as these mentioned, and others unspoken, makes the desire and attempt toward family reunification and restoration that more beneficial for citizens recently released from prison (Dyer, 2005; Travis & Stacey, 2010). Involvement in the criminal justice system is perceived a hindrance to family reunification and restoration and has been determined to deteriorate the parent-child relationship (LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, and Castro, 2005). In my view, directing attention to the parent-child relationship is necessary since formerly incarcerated fathers are less involved with their children compared to other father types (Woldoff & Washington, 2008). More importantly, involvement in the criminal justice system affects the level of paternal participation as well as the attitudes and thoughts attributed to the parenting role (Dyer, 2005).

The socialized perceptions on parenting craft an even greater struggle for formerly incarcerated fathers in regards to satisfying the standards and expectations of responsible parenting behaviors (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Jeffries, Mehghraj, & Hairston, 2001; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Schneider, 2002). The strain of release, adjusting to key roles in the family (i.e. parent), court-mandated obligations (i.e. fines, restitution, child support, community supervision) in addition to the need to secure housing, employment, and comfort in an unstructured environment, creates potential that a formerly incarcerated father will evade efforts to participate in parenting behaviors (Dyer, 2005; Pearson & Davis, 2003). On the other hand, parental involvement may be the saving grace for formerly incarcerated fathers who desire to live a reformed productive life as a positive contributing member of society (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2001; Dill et al., 2016).

Research on fatherhood and fathering surfaced in the 1970s and was presented more extensively in the 1990s (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000) showing a reason for international concern (Baker et al., 2004). Interest in fatherhood and fathering continues in present day exploring various social and cultural shifts that shape the function of the role, meaning of the role, and its generational impact (Coates & Phares, 2013; Kalil, Ziol-Guest, & Coley, 2005; Ratele, 2012). For research purposes, an examination of the scholarship on fatherhood and fathering was completed. The following sections present a general understanding of the idea of “father” and “fathering” to establish an intellectual

foundation of parenting with insights related to fathers connected to the criminal justice system.

Conceptualization of Fathering

The label of father has been grounded on the premise of being physiologically crafted male and having human offspring (Langeveld, 1944; Ortner, 1972). The general definition of the terms 'male' and 'father' coincide suggesting universal acceptance of a gender specific distinction related to reproductive characteristics and participation in the act of procreation. However, true realization and manifestation of fatherliness demand the application of tangible and intangible substances yielding a widespread conception that translates beyond mere physiological existence (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). Being a father and the idea of fatherliness is more than conceiving a child with a female partner designating biological likeness. Fathering is anchored by the execution of a pattern of behaviors and practices that cultivate the development of offspring (Coleman & Ganong, 2009; Lamb et al., 1987). The assumed purpose and influence of fathering merges with personal and socialized perceptions of *maleness* and *manhood* that cannot be isolated, to frame the practice and performance of such role (Hunter & Davis, 1994).

The father role manages constant negotiation with needs, motivations, internal discord, and external complexities related to self, children and the broader community (Dick, 2011; Kolvin, Miller, Fleeting, & Kolvin, 1988). To comprehend the purpose and act of fathering is to become conscious of the gender-specific expectations and obligations that are socially constructed and imposed by society on males having non-

adult children (Morman & Floyd, 2002) in conjunction with male identity and the lived experience (Dick, 2011).

The basic quality that grants a person the authority to profess the designation of father, one having the natural ability of male reproduction, is shifting away from the traditional view to one that incorporates a broader perspective (Coleman & Ganong, 2009; Gillis, 2000; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). The idea of social fathers (Richter et al., 2012; Turney & Wildeman, 2013) and gay fathers (Berkowitz, 2007; Tornello, Farr, & Patterson, 2011) is part of the broader perspective. In this study, I focused solely on individuals who are male with the natural ability to reproduce, and are currently participating in parenting activities for the purpose of rearing children that were biologically conceived.

Altered Fathering Across Time

The position and expression of fathering endure cycles of transformation induced by political, social, religious, economic, and cultural components (Dick, 2011). Shifts in familial consciousness, relation, role function, and everyday activity are a fragment of our collective historical existence (Dick, 2011; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). With America's diverse composite of ancestry, the typical paternal reality is expected to involve a mass of experiences and interpretation of experience. The habits, manners, attitudes, and socially driven codes across time has become a source for understanding and articulating the historical experiences of men raising children while living in the United States.

Given our evolution of life and living, with an array of different versions of historical expression, it is perplexing and problematic to capture the pureness of meaning and perception of fatherliness in times past. Civil, business and commerce, religious, and political happenings (i.e. slavery, war, eugenics, industrialization, depression, People's Temple, civil rights, social welfare, family and child welfare, women's suffrage, technology, etc.) converted understandings and expectations particularly on father performance while subjecting varied weight to its established function (Crowley, 2009; Darity & Turner, 1972; Davis-Kean & Tang, 2015; Franklin & James, 2015; Ginther, 2015; Hall, 1988; Johnson & Johnston, 2015; LaRossa, 2007; McLoyd, 1998; Moynihan, 1965). Social happenings continue to shift the perspectives and expectations on the identity and role of the father in present day.

Historical happenings provide unquestionable evidence on the changes in parenting experiences and attitudes related to paternal liberties and authority (Coleman & Ganong, 2009; Geddes, 2008; Long, 2004; Puckering, 2009; Ricketts, 1989), particularly for men. Prior to the era of industrialization, for example, a father's function primarily involved teaching and coaching children in academics and moral standards that were expected to be displayed outside the home (Coleman & Ganong, 2009; Geddes, 2008). The fathers of present day are expected to go beyond teaching and coaching to assume duties of nurturing and mentoring (Ives, Draper, Pattison, & Williams, 2008; Krampe, 2007; Morman & Floyd, 2006; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). The pre-industrial authority of fathers portrayed a structure of control that supported the family's program of survival mimicking the likeness of a production center (Coleman & Ganong,

2009; Griswold, 1993). The fathers of present day may adopt and engage in a parenting model of shared fluctuating responsibility to attend to the rearing needs of children. Life in the pre-industrialized world held fathers in a more superior position of responsibility and authority in comparison to their female counterpart. The fathers of present day uphold a position of responsibility and authority, but may not necessarily be more superior. In this respect, fathers may be held to function from a mutually balanced position of parental duty with their female counterpart.

The maternal experience has ruled in conversation about parenting that has overshadowed the significance of the paternal position. Evidence of this fixation of the maternal experience can be discerned by viewing the historical progression of developmental theories such as Bowlby's theory of attachment and Freud's stages of psychosexual development (Crain, 2011; Geddes, 2008; Matas, Arend & Sroufe, 1978; Shoben Jr, 1949). The focus on maternal parenting is seen in social policy concerning marital separation and custody (Derdeyn, 1976; Kay & Philips, 1966; Kelly, 1994). The overall belief that mothers are better suited to care for children as opposed to fathers seems to prevail (Dowd, 2012; Mason, 2012; O'Donnell, 2010). With that, the role and responsibility of fathers faded from traditional expectancies in light of socioeconomic development and the execution of justice. The preference of mother over father fed the surge of paternal absence perhaps endorsing an attitude of exemption concerning the parenting activities of teaching, coaching, and discipline that were once primarily reserved for the father (Gillis, 2000; Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). If such an attitude

of exemption exists as a consequence of maternal preference, the lived experience of fathers in parenting may be shaped by and associated with this reality.

Roles and Patterns of Fathering

The function of males in the role of father as presented in this section is guided by contemporary western understandings, heteronormativity, and the concept of a sex/gender system (Kimmel, 2006; Nielsen, Walden, & Kunkel, 2000; Rubin, 1975). Cultural expectations for father involvement has changed from an acceptable casual presence, to a secondary job-sharing position, to now one that insists on increased engagement in roles previously accepted as primarily maternal functions such as nurturing and caregiving (Wall & Arnold, 2007). The role of father is also believed to have become more voluntary (Forste, 2002) holding to present perspectives that question the degree of influence fathering has on the child.

Fathers bring a unique presence to the parenting equation that is neither one-dimensional nor insignificant (Coles, 2009; Geddes, 2008; Doyle et al., 2015; Johnson, 1996; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). The diverse function of the male in parenting caters to the well-being and development of their children as well as the welfare and development of the male himself (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Forste, 2002). The state of a father's existence plays a part in his experience of involvement with his children (Jones & Mosher, 2013). The experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated fathers may present with challenges that differ from fathers without a history of incarceration. The following sections offer brief descriptions of common roles and patterns of fathering providing a general understanding of the responsibility a father may have in the

development of his children. General insights into the possible experience of the formerly incarcerated fathers' involvement in parenting are also offered.

Provider. Traditionally, the primary responsibility for the male or father in the home centered on securing the means for subsistence (Forste, 2002; Wall & Arnold, 2007). The role of provider or breadwinner is therefore perceived to have a sense of personal fulfillment, upholding the satisfaction of wage earner, supporter, and manager of resources (Day, 2004; Roy, 2004). A study conducted by Griswold and Pearson (2005) provided evidence to the reality of employment being the key factor absent in exercising the provider role among formerly incarcerated parents. Any sense of satisfaction to be experienced is potentially delayed given the issues of employability confronted in the community during the phases of reintegration.

For formerly incarcerated fathers, the provider function is commonly identified by way of child support payments and other informal monetary support given to assist with ongoing caregiving needs (Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010). Offering another perspective in research on father involvement, Garasky, Stewart, Gundersen, and Lohman (2010) emphasized the presence of in-kind support (i.e. the purchase of clothing, shoes, food, diapers, etc.) and visitation as two additional features associated with the provider function of fathering. The expectation to exercise the provider role and the absence of resources to do such a function creates strain for formerly incarcerated fathers leading to illegitimate efforts to acquire resources or a decision to reject the responsibility altogether (Forste, 2002; Lewis Jr., Garfinkel, & Gao, 2007).

Protector. Another primary function traditionally held by fathers is that of protector. The importance of this role has cultural implications, however, the socialized principle message to be heard and perceived by fathers is that they are the primary guardians or providers of safety for the family (Brownson, & Gilbert, 2002; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). In a qualitative study conducted by Summers, Boller, Schiffman, and Raikes (2006), the idea of “good father” involved the function and ability to care for children by way of protecting them from potential danger and harm. The activities that illustrate the protector role as likely performed by fathers involve the monitoring of social connections like friends and dating partners, observing music and television programming to shield from inappropriate exposure, inspecting surroundings while child is sleeping, providing guard when child is fearful or insecure, keeping child from playing with or by electrical outlets, and other such activities that align with this function (Palkovitz, 1997; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). The father as guardian has been shown to contribute to the emotional well-being of their children as well as prevent adolescent delinquent behavior (Cabrera et al., 2000; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998).

Nurturer. The function of caretaking or nurturing children is perceived the maternal responsibility (Cabrera et al., 2000). An existence of current social pressure is actively shifting caretaking and nurturing in such a way to realize a maternal/paternal balance of responsibility. Nurturing is typically depicted in regards to behaviors like taking a child to school, preparing meals, or bathing; activities that are observable and measurable by way of time (Palkovitz, 1997). A study that explored men’s experiences in

fathering (Ives et al., 2008) revealed the believe, as perceived by participants, that nurturing (i.e. caring for, providing for, protecting, spending time with, etc.) is a fixed responsibility to the child. The conclusions of the study established nurturing as a moral obligation that was valued much greater than the significance of biological relatedness.

The ability to function as a caregiver may be problematic for fathers who live separately from their children (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erikson, 1998), have a strained relationship with their maternal counterpart (McBride, Brown, Bost, Shin, Vaughn, & Korth, 2005), are economically unstable (Harris & Keller, 2005; Henry & Jacobs, 2007), or are legally barred to some degree from connecting with their children (Brodie, Paddock, Gilliam, & Chavez, 2014; Ives, Draper, Pattison, & Williams, 2008). The father-child mutual contact and relational exchange is judged critically important though research estimates that the amount of time fathers spend with their children is significantly less than their maternal counterpart (Doyle, Pecukonis, & Lindsey, 2013).

The stable and long-lasting nurturing presence of fathers has been shown to realize a quality-filled positive relationship with children and in turn generate positive perceptions of fathering (Doyle, Pecukonis, & Lindsey, 2013; Smetana, Metzger, & Campione-Barr, 2004; Veneziano, 2003). The presence of father nurturance has importance as early as infancy for the purpose of influencing children's ability to interact actively with both parents (Doyle, Pecukonis, & Lindsey, 2013). Over the course of time, the provision and need for nurturance are believed to diminish for the child upon reaching the age of 18 (Doyle, Pecukonis, & Lindsey, 2013). Formerly incarcerated fathers are

perhaps challenged with finding and having opportunities to nurture their children before the need for it ceases.

Mentor. Fathers functioning as mentor is another traditional feature that shapes the experience of paternal involvement (Coles, 2001; Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009; Hamer, 1997; Hawkins, Bradford, Palkovitz, Christiansen, Day, & Call, 2002; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006; Wall & Arnold, 2007; Veneziano, 2003). The idea of modeling involves and is influenced by the father's perceptions of and experience with his father (Gordon, Nichter, & Henriksen, 2012), father's perceptions of self as parent and experiences of parenting (Roy, 2004), and the child's perception of and experience with the father (Krampe, 2009; Veneziano, 2003) in performing mentoring behaviors.

Mentoring or role modeling is conceivably illustrated by fathers helping their children act and look a certain way, learn new things, develop new skills, and among other things problem solve life-related challenges. (Drakich, 1989; Krampe, 2007; Wall & Arnold, 2007). The respondents in the study conducted by Summers, Boller, Schiffman, and Raikes (2006) held mentoring/role modeling as a high quality priority necessary for exposing children to the world and teaching them social values. Researchers established mentoring or role modeling as an attribute of "good" fathering particularly because it requires effort and availability on the part of the parent (Morman & Floyd, 2006; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006).

Regardless of the source of mentoring wisdom, fathers perceive this function as an indispensable obligation (Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). The

challenge for formerly incarcerated fathers may be around social gatekeepers who block father-child interaction, and the probable constraints on time due to satisfying daily system imposed obligations.

Disciplinarian. The ability to provide structure, control, and correction is another feature of parental involvement held as a function of fathering (Brownson & Gilbert, 2002; Carlson, 2006; Hamer, 1997; Hawkins, Bradford, Palkovitz, Christiansen, Day, & Call, 2002; Ives, Draper, Pattison, & Williams, 2008; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Discipline is a means to foster constructive growth in character by teaching and encouraging self-control, respect, integrity, social values, and a moral sense of living (Doyle et al., 2015; Hamer, 1997; Johnson, 1996; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). The reason fathers readily assume the responsibility of discipline has been explained in present day scholarship. Primarily, fathers hold an unfavorable view concerning the disciplinary actions taken by other caretakers involved in their child's life (i.e. mother, grandparent, etc.) (Hamer, 1997; Hauari and Hollingworth, 2009). In performing discipline activities, the perception of consistency and fairness are essential for fathers (Hamer, 1997; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). Taking up the responsibility to discipline assures fathers that their sense of proper control, respect, and moral grounding is continually carried out with their children.

The ability to execute this role is a challenge for formerly incarcerated fathers who are hindered by social gatekeepers, strained relational connection with their maternal counterpart, and a lack of knowledge of such concerns existing due to absence from the child's primary residence.

Fathering and the Leverage of Criminal Justice

By virtue of one's distinct personality, knowledge, skill, and motivation, the experience of a father parenting his child is perhaps incapable of duplication. The need and push for increased involvement on the part of fathers is a testament to the widespread acceptance that father influence is more significant than previously claimed. The contribution of fathers to the activity of parenting may be swayed as a result of obligation or former connection to the criminal justice system. In the following sections, fathering will be discussed with regard to the criminal justice system. A brief history of community supervision will begin the discussion followed by an outline of influences that may present within the experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated fathers. Insights specifically tethered to formerly incarcerated African American fathers will be given to establish a probable base of understanding on the parenting experience.

The sanction of supervision. A historical review of the U.S. response to crime and punishment reveal changes in approaches taken to regulate anti-social behavior. Alternative means of punishment, in contrast to imprisonment, included flogging, mutilation, branding, public humiliation, workhouse, exile/banishment, sanctuary, the benefit of clergy, and recognizance (Foucault, 1977; Hanser, 2010; Roth, 2011) which were freely practiced prior to the American Civil War. The social changes in opinion and attitude created a shift away from punitive measures of punishment to those more rehabilitative in nature to encourage positive social existence.

Alexander Maconochie, known as the father of parole, is credited with influencing the earliest development of the offender classification system and

establishing an elaborate presentation of indeterminate sentencing. (Hanser, 2010; Roth, 2011). Indeterminate sentencing holds the idea of granting early release to prisoners for performing a certain amount of labor or upholding a certain level of good behavior (Ditton & Wilson, 1999; Hanser, 2010; Roth, 2011). The use of early release in offender processing was predicated on the belief that unwanted conduct by offenders can be altered through the use of desirable incentives (Hanser, 2010; Larkin Jr, 2014)). Early release is commonly referred to as parole. Characterized as a back-end sanction (Hanser, 2010; Klingele, 2013), parole is a distinct state of transition between freedom and confinement, dependence and autonomy (Hanser, 2010; Werth, 2011).

Parole is a systematic tool exercised to manage the process of restoring and integrating formerly incarcerated individuals to a state of productive citizenship within the community (Hanser, 2010). The United States Parole Commission is the principal authority concerning the approval and delivery of parole services for persons released to the community following a federal sentence. The governing authority concerning approval and delivery of parole services for persons released to the community following a state sentence vary across each state. Parole authority may be directed, for instance, at the state-level executive branch (e.g. Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina), state-level judicial branch (e.g. Colorado, Kansas, New Jersey), local-level executive branch (e.g. California, New York, Oregon), local-level judicial branch (e.g. Illinois, Texas, West Virginia), or a combination of authority structures (e.g. California, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania) (Hanser, 2010).

The operational rule by which post-conviction release (i.e. parole) is granted to individuals leaving a corrections-related institutional setting is of some importance in relationship to community supervision. Individuals returning to the community following a period of incarceration may be released in accordance with the unconditional rule—having no obligation to community supervision, or the conditional rule – consenting to a particular program of community supervision. The granting of community supervision permitted according to the conditional rule of release is accepted under a discretionary or mandatory arrangement. Discretionary release, mostly supported prior to the 1970s, is realized through the overarching authority of a parole board that operates to make release and revocation decisions, promulgate requirements for conditional release, frame policies and practices related to parole supervision, and offer advice about sentencing policies and new legislation (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008; Ditton & Wilson, 1999; Hanser, 2010; Paparozzi & Guy, 2009; Petersilia, 1999; Roth, 2011; Solomon, Kachnowski, & Bhati, 2005; Werth, 2011). In their function, parole boards create what is believed to be an individualized program of conditions and activities intended to assure successful transition from imprisonment to community, yielding favorable outcomes realized by the offender (Ditton & Wilson, 1999; Paparozzi & Guy, 2009; Petersilia, 1999; Roth, 2011; Werth, 2011). Upon discretionary release by a parole board, an offender is then subject to a system of monitoring or a coordinated structure of supervision within the community (Roth, 2011). Public partiality toward discretionary release drastically faded entering the 1980s along with the elimination of federal and state systems of parole (Hanser, 2010; Petersilia, 1999).

In contrast, a mandatory condition of release is attained devoid of any parole board structure. A mandatory release is applicable when an incarcerated individual meets the time of an originally imposed sentence with an accrued sum of good time credit (Solomon, Kachnowski, & Bhati, 2005). The accumulated good time credit becomes the remaining portion of the original sentence to be served under the arrangement of community supervision (Ditton & Wilson, 1999; Solomon, Kachnowski, & Bhati, 2005). The rise of determinate sentencing and truth-in-sentencing laws, intended to make certain offenders serve a substantial portion of their prison term (Ditton & Wilson, 1999; Solomon, Kachnowski, & Bhati, 2005; Hanser 2010), led to the recognized favored position of mandatory release within the United States in present day (Maruschak & Parks, 2012). Mandatory release to community supervision was, in part, the focus when approving individuals to participate in this study.

From confinement to community. Mandatory supervision has a systematically placed social cost that influences the experience of fathering subsequent to an incarceration. Individuals afforded the exchange of institutional confinement for community living assent to an arrangement of specified terms and conditions. Research within the United States regarding parole conditions presents a pattern of jurisdictional similarity (Travis III & Stacey, 2010) suggesting a perceived commonality in the operational experiences realized by conditionally released individuals. Through service research Travis III and Stacey (2010) ascertained a universal compilation of parole conditions within the United States that includes agreement to acquire and maintain adequate employment, stable housing, payment of fines and restitution, participation in

educational programming, schedule and attendance at regular meetings with parole/probation officer, successful completion of substance abuse treatment or some series of therapeutic programming, refrain from association with court determined undesirable persons, and consistent upkeep of one's status of law-abiding citizenship. Although not exhaustive, the list of required commitments ordered for completion by supervised individuals can be daunting after extended isolation from the community (Hanser, 2010; Klingele, 2013).

An increase in the number of parole conditions per supervisee appears to be a growing trend resulting in a rise in technical violation convictions (Travis & Stacey, 2010). Of the number of persons released with community supervision requirements, approximately 40% return to prison for a new crime or technical violation (Travis & Stacey, 2010). The 2012 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics made known that approximately 12% of the parolee population was re-incarcerated on the cause of parole violation by end of the year 2011 (Maruschak & Parks, 2012). By the end of 2013 27% of the state parolee population was re-incarcerated due to parole violation (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). Although indicating a decrease in parole violation reincarceration from the previous year (Carson & Golinelli, 2013; Maruschak & Parks, 2012), parole violation penalties have a sure impact on the reintegration process like incarceration since a return to institutional confinement is the customary solution. The scope of commitment around parole supervision may interfere or interrupt the process of parent-child reunification and relationship permanence for fathers who are battling parental rights termination, foster care regulations, adoption proceedings, and an overall return to father involvement

(Hirsch, Dietrich, Landau, Schneider, Ackelsberg, Bernstein-Baker & Hohenstein, 2002; Martinez, 2010).

The process and activity of community reintegration following an incarceration particularly challenges men with child-rearing obligations. The quality of life experienced deteriorates more than prior to incarceration as a result of active criminal justice system involvement (i.e. parole and probation), challenges related to achieving a feasible level of stability, and re-establishing familial connection while negotiating personal needs and aspirations (Snyder, Wormer, Chadha & Jagers, 2009). The issue of community reintegration for men is of concern particularly because incarceration impedes personal and social development (QCEA, 2011; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia & Khurana, 2009), devalues the responsibility of manhood as accepted by offenders seeking a second chance (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005; Roy & Dyson, 2010), invalidates ones' pursuit to actualize society's definition of "man" and "father" (Dyer, 2005; Marsh, 1988; Martinez, 2010), and reserves the value of trust generally afforded by society (Nelson, Deess & Allen, 2011).

The activity of community reintegration gives rise to oppressive behaviors by members of society finding cause to infringe on the basic human rights of formerly incarcerated individuals (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Woldoff & Washington, 2008; Wronka, 2008). Acknowledging self as a person undergoing the process of community reintegration inadvertently brings about restriction regarding opportunity and access to social privileges (Hirsch, Dietrich, Landau, Schneider & Ackelsberg, 2002; Piehl, 2009; Porporino & Robinson, 1992; Schneider,

2010), and proliferate social ills like discrimination and economic deficiency (Dowd, 2005; Gardner, Tuchman & Hawkins, 2010; Schindler & Coley, 2007; Schneider, 2010). The process of community reintegration also has significant implications for family (Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, Loney & Brooks, 2010; Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Pearson & Davis, 2003), community development and progression (Wronka, 2008).

Fathers and family. Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005) conducted a phenomenological study interviewing 51 middle-aged fathers with minor children who were anticipating an upcoming release. The methodological approach of this study incorporated Weiss and Fine's theory of method and the concept of people as meaning makers to produce descriptions of father experience one month preceding release. The eligible participants included incarcerated fathers with at least one child under the age of 18 years, a scheduled release date set one month after the interview, and having convictions not to include sex crimes or violent acts against a family member. Additional characteristics of participants included an average age of 35.5, more than half of participants being identified as Caucasian, having more than one child with more than one partner, approximately 85% having at least a high school diploma, and having a current average incarceration of 24 months. The interviews with 51 middle-aged fathers revealed the presence of helplessness and regret ("it's been hard to be a father"), identity shifts and ambivalence ("I really don't know whether to give up or try..."), parenting involvement ("I am being the best dad I can"), visitation difficulties ("they wonder where I am"), and variations in the father-mother relationship ("I feel like the mother is the problem", "she keeps us connected") (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005). The results of

the study confirmed that fathers experience difficulty maintaining a relationship with children during incarceration and harbor an intense desire to reunite and build a relational connection with children upon release.

Incarceration considerably impedes the communication and nurturing process between fathers and their children potentially beyond repair. A quantitative analysis conducted by Woldoff and Washington (2008) using a linear regression model to explore the engagement of fathers with their children revealed that on average formerly incarcerated fathers proved less engaged. Factors that likely contributed to the lack of engagement are suggested by the findings of the study to include the level of interference by way of penal supervision, impulsivity, a low degree of education, lack of employment, negative rapport with maternal counterpart, and age.

Researchers provided evidence on the importance of active family connection as a support mechanism to stabilize and maintain success following an incarceration. As previously referred, Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005) delivered an empirical investigation with incarcerated fathers in anticipation of community reentry and identified changes in father identity along with illustrations signifying the influence of family involvement in the social reintegration process. Kenemore and Roldan (2006) used grounded theory to explore the experience of 12 ex-offenders following an incarceration; eight men and four women between the ages of 28 and 55 years with a current release timeframe of one year or less. The participants were engaged in ten hour-long semi-structured interviews and received monetary compensation. The researchers reported a mutual history of abandonment, violence, early onset of criminal activity, and

failure among participants. More importantly, the study's researchers made known post incarceration experiences outlining matters related to perceived social isolation, strained access to necessities for survival (i.e. employment, housing, etc.), feelings of optimism and hope toward *staying straight*, and aspirations to become a role model for their children and others. The challenges identified in the study by Kenemore and Roldan bring understanding to the life stories of formerly incarcerated individuals and supports the overall value of positive family connection to encourage an optimal transition to life in the community.

For Martinez (2010) optimum existence within the community is most probable when formerly incarcerated individuals assume identities that influence pro-social behavior. Using the theory of role accumulation, Martinez conducted a qualitative investigation with 10 pairs of African American and Latino formerly incarcerated persons between the ages of 19 and 26 years. The research was achieved with active participation by family members of the identified formerly incarcerated persons. Martinez gave emphasis to the significance of upholding pro-social non-criminal identities to establish and maintain productive citizenship. The results of the study indicated that a pro-social role like that of father stimulates valuable interactions and relationships, leading to cognitive and emotive gratification given the tasks performed in accordance with the ascribed role. As studied by Martinez, formerly incarcerated males assuming the role of father are believed to have a greater probability for a positive value-based post incarceration life experience. Because a formerly incarcerated male assumes the role of father their propensity toward participation in illegitimate behavior is likely reduced.

In their study, Nelson, Deess, and Allen (2011) reported the outcomes of 49 individuals released from incarceration and returned to New York City under mandatory community supervision. More than half of the participants were males convicted of drug-related offenses and had served time in a New York state institution for a period ranging from 2 to 36 months. The participants in this study completed seven interviews; the first two weeks prior to the date of release, the second at the time of release, the third 24-48 hours after release, the fourth, fifth and sixth taking place weekly, and the final interview happening 30-35 days after release. The researchers explored areas of employment, housing, substance use, and community resources. Nelson, Deess and Allen's research concerned with the issues of family support and influence is of particular importance. The participants in this study was asked to complete two scales, the Family Strength Index and Individual Success Index, introduced in conjunction with the seven interviews. Analysis of the data originating from the two scales indicated a strong relationship between family connection and individual success ($R^2 = .240, p < .0003$). The formerly incarcerated persons released within the first 30 days to strong supportive family association were more likely to experience success due to having an active means for stable subsistence, accountability, and encouragement.

Employment. As a condition of parole supervision, recent research conducted on the issue of reintegration and recidivism confirmed that employment and financial stability are essential to the success of formerly incarcerated individuals living in the community (Nunez-Neto, 2008; Varghese, Hardin, Bauer & Morgan, 2010; Visher, Winterfield & Coggeshall, 2005). The attitudes and judgments regarding formerly

incarcerated individuals and their capacity to perform satisfactorily within the work environment create a barrier to job access and opportunity (Pager, 2007; Pager & Quillian, 2005). Varghese, Hardin, Bauer and Morgan (2010) conducted a logistic regression analysis with 275 college students to examine attitudes in hiring practices of individuals with criminal histories. The results revealed that individuals with criminal histories were approximately 15% less likely referred for employment. There were fluctuations realized based on the severity of the offense. The degrees of severity related to an offense was a considerable factor noted by Visher, Winterfield, and Coggeshall (2005) in their quantitative synthesis and meta-analysis of 33 correctional vocational programs. The conclusions from the study advised the use of community employment assistance services to specifically support individuals without a GED or high school diploma, little to no work history, and a recent conviction involving incarceration.

Employment training and placement is a necessary resource to repel economic hardship and preserve means of survival, regardless of personal background. Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reinforces that position by the established freedom code that states, “everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment” (Wronka, 2008, p. 284). Yet, individuals returning home following an incarceration are met with rejection, restriction, and disadvantage regarding opportunities for employment (Lewis Jr., Garfinkel, & Gao, 2007). Formerly incarcerated individuals confront a disadvantaged reality as a job-seeker regardless of active willingness to provide full

disclosure of criminal justice history and full display of pro-social attitudes and behaviors applicable to the workplace.

Success in acquiring employment allows for the ongoing financial support that essentially provides stability in the parent-child relationship. Finding gainful employment alleviates the impulse to engage in criminal activity for purposes of survival and subsistence which violate parole conditions and other commitments toward rehabilitation (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Nelson, Deess & Allen, 2011). The challenges around obtaining steady employment following an incarceration bring attention to the fact that any connection to the criminal justice system is a costly disadvantage.

Child Support. A significant portion of criminal justice system involved individuals are parents with minor children. By midyear 2007, Glaze and Maruschak (2010) reported that an estimated 809,800 state and federal detainees were parents to minor children. Of the calculated 1,518,535 incarcerates within our nation's borders in 2007, 52% of state detainees and 63% of federal detainees were a parent to at least one minor child (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). The number of parents incarcerated increased by 79% between 1991 and 2007 that undoubtedly increased the number of child support claims generated. The results from a study conducted by Sorensen and Zibman (2000) revealed that child support may account for nearly 40% of a family's income; however, the actual payment of child support becomes an issue when factors of race, economic status, education, and criminal background come into play.

The impact of legislation like child support is suggested to stimulate an avoidance response in newly released parents who do not possess the means to satisfy such legally-

based financial obligations (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; May, 2004; Roberts, 2001; Sachs, 2000; Turetsky, 2007) despite legislative presumptions (Harris, 2011). Formerly incarcerated individuals are potentially subject to as much as 65% garnishment of wages after obtaining employment (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Huang, Mincy, & Garfinkel, 2005; Roberts, 2001; Solomon-Fears, 2009). With the existence of state statutes that permits arrest and incarceration for failure in adhering to child support orders (Brito, 2013; Evans, 2014), newly released parents commonly request for assistance in meeting child support obligations (Pearson & Griswold, 2005). Although release violations do not occur specifically for inability to pay child support fines, the potential for re-arrest presents the prospect for violation. The potential for crisis due to elevated strain and stress is sure (Gideon, 2009; Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Roberts, 2001; Sachs, 2000) particularly due to the strain caused by debt repayment seeking efforts of collection authorities (Cammett, 2006; Hanser, 2010).

Research confirms that child support reduces child/family poverty (Solomon-Fears, 2009; Sorensen & Zibman, 2000), yet the payment of such obligation can be made only when suitable income is present and consistent. Laws guiding child support enforcement are state specific although the national standard in execution is to successfully collect payment on behalf of the minor child. The experience or state of incarceration in many instances does not qualify one for termination or deferment of child support obligations (Pearson, 2004). Additionally, incarcerated individuals may be responsible for retroactive pay, birth costs, court fees, and interests especially if the custodial parent is receiving welfare benefits (May 2004). The existence of child support

debt coupled with anticipated hardships of finding employment due to having a criminal history creates high levels of stress that could potentially lead to an episode of a crisis (Cammett, 2006; Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Roberts, 2001; Sachs, 2000).

Housing. Securing suitable housing, as it is declared an innate freedom under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Wronka, 2008), is not effortless or void of significant challenge for fathers following an incarceration. Formerly incarcerated individuals face difficulty acquiring or occupying “suitable” housing; suffering eviction or being subject to extreme liabilities (Hirsch, Dietrich, Landau, Schneider, & Ackelsberg, 2002; Schneider, 2010). The research reported by Nelson, Deess, and Allen (2011), Kenemore and Roldan (2006), and Naser and Visser (2006) confirmed that family support is vital for formerly incarcerated individuals for purposes of lodging accommodation.

During the time of incarceration family relationships are at risk of becoming strained, posing intense difficulty concerning reentry for the incarcerated individual (Geller & Curtis, 2011). Some of the research uncovered on the issue of family relationship strain assert that family members distance themselves because their incarcerated loved one becomes a burden financially and emotionally (Naser & Visser, 2006), and the facility where their loved one is contained is outside a perceived reasonable travel distance (QCEA, 2011). The family of an incarcerated individual may respond to their loved one with abrupt inattentiveness as a result of shame and anger over the nature of the offense (Schneider, 2010). Any expression of perceived suspicion around paternity or inability to maintain child support by an incarcerated individual likely

causes conflict and strain which establishes a relationship barrier between the incarcerated and their significant other (Pearson & Davis, 2003; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009). Consequently, when there is no active or available family support, attaining suitable housing is a serious challenge for individuals reintegrating back into the community (Schneider, 2010).

The persons obligated under the program of parole are responsible for securing suitable housing to support the monitoring and assessment mission of community supervision (Travis III & Stacey, 2010; Yahner, Visher, & Solomon, 2008). It is not uncommon for an individual to be released from a correctional setting without suitable long-term housing in the community (Walker, Hempel, Unnithan, & Pogrebin, 2014). The potential for a discontinuation of housing causing formerly incarcerated persons to endure multiple relocations is also probable (Yahner, Visher, & Solomon, 2008; Harding, Morenoff, & Herbert, 2013). The challenges around securing suitable housing may not be accepted as reasonable justification for failing to follow a housing plan or either acquire suitable housing within the community. To walk away from a containment facility to live in the community without the security of suitable housing accommodations leaves one to consider undesirable and less dignified options such as public shelter, boarding with strangers, sleeping in abandoned buildings or other low traffic areas within the community (i.e. parks, alleys, inoperative bridges, etc.) (Geller & Curtis, 2011). In such cases, the odds for successful reintegration are slim because the individual becomes susceptible to former destructive attitudes and behaviors (Nelson, Deess & Allen, 2011), counteracting any progress made while reintegrating back into the community.

Education. Research on education with formerly incarcerated adults provides evidence of impact on the process of reintegration (Osborne & West, 1979; Pearson & Davis, 2003; Porporino & Robinson, 1992). Low degrees of intellectual ability have been linked to anti-social behavior in both children and adults (Holland, Clare & Mukhopadhyay, 2002; Lindsay, Taylor, & Sturney, 2004; Loeber, Burke, Lahey, Winters, & Zera, 2000) making access, availability and opportunity for education even more significant. The fathers who seek to improve or reignite relationships with their children following an incarceration may experience difficulty in assisting with academic or learning needs (Booth & Booth, 1993; Gale & Cosden, 1997), and therefore may internalize a notion of failure when presented with such challenges by their children.

Formerly incarcerated fathers who are engaged in educational programming may experience a decrease in anxiety around perceptions of incompetence, increase the capacity to confidently support children in learning and other academic interests, as well as build confidence in commitments toward rehabilitation (Fagan & Stevenson, 2002; Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). Because low degrees of intellectual ability has been linked to anti-social behavior, educational pursuits by formerly incarcerated fathers may influence pro-social behaviors in children, family and familiar individuals within the community. Improved intellectual ability advances the capacity for employability and widens the access and opportunity to higher wage earning positions to meet financial obligations particularly around the care of children (Matsuyama & Prell, 2010; Shapiro, 1999). Education, with all its wonderful attributes, may not be perceived as such in view of community reintegration challenges following an incarceration (Listwan, Cullen, &

Latessa, 2006; Thompson, 2004). Formerly incarcerated fathers may find educational activities to be a challenge to family reunification and preservation because of the need to devote one's time (Scott-Hayward, 2011); a high valued commodity after an incarceration.

Time. The value and use of time have a relationship to a person's behavior patterns and perspectives (Brisline & Kim, 2003; Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). In the United States, the perception of and orientation to time are distinguished by the idea of clock time which emphasizes the seconds, minutes, and hours present in the day as opposed to the events or experiences that take place therein (Brisline & Kim, 2003). A clock time orientation provides an understanding in regards to the attitude toward flexibility and pace of time. Punctuality, for example, is of most importance and lateness is considered a blatant disregard for the value of one's time (Brisline & Kim, 2003).

Considering the view and use of time in the context of formerly incarcerated fathers returning to the community is important and necessary, especially for individuals who spend a significant sum of time satisfying community supervision directives. Measuring father involvement using a multivariate analysis, Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean and Hofferth (2001) discovered that the degree of external obligation outside the home (i.e. work, school) decreases the amount of time spent with children. An increase of involvement was found present particularly during the weekend suggesting a decline in external obligation, thus leaving availability for family-specific activity.

For supervised individuals, community corrections authority designates and consumes usage of time that necessitates mandatory directives as a top priority. A failure

to adhere and complete required daily tasks is no excuse on the part of the supervised, and is as well laden with consequences. However, family involvement particularly related to children has an expectation of one's time that perhaps introduces a conflict despite the mandatory directives given by the corrections authority.

Parental Rights Termination. In 2008, research attentive to the United States estimated 1.7 million children with at least one parent incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Solomon-Fears, 2009). Of the more than 800,000 persons released back into the community under court restricted supervision, almost half of them were parents of minor children (as cited in Travis & Stacey, 2010; Glaze & Maruschak, 2010; Solomon-Fears, 2009). Because research suggests that family reunification and restoration is beneficial to the reentry process the issue of parental rights termination is a worthy topic for discussion.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, enacted by former President Bill Clinton, requires states to terminate the rights of a parent who has a child sustained in an out of home placement for 15 months within a 22-month timeframe (Child Welfare, 2011). If the child is under kinship care or determination is made that parental rights termination is not in the best interest of the child, termination is circumvented (Child Welfare, 2011). The legislation also gives states the ability to make independent determinations regarding the guidelines surrounding parental rights termination (Solomon-Fears, 2009). In Alaska and California, for example, legislation has been enacted that “relieves the state of making reasonable efforts to reunify families” (Travis,

McBride & Solomon, 2005, p. 8) specifically in cases where reunification is perceived inappropriate or harmful to the child (Child Welfare, 2011).

The state of Kansas outlines justification for the termination of parental rights within a statute regarding the care of children (Revised Kansas Code, 2014). According to statute 38-2269, a court of law “may terminate parental rights...when the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the parent is unfit by reason of conduct or condition which renders the parent unable to care properly for a child and the conduct or condition is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future” (Revised Kansas Code, 2014). There are a variety of conditions that apply to involuntary termination of parental rights including conviction of a felony and imprisonment, failure to pay child support, and “lack of effort on the part of the parent to adjust parent’s circumstances, conduct or conditions to meet the needs of the child” (Revised Kansas Code, 2014). With the highest number of termination criteria, the state of Kansas agitates a growing concern around the issue of parental rights termination (Novak, 2013).

The matter of parental rights termination, as a result of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, intensified with regard to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated fathers despite the positive impact the parent-child relationship is believed to have on recidivism (CCJ, 2006; Genty, 2002). Between the years 1997 and 2002, the number of reported parental rights termination cases among people in the criminal justice system grew by 250 percent in contrast to a 30 percent growth between the years 1992 and 1997 (Genty, 2002). In that, parental rights termination is an imminent threat for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals; one that is a huge challenge to battle (Schneider,

2002). The notice of involuntary termination of parental rights for an active institutionalized parent is overwhelming, demoralizing, and stressful although involvement is limited. Learning about an involuntary termination of parental rights subsequent to returning home from an incarceration is damaging to the hopeful father anticipating increased parental involvement with his child. Additionally, an involuntary termination of parental rights weakens familial support toward efforts around reintegration and parent-child reunification.

In a different perspective, parental rights termination is a beneficial policy executed on behalf of children whose parents are abusive (mentally, emotionally, and physically) to them and others. This policy is useful as well as when executed in cases where the parent suffers from severe mental instability. To consider the direct impact a statute of this nature has on the community is also appropriate. For example, the cost of kinship and foster care has an expensive tag that is potentially burdensome to tax paying citizens due to the allocations of state funds to support such placements (Solomon-Fears, 2009). The social, mental, and emotional costs associated with this kind of care is felt by the child, his/her family, and the appointed caretaker (Travis, McBride & Solomon, 2005).

The present dispute around parental rights termination remains at a heightened level. In recent times, the Supreme Court of New Jersey ruled against the states' child protective services agency who sought to terminate the rights of a father on account of his extended period of incarceration (DYFS v. R.G. and J.G., 2014). The New Jersey child protective services agency was judged unsuccessful in proving by clear and convincing

evidence that parental rights termination was needed. Consequently, incarceration was rejected as being sufficient for the termination of parental rights. In general, overtly acknowledging a formerly incarcerated person for performing successfully in the role of a parent is unconventional practice. Formerly incarcerated fathers are subject to an arbitrary judgment declaring them incompetent or conceivably unsuccessful given their history of criminal justice involvement (Genty, 2002). As favored and promoted by Schneider (2002), formerly incarcerated fathers are believed to have the capacity to hold a loving, caring parental relationship with their children regardless of criminal involvement or history.

In spite of state and federal efforts, it is meaningful to note that the legal establishment of parenting does not negate the moral, value-based, and innate association and sense of duty that compels one to act in the manner that constitutes fathering. The dynamics of the parent-child relationship are immensely complex and cannot be regulated completely by a court of law (O'Donnell, 2010).

Health and Mental Health. An experience of physical and mental health decline is an extremely probable consequence for most incarcerates due to the closely confined nature of correctional environments, and the state of overcrowding and sub-par ventilation (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2010; Hammett, 2006; MacNeil, Lobato, & Moore, 2005). The individuals detained in correctional institutions for reasons related to committing an offense typically enter with pre-conditions of health and mental health, and usually experience some degree of deterioration while incarcerated. The ailments of high concern for correctional institutions include HIV/AIDS (Bryan, Robbins, Ruiz, &

O'Neill, 2006; Hammett, 2006), hepatitis B and C (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2010; Harzke, Baillargeon, Paar, Pulvino, & Murray, 2009), tuberculosis (MacNeil, Lobato, & Moore, 2005; Noeske, 2012), diabetes (Greifinger, 2007), psychosis, bipolar, schizophrenia and major depression (Baillargeon, Penn, Thomas, Temple, Baillargeon, & Murray, 2009; Caverley, 2006), sexual and physical violence (Kerbs & Jolley, 2007; Wolff, Blitz, Shi, Bachman, & Siegel, 2006; Wolff & Shi, 2009), suicide (Bonner, 2006; Spaulding, Seals, McCallum, Perez, Brzozowski, & Steenland, 2011) and other causes of death (Fazel & Benning, 2006; Useem & Piehl, 2006). The conditions of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, and tuberculosis are experienced among incarcerated individuals at a rate five to ten times higher than the general public (Hammett, Roberts, & Kennedy, 2001; LaVigne & Cowan, 2005).

The individuals returning to the community following an incarceration have elevated medical concerns that may involve issues related to mental health (Cuddeback, Corsi, Long, Booth, Kutner, & Steiner, 2011; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). In research conducted by Cuddeback, Scheyett, Pettus-Davis, and Morrissey (2010), formerly incarcerated individuals are more likely to suffer from infectious diseases, blood disorders, skin disorders, co-occurring substance use disorders, and schizophrenia. Formerly incarcerated individuals are more likely to suffer from multiple medical conditions including general medical-related ailments (Cuddeback et al., 2010). The suffering severity of a medical-related ailment may reduce any inclination of realizing a favorable state of health, being convincingly employable, and the capacity to achieve a state of overall stability during the process of reintegration (Mallik-Kane & Visher,

2008).

Formerly incarcerated individuals are estimated to have originated from disadvantaged minority-based communities where they likely return during the process of reintegration (Western, 2006; Wheeler & Patterson, 2008). There is a high probability that the communities receiving formerly incarcerated persons requiring physical and mental health support lack the ability to provide the necessary treatment services for them to maintain optimal health (LaVigne & Cowan, 2005; Luther, Reichert, Holloway, Roth, & Aalsma, 2011; Wheeler & Patterson, 2008). After their return to the community, formerly incarcerated individuals typically require follow-up treatment to manage their specific physical and mental health-related conditions after the first 30 days of release (Binswanger et al., 2011). Access barriers to treatment may include a lack of knowledge of available services and how to access them, long wait times at mental and physical health care facilities, the absence of providers to refill chronic medications as necessary, challenges in obtaining proof of citizenship documents (i.e. birth certificate, social security card, driver's license, etc.), excessive fees required to pay for medication and treatment services, and the inability of treatment services to match the individuals' level of need (Binswanger et al., 2011; Luther et al., 2011; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). The lack of access and continuation of access to medical support services enhances the challenges faced during the reintegration process.

The experience of failing efforts to seek assistance leads formerly incarcerated individuals to declare their health as either fair or poor by their eighth month in the community (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). The formerly incarcerated men with poor

health are at a greater risk during the process of reintegration than those with fairly good health. A significant risk is the experience of reincarceration. Formerly incarcerated men suffering from poor health conditions have been reported to experience reincarceration at a higher rate (Mallik-Kane, & Visser, 2008) perhaps as a result of reengaging in crime-based activities (Belenko, 2006; Binswanger et al., 2011; Golembeski & Fullilove, 2005; Luther et al., 2011). The perceived quality of physical and mental health not only increases the probability of reincarceration but has an influence as well on life expectancy.

Within the first 30 days of return to the community, formerly incarcerated individuals are at an extremely high risk of death (Rich, Wakeman, & Dickman, 2011; Wakeman, McKinney, & Rich, 2009); much greater than during incarceration (Binswanger, Stern, Deyo, Heagerty, Cheadle, Elmore, & Koepsell, 2007). Individuals with previous substance abuse history are likely to relapse during this time increasing the risk for experiencing overdose (Belenko, 2006). An experience of a drug overdose has been found to be a primary cause of death among newly released individuals in addition to cardiovascular disease, homicide, and suicide (Binswanger et al., 2007). The presence of mental and emotional upset may come prior to a relapse of substance use for previous abusers introducing the potential to dismiss any possibility of successful reintegration back into the community.

Questions surrounding the association between incarceration, health care costs and community well-being have been raised in view of the high rate of incarceration in the United States (Ahalt, Binswanger, Steinman, Tulsky, & Williams, 2011; Golembeski

& Fullilove, 2005). The high rate of infectious and non-contagious chronic disease, physical disability, substance abuse, and mental health experienced by the population of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals is deemed a threat to society (Binswanger, Redmond, Steiner, & Hicks, 2011). The community-based transmission of diseases, the cost of social programs for the treatment and management of conditions, and the potential for incidence of violence due to relapse or psychological breakdown is of concern (Baillargeon & Hoge, 2010; Belenko, 2006; Clear, 2007; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008; Rich, Wakeman, & Dickman, 2011; Wakeman, McKinney, & Rich, 2009).

Because of the specialized need for care among formerly incarcerated individuals with health and mental health concerns, family support is likely to be lower than one without these conditions (Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). A formerly incarcerated father having low family support conceivably leaves a child susceptible to the effects of long standing paternal absence, and a father existing outside the reality of ongoing paternal engagement.

Contemplating African American Fathering

African American fathers experience the same challenges outlined previously related to the population of incarcerated individuals. However, the effect of community reintegration for African American fathers following an incarceration is understood to be positioned within the context of realities around the African American existence in the United States (Unnever, 2014). A discussion about African American fathers may be incomplete without giving thought to this history. Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) posit that African Americans exist with a racialized worldview that shapes their beliefs and

behaviors in relationship to self and others. Therefore, an understanding of the lived experiences of African Americans living in the United States is only possible when ascertained within a context of race-relations (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011).

The cultural nuances specific to African Americans may alter the perception of a father's experience and may change the way in which the reality of parenting is described. Situating the realities of the African American experience into a workable perspective creates the framework for an increased awareness of culturally specific matters that may shape the African American fathers' post incarceration experience in parenting. In the next section, a profile of the African American historical and present day experience in the United States is given. The discussion concludes with an outline of possible impressions assumed by formerly incarcerated African American fathers managing the process of community reintegration.

Racism: plague from a dark past. In ancient history and throughout the late middle ages, identification of a person or group was articulated void statements about physical features, but of attributes akin to geography, language, occupation, patterns of behavior, and religion (Coombs, 2013; Smedley, 1998). Ancient understanding and practice of identification and group representation are believed to have been abandoned during the colonial era by the first generation of European settlers within the borders of what is presently known as the United States (Plous & Williams, 1995; Smedley, 1998). Individual and group identity was given a characterization that rested on the belief that one group, the *white representation*, is superior to all other groups (Rodriguez, 2007). Consequently, race identity and racism were introduced exploiting the physical features

of a human being, particularly the color of one's skin (Arat, 2006).

Racism, the immoral plague infecting American society, has been recognized as a socially invented construct (Arat, 2006; Berry, 2015). The beliefs and intentions of racism were instituted through the practice and public justification of slavery driven by the white representation (Arat, 2006; Feagin, 2014). The distorted consciousness of racial identity advanced purposes centered around inferiority, oppression, discrimination, prejudice, intolerance, and stereotyping (Arat, 2006; Bankston, 2006; Feagin, 2014; Rodriguez, 2007; Smedley, 1998; Spooner, 1997). In promoting this altered view of identity, a racialized hierarchy was established and supported giving social meaning to the physical characteristics of a human being.

The operation of racism. The early 1600s through the late 1800s marks the era of human trafficking and trading when Africans immigrated to what is presently known as the United States and forced into a position of dehumanization and oppression (Coombs, 2013; Degler, 1959; Rodriguez, 2007). First generation Africans to the states and their enslaved descendants braved hundreds of years in bondage catering to the greed, ill will, and attitude of inferiority held by the white representation (Wilson, 2012; Rodriguez, 2007). An unquestionable allegiance to supremacy was the absolute demand (Balkin & Levinson, 2012; Spooner, 1997). The operation of slavery subjected the first generation of enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants to physical abuse and torture, intimidation, isolation, sexual exploitation, moral, intellectual, and psychological deterioration (Altman, 1997; Rodriguez, 2007; Taylor, 2005). The first generation of enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants were stripped of natural existence and

citizenry by the white representation who fabricated a realization of barbarism, repulsiveness and animal likeness, explicitly pronouncing this group as being only three-fifths of a human (Maltz, 2013; Rodriguez, 2007).

The practice of slavery forbid the first generation of enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants from owning property, attaining education, participating in governance (i.e. vote, uphold the presidency, etc.), or exercising choice related to life, liberty, justice, and the pursuit of happiness (Balkin & Levinson, 2012). To uphold a lasting white republic, the enslaved were conditioned as chattel and suppressed mostly without guilt or a sense of moral decay being acknowledged by perpetrators (Feagin, 2014). There were oppressive practices imposed for the sake of satisfying an appetite for money, power, opportunity, and privilege eligible to only those defined free (Spooner, 1997). Slavery, therefore, was no more than a vehicle used to uphold the constructed ideology and system of superiority by the publicly perceived majority. The experience of slavery was ruthless and cruel as publicized by the accounts of men who recalled their memory of being a slave and described it characteristically in common with existing as a wild animal (Public Broadcasting Service, 2005).

The reality of slavery was the manifestation of a racist ideology that appealed to the immoral disdain held by the white representation against individuals and groups determined different and inferior. Pro-slave owners and supporters legally and morally justified slavery using biblical scriptures as evidence. The “curse of Ham”, based on the biblical account of ancient Egypt’s’ slavery program, was put forth by the white representation as proof that Africans were divinely destined to a life of slavery

(Rodriguez, 2007). While pro-slave owners and supporters proclaimed the curse of Ham, the enslaved declared a divine destiny of triumphant liberation as evidenced by the deliverance of God's people from Egyptian slavery through the work of Moses. The Bible created a spiritual grounding that instilled an unwavering faith, hope, and resilience within the hearts and minds of the first generation of enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants. The belief in a higher power and biblical scriptures as absolute truth shaped the foundation of identity and unity amid turmoil and depravity.

The operation of racism maintained white-on-black dominance (Feagin, 2014). In time, the misery and exasperated immoral treatment experienced by the first generation of enslaved Africans and their enslaved descendants incited nonconformist initiatives by both advocates and the enslaved insisting rights of freedom (Altman, 1997; Taylor, 2005). The institution and practice of slavery was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court prior to constitutional abolishment in 1865 with the enactment of the thirteenth amendment. Immediately following the constitutional abolishment of slavery arose a systematic program to deny African Americans their emancipated rights under the United States Constitution. Using the tenth amendment as justification, the states took legal efforts to replace slave laws by creating *black codes* that were purposed to bind African Americans to social, economic, political, and physical oppression (Altman, 1997; Sigler, 1998). Becoming an American citizen came at a high cost partially paid with an immense amount of bloodshed and tears. Sorrowfully, the cost of freedom required even more.

Unrelenting battle against racism. Racial inequality failed to cease with the constitutional abolishment of slavery. Perhaps, the existence of racially devised

difference was maintained and elevated in many respects to compensate for the legal ban on slavery. The era of reconstruction, marked by the period of 1865 through 1880, began a new phase of life within the United States for African Americans. Acquiring lawful citizenship as an African American within the states was welcomed perhaps as a social rebirth endowed with both civil and public rights (Franke, 1999). However, the newly gained rights were exercised as defined and regulated by the dominant majority (Franke, 1999). The formation of black codes placed strict parameters on rights assumed by African Americans for the purpose of controlling their integration into society and preserving white purity (Sigler, 1998). The efforts to become a civilized people within the states were not met without much struggle, sacrifice, and daunting persistence by African Americans. To their dismay, the year 1881 presented a new obstruction toward the fight for equality with the rise of the Jim Crow caste system.

The ideology of racism held by the white representation was sustained as the status quo by establishing a legal and authoritative act for segregation. The Jim Crow system of social control, expansion of the black codes, openly permitted discrimination and prejudice against African Americans that was expressly made justifiable using various tactics consisting of eugenics, theology, Darwinism, science, and political rhetoric (Goff, Williams, Eberhardt, & Jackson, 2008; Sigler, 1998). African Americans existed from a position of segregation in every facet of life – separate schools, churches and Bibles, libraries, hospitals, prisons, neighborhoods, entrances to public places, travel, cemeteries, playgrounds, drinking fountains, restrooms, restaurants, and other life-related affairs (Carter, 2008; Fass, 2004; Jim Crow Museum, 2014). Any open resistance, or

perceived resistance, to the program of segregation brought an assortment of consequences that included unjust jailing, confiscation of property, shooting, lynching, castration, dismemberment, and burning (Rodriguez, 2007). The organized groups like that of the Ku Klux Klan carried out cruel and undue acts of violence against African Americans that were utterly condoned (Arat, 2006; Bankston, 2006; Rodriguez, 2007). There proved little protection for African Americans, particularly in the south, attributable to the existence of an anti-equality justice system controlled by the white representation.

Segregation became the painstaking undignified standard of American life for African Americans for over 85 years. In the course of that time, constant portrayal and emphasis on the “inferior being” ideology was proliferated by socially segregated norms and images established in the culture (Fass, 2004). As part of that standard, African Americans were incessantly insulted without just recourse. Derogatory exclamations magnified resentment held by African Americans who were referred to as niggers, coons, darkies, monkeys, apes, and bastards (Fass, 2004; Goff, Williams, Eberhardt, & Jackson, 2008; Pilgrim, 2012). African Americans were disenfranchised civilly being subjected to unfair testing to vote or participate in democracy (Franke, 1999). There were disproportional realities in education with the presence of ill-prepared teachers, repetitious teaching practices due to an inadequate academic curriculum, lack of access to academic resources, and use of rundown facilities (Branch, 2015; Fairclough, 2000; Fass, 2004). Acquiring an education was also pursued in secret or engaged in by students using

extreme caution as explained by Susie King who recalled wrapping her books in paper to hide them (Smithsonian National Museum of American History, 2015).

In entertainment, music was segregated referring to works of African American artists as *race records*, prior to being coined *rhythm and blues*, and marketed under the social order of segregation (Roy, 2004). African Americans used in commercialized works were obliged to perform *coon songs* while commonly depicted in grotesque exaggeration (Mahar, 1999; Roy, 2004) to maintain a dehumanized characterization of being like a raccoon (i.e. lazy, inarticulate, easily frightened, chronically idle, etc.) (Pilgrim, 2012). One of the great African American artists of this era, Robert Allen Cole [1868-1911], began his musical career as a coon-song composer and produced the work *Mr. Coon, You're all Right in Your Place* that dramatized the sadistic stereotype ascribed to African American men. The work draws attention to the era's common sentiments that labeled African American men as hypersexualized vicious deviants and illustrated the common unjust action of lynching (Library of Congress, 2014).

In other aspects of existence, African Americans were restricted from patronizing certain eateries or required to utilize the "blacks only" entrances such as a back door or alley. There were restrictions on travel as evidenced by the Negro Motorist Green Book published from 1936 through 1964 identifying the roadways, hotels, tourist homes, restaurants, shops, service stations, and taverns that were safe for African Americans to visit (NY Public Library, 2015; Seiler, 2006). African Americans negotiated many risks of harm when traveling by car, and were limited to "blacks only" sections of trains and buses when using public accommodations (Carter, 2008).

A social bias and ignorance affected all facets of life for members of the African American community. As the years progressed, expressions of rejection toward the Jim Crow social order was made by African Americans and supporters of equal rights that took the form of riots, protests, boycotts, and various political movements. The role of the U.S. Supreme Court added to the significance of this era in history. The 1896 landmark ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Homer A. Plessy v. John H. Ferguson* gave credence to racial segregation making it lawful for states to function consistent with an agenda of oppression. The U.S. Supreme Court 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* generated momentum for the national civil equality movement by declaring segregated schools unconstitutional. Although the 1954 ruling did not overturn the *Homer A. Plessy v. John H. Ferguson* decision, upholding racial segregation in public accommodations was a landmark decision that corroborated anti-segregation sentiment.

For the purposes of this discussion, all the details concerning the condition and magnitude of experience for African Americans during the Jim Crow era must be reserved. It is fitting to note that the everyday life experience of African Americans in the social context of the Jim Crow era required one to yield to practices of exclusion and hate centered on an overtly manifested acceptance of white-on-black dominance. African Americans stood on the bravery and hope of their ancestors fighting the powers that lived by demanding complete and equal rights to life, liberty, justice, and the pursuit of happiness. A host of courageous and committed leaders and organizations were birthed and operated during this time that sacrificially fought for the cause of equality. The Civil

Rights Act of 1964 marked the end of the Jim Crow caste system. Nevertheless, the uninterrupted strife by reason of its existence lingers.

Still an unsettled community. African Americans continue in the fight for equality even now being 50 years beyond the era of Jim Crow. Though progress has been made the struggle remains without a definitive end (Wilson, 2012). While negotiating the discriminatory effects against their survival, African Americans have to wrestle with a marginalized existence. Presently, the communities and neighborhoods where formerly incarcerated African Americans commonly reside are debilitated and depressed by homelessness, unemployment, low education, parental absence, crime, alcohol and drug addiction, drug trafficking, gang association and violence, lack of access to sustaining resources, community blight, and poor community relations (Alexander, 2012; Wilson, 2011; Wilson, 2012). These concerns show evidence of deterioration within the African American community and were deemed an after-effect of slavery (Moynihan, 1965). An after-effect presumed intentional. Outlined in the blueprint of American civilization was the desire to sustain a racially divided society (Degler, 1959; Spooner, 1997). A plan that formerly enslaved Frederick Douglas has been recalled to have projected would transition African Americans from a state of being a “slave to an individual” to “the slave of society” (as cited in Feagin, 2014).

Racial hierarchy and racialized identity render a struggle for African Americans to overcome the remnants of a dark past involving slavery. The contamination of race consciousness by the philosophical declarations of the white majority has infected all social and political systems of American society (Alexander, 2012; Wilson, 2012;

Unnever, 2014). The influence of a flawed ideology of race drives pessimistic opinions about African American men. The sentiments are expressed typically by terms like gangster, hustler, and thug, propagating the stereotype of being untrustworthy, unruly, dangerous, and incorrigible (Bankston, 2009; Slatton & Spates, 2014; Tyler, 2014). A study conducted by Unnever (2014) revealed that such stereotypes heighten the likelihood an African American male will commit an offense. Conversely, the stress of living in view of socially constructed unfavorable stereotypes lead African American men to shift and change their behavior to alleviate any tension that may arise from their presence when around others (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Slatton & Spates, 2014). The rate and degree to which this kind of behavior shifting occurs among African American males is regrettably unknown.

The influence of a flawed ideology of race has an impact on how people publicly and privately relate to African American men. The disturbing demoralizing person-to-person exchanges in present day tend to employ communication tactics historically used to achieve racially biased intents. Offensive language and ridicule, for instance, may be used to express hostility or contempt without the threat of physical harm. An illustration of this point can be found in reviewing the lyrics of the racist chant uttered by members of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon college fraternity at the University of Oklahoma (Moyer, 2015). The members of the fraternity used the racial slur *nigger* and referenced the unjust act of lynching in a chant purposed to express open rejection to the inclusion of African American students as members of the fraternity. To further illustrate the impact of racism, a city police officer in White Plains New York made a racially offensive remark

to an African American male before he was fatally shot by the second responding officer. His offensive remark, “we have to talk nigger,” was explained by alleging the individual was “emotionally disturbed” (Liebson, 2012). A substitute teacher at an Illinois middle school was reported using the racial slur *nigger* several times during an 80-minute class, directing this remark toward the students who were present (Weingus, 2014).

Intentional acts of hostility, contempt, and hatred against African Americans can be executed by individuals within the same community. A non-profit administrator was federally prosecuted for racially offensive outbursts made to African American employees (Cawthon & Sgueglia, 2013). Account of the outbursts by the non-profit administrator was reported to last for several minutes in length and included utterances of the racial slur *nigger* asserting justification in its use as a depiction of character or disposition. The media reports, eyewitness accounts, and expert commentary on happenings like the ones mentioned have reawakened and reenergized widespread conversations and social movement on the subject of racial discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance. Any sense of weariness felt by the African American community may at times overshadow in progressing the current struggle, but every triumph is imagined to deliver momentum to withstand the fight against all acts of hate-induced unjust treatment (Maron, 2015).

Society’s way of thinking about and characterizing African American men remains problematic. Despite all efforts expended over the course of many years to overcome social bias, African Americans are still regularly confronted by the civil and political prejudice that overruled the past (Alexander, 2015; Dowd, 2012; Leap, 2015;

Pieterse & Carter, 2007). African American men are likely judged negatively or perceived threatening in ordinary everyday life circumstances (Taylor, 2014; Wilson, 2012). For example, when seen wearing a dark hooded sweater, driving an expensive car in a certain neighborhood, or reciting rap lyrics while walking down the street, passive spectators then typecast African American men according to unfavorable socially constructed views (Johnson & Stanford, 2002). African American men observe unwarranted reactions to their presence that may be revealed by, for instance, a woman clutching her purse in passing or when being followed while in a store in search for a particular item to purchase (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Events like these indicate a long-lasting stereotype that characterizes African American men as unruly, dangerous, and incorrigible (Bankston, 2009; Slatton & Spates, 2014; Tyler, 2014). Judgment becomes increasingly harsh when the individual is known to have involvement with the criminal justice system.

The leader of the United States, President Barack Obama, publicly proclaimed that the spirit and appearance of racism are presently found in every aspect of life (Maron, 2015). The United States system of criminal justice is believed to be the most common form of racial bias against African Americans and plays a significant role in shaping the lived experience of African American men (Alexander, 2012). According to the International Centre for Prison Studies (2015), the United States has the second highest rate of incarceration in the world, achieving a 500 percent increase over the last 30 years. Totalling over 2.2 million, the United States also has the largest prison population in the world (International Centre for Prison Studies [ICPS], 2015). There

exists in the United States an epidemic of mass incarceration where the African American male is disproportionately represented. As an illustration, 67 percent of Ferguson Missouri's population is African American which comprises 90 percent of the city's arrests (Haile, 2015). African American males were the largest group imprisoned within the nation's state and federal facilities at yearend 2013 and had the highest imprisonment rate compared to all other ages and groups (Carson, 2014). Once convicted, African Americans are sentenced 10% longer than other groups for the same crime (United States Sentencing Commission, 2010).

The issue of mass incarceration has been coined the "new Jim Crow" (Alexander, 2012), and gives weight to the concern of an increasing absence of African American men within the community (Haile, 2015). As like in the times of the black codes and Jim Crow, African American men in the present day are often confronted by acts of police profiling, harassment, and abuse that has in many cases ended in avertable fatalities. Recent cases of misfortune involving African American men, the fatal death of Michael Brown by a Caucasian police officer in Missouri (Shoichet, 2014), and the fatal death of Walter Scott by a Caucasian police officer in South Carolina (Swaine, 2015), were believed to have been exercised on the basis of hatred. Violence motivated by hate is particularly alarming when executed by persons appointed to protect and serve the public. Another illustration of hate-related violence is the fatal execution of nine church attendees by a Caucasian male claiming to be a white supremacist (Eversley, 2015). The perpetrator, however, was not a member of law enforcement.

With respect to Americans who uphold racially biased views, their attitude and manner of conduct toward members of the African American community may not change regardless of public outcry. The U.S. Supreme Court's June 25, 2015 ruling to uphold the Fair Housing Act of 1968 (*Texas v. Inclusive Communities Projects*, 2015), a significant civil rights milestone, and the debate over the removal of publicly displayed confederate flags across the nation supports the conversation and movement against racial disparity while emphasizing its present reality. A social columnist published the work, *So the confederate flag has come down. What the heck do we do now?* (Archibald, 2015), that put forth his view on the issue of removing publicly displayed confederate flags. According to Archibald (2015), the removal of publicly displayed confederate flags is akin to a kind deed since the issue is not about confederate flags, but of something profoundly more severe.

The greater and more serious issue for the United States is knowing that the impact of a flawed racial ideology goes beyond the belief that race is the primary determinant of natural qualities and capabilities, or that one group is more superior to another. Extended beyond the surface is a growing deep-seated intense and extreme sentiment of dislike for others corresponding to the socially fabricated ideology of race and racial intolerance. While sharing her knowledge about unjust treatment of vulnerable and marginalized persons in the United States, Catherine Davis, founder of the National Black Pro-life Coalition, blatantly rejected the characterization of racism in her commentary. She asserted that the issue of race and identity in America is not racism, but "skin colorism" (Ketola, 2015). Davis explains, "we assign value to people based on the

color of their skin, and then act according to the value we assign” (Ketola, 2015). Despite the fact we live in a pluralistic society the racial divide reinforces vulnerable persons becoming more vulnerable and victims of disparity eventually being re-victimized.

African American males having this understanding may present themselves guarded and often questioning the intentions of others when interacting especially with persons outside their community. Remaining consciously sensitive to the intentions of people is more or less an effect of a socially ingrained fear felt by African American men concerned particularly with defending oneself against the suspected evil motives of others (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). On the other hand, African American men may harbor intense emotions of anger consequently related to knowledge gained from the history of inequality, perceived discrimination, and directly enduring the effects of disparity (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Unnever, 2014). African American men harboring intense unhealthy emotions related to living amid the realities of racial bias are at risk of acting in ways that unfortunately affirm socially constructed negative perceptions ascribed to members of the African American community.

Racial inequality, frequently identified as a significant obstruction afflicting the community of African Americans living in the United States (Wilson, 2011), has no boundaries of gender, sexuality, geography, occupation, religion, or the like. A few remarks were given recently on the issue of racial disparity by the first African American in the highest office of the United States, President Barack Obama. In his commentary, President Obama acknowledges that racism and racial disparity remains a seriously present reality within the United States and urges that we extract hope from gained

progress knowing that movement toward racial justice continues (Maron, 2015). All hope to realize an end to discriminatory and divisive practices that keep the curse of a dark past alive is coupled with African Americans staying persistent, resilient, and forgiving. The ability to maintain persistence, resilience and to exercise forgiveness is as a result of the spiritual consciousness cultivated and strengthened during the ages of slavery (Brown, 2013; Rodriguez, 2007; Thomas et al., 2013). A shared spiritual consciousness among African Americans supported the certitude to configure a unified community of believers that would challenge oppressive powers of the day. The organized spiritual congregations within the African American community heavily influenced cultural identity and spearheaded many of the civil rights movements birthed throughout the nation's history.

As part of the spiritual grounding around American socialization (DeSouza, 2014; Rodriguez, 2007), African Americans were driven to maintain strong family bonds that stretched beyond natural kinship. Caring and supporting one another has become an essential part of African American identity and culture. Racism, however, has been blamed for depriving the African American community of its identity (Smedley, 1998) provoking persons to disregard, limit, or ignore the necessity and opportunity to maintain relational connection. To counteract the impact of race-based discrimination and prejudice, African Americans create and support occasions to ban together as a united group to preserve and affirm the importance of family and community in addition to continuing the fight for equality (Kershaw, 2001; Thomas et al., 2013). Historical organizations like the Prince Hall Freemasonry, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership

Conference (SCLC), and the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), operate in part to encourage community and promote efforts toward equality. Observances like the celebration of Black history reserved for the month of February, emancipation day or Juneteenth reserved for the month of June, and Kwanzaa reserved for one week across the months of December and January are valued community-based traditions enjoyed annually around the world.

The traditions established for and by African Americans like the ones mentioned are set to further educational objectives, preserve opportunities around the building of family and community, maintain a sense of hope, defend the African American heritage, and assure the historical battle for freedom and equality is never forgotten (Brown, 1994; Carter, 1997; Ferguson & Young, 1995; Harper & Quaye, 2007; McCoy, 2011; Pleck, 2001; Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). Although the African American community remains unsettled its strength of persistence, resilience, and forgiveness amid social and institutional disparity offers hope to one of its most vulnerable citizens, the formerly incarcerated African American father.

Offenders Fathering Amidst Bias. Interest in the practice and performance of African American fathering has increased significantly in part due to the trend of mass incarceration and father absence. Although a decline in the prison population became evident in the year 2007 (Carson & Golinelli, 2013; Glaze & Parks, 2012) the decline ceased by yearend 2013 with a 4% prison population increase (Carson, 2014). With the rise in prison populations, imprisoned African American fathers remain at an elevated level (Carson, 2014). The high rate of incarceration among African Americans, 3%

African American males imprisoned on December 31, 2013 compared to 0.5% Caucasian males (Carson, 2014), presumes that a substantial number of African Americans return to the community. In the Kansas City metropolitan area specifically, more than 4,000 releases occur annually realizing over 14,000 individuals under community supervision over the course of a given year (Geither, 2012; McDonald, Holsinger, 2010). In that, the potential for African American fathers to be successful depends on their ability to adjust to life beyond the correctional facility and balance that with the duty of responsible fathering.

Formerly incarcerated African American fathers return to the community with a pre-existing knowledge and experience of discrimination. As an African American, there exists the social issue of racism or colorism appearing in every aspect of the everyday life (Ketola, 2015; Maron, 2015). African American men are judged and labeled unruly, dangerous, and incorrigible (Bankston, 2006; Tyler, 2014). The purported characterization of African American men in society endorses an angry, reckless, weak-minded portrayal that, in many ways, affirms African American men as a social nuisance (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Goff, Williams, Eberhardt, & Jackson, 2008; Unnever, 2014).

As offenders, African American men may recognize the parallels criminal justice system involvement has with slavery, segregation, and racism. Slavery stripped African American men of their independence as a consequence of an oppressed reality consisting of being defined as human property that was owned, bought, and sold (Rodriguez, 2007; Taylor, 2014). Segregation required strict practices of isolation, coupled with racism,

demoralized one's healthy sense of self (Finkelman, 2009; Sigler, 1998; Wright, 2013). The criminal justice system places African American men in a position of being perceived as human property which eliminates the sense of manhood and personal security, preserves feelings of separateness by reason of being barred from exercising common rights and privileges, and discredits the positive consciousness of self and distinct uniqueness of character (Alexander, 2012; Arat, 2006; Binder, 2002; Kann, 2001; Rodriguez, 2007). As fathers, African American men are judged as being poor role-models incapable of responsibly nurturing a child toward becoming a positive contributing member in society (Leap, 2015).

Discrimination is a multifaceted experience for criminal justice system involved African American fathers. The life history of criminal justice involved African American fathers almost certainly includes living through some reality of drug trafficking, gang association, substance abuse, and violence (Belenko, 2006; Leap, 2015). Additionally, formerly incarcerated African American fathers are likely returning to communities where housing restrictions prohibit occupancy by persons with a felony conviction, and the denial of social program assistance is highly probable. Trying to negotiate the need to reinvent a life that is legally and socially acceptable becomes complicated for formerly incarcerated African American fathers given that the experience of discrimination extends beyond self to the immediate family (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014; Marbley, & Ferguson, 2005; Turney, 2014; Wildeman, 2014).

The children of criminal justice system involved parents are prone to suffer most from discrimination (Turanovic, Rodriguez, & Pratt, 2012), and are susceptible to leading

anti-social lives (Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Roettger & Swisher, 2011). Because children observe and negotiate life according to what they see as opposed to what they hear from their parents, the impact of exposure to unhealthy self-destructive behaviors by criminal justice system involved parents place children at a greater level of elevated risk (Johnson & Stanford, 2002). The children of criminal justice system involved parents are assumed delinquent by society despite evidence to prove the assumption and are subject to suffer ill-treatment hindering their potential to lead a pro-social life (Dishion, Owen, & Bullock, 2004; Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Kolvin, Miller, Fleeting, & Kolvin, 1988; Leap, 2015).

The impact of disparity within the criminal justice system may encourage African American fathers to live intentionally in a state of social marginalization and alienation. Making a choice to disconnect in some way for the purpose of guarding self against experiencing stigma within social settings may lead to the operation of alternative forms of civic engagement and socialization (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014). As presented by Lee, Porter, and Comfort (2014), parents who return home after incarceration may view living in the community from a different perspective than the general public, and may make decisions according to their adopted perspective. Distrust in government and negative attitudes toward law enforcement, reduced political participation, and the perception of discrimination are a few positions found to be byproducts of parental incarceration (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014). For African American fathers, distrust and skepticism may have already existed as an internalized attitude toward government and law enforcement (Leap, 2015).

African American fathers with a history of criminal justice system involvement may regard incarceration as a rite of passage (Dailey Jr., 2001; Leap, 2015; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Maruna, 2011) or an institution of socialization (Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014). The adopted position on incarceration, a rite of passage or institution of socialization, may be incorporated in processes and activities devoted to rearing their children. Ethnic pride and the awareness of racial bias may be integrated in the development of children increasing their capacity to live not exclusively with a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1899; Rodriguez, 2007), having an African American perspective and a European-American perspective, but with a multi-level consciousness of the world (McAdoo, 2002).

Formerly incarcerated African American fathers are likely to have strained family relationships upon returning to the community. The ability to connect with family reduces some stress related to housing (Harding, Morenoff, & Herbert, 2013; Schneider, 2010) and employment (Shivy, Wu, Moon, Mann, Holland, & Eacho, 2007; Varghese, Hardin, Bauer, & Morgan, 2010). Once back in the community, formerly incarcerated African American fathers desire to reconnect with their children and the probability of having multiple children with multiple partners is high (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Leap, 2015). The more maternal partners involved in the parent-child reunification process the more complex the circumstances become. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers will likely have to contend with the mothers of their children excessively guarding or declining opportunities to interact with their child (McBride, Brown, Bost, Shin, Vaughn, & Korth, 2005; Perry & Bright, 2012). Several reasons that may contribute to

the gatekeeping of children include the mother finding a new intimate partner (Perry & Bright, 2012), or the need to shelter the child from the stigma and discrimination that is associated with incarceration and reintegration (Turney, 2014). In view of the trajectory of African American children with criminal justice system involved fathers (Besemer & Farrington, 2012), any efforts made toward realizing healthy father-child relations will require cooperation from the maternal partner, and the involvement of both relative and non-relative social figures within the community to assist with assuring that success (Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2004).

The pressures around carrying out the function and responsibility of parenting come with socially suggested directives that may present discrepancy. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers often are exposed to messages meant to direct the motivation and function of role performance that perceptibly has a consistent theme of contradiction. For instance, the message “fathers are protectors” may be perceived or heard but, the ability and experience of maintaining this particular role function may be hindered by legally imposed restrictions as a result of custody battles or criminal justice system involvement. According to Brownson and Gilbert (2002), a scenario of this kind poses gender role conflict that ultimately influences participation and involvement in the father-child relationship. For active participation to be less burdensome, formerly incarcerated African American fathers may reconstruct parenting role-related messages making them more specialized to fit their circumstances.

There is a high probability that formerly incarcerated African American fathers do not have a frame of reference for what it means to be a good father. Many formerly

incarcerated African American fathers consider themselves raised by the streets and seek to find positive father figures to receive guidance in parenting (Leap, 2015). In general, fathers are likely to share stories and give advice when interacting with their children in hopes to make an impact on their positive development. The practice of storytelling along with family and culture-specific events may be used by formerly incarcerated African American fathers to shape the attitudes and behaviors of their children (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Hughes et al., 2006; McAdoo, 2002; Roy, 2006). Regular storytelling, participation in culture-specific and family-based events act as a conduit helping African American fathers engage their children (Ashbourne, Daly, & Brown, 2011; Hutchinson, & Cedebaum, 2011), and affirm their paternal identity as an African American male living in community (Gordon, Nichter, & Henriksen, 2012; Roy, 2006). In striving to be the best father they can be, seeking the highest quality of well-being for their child, formerly incarcerated African American fathers will not only receive messages but will give messages. The principle message criminal justice system involved African American fathers desire to communicate to their children is, “you have to be better than me. You have to be better than Daddy” (Leap, 2015).

The prognosis of success for African American fathers returning to the community after incarceration is poor given that post incarceration difficulties are estimated worse for African American males compared to other ethnic groups (Dyer, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Nelson, Dees, & Allen, 2011; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). The potential for incarceration and reincarceration is high for African American fathers leading to an overwhelming proportion of father absence and female headed

single parent homes within the community. For these reasons, and others previously mentioned, formerly incarcerated African American fathers will likely be referred to community-based programs to help manage their process of return.

The community programs and organizations that cater to reentry efforts would be most useful since the specific concerns of formerly incarcerated individuals will be a central focus. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers will perhaps be referred to a program like *Second Chance* (www.secondchancekc.org) that provides assistance with accessing employment, housing, transportation, medical and mental health services. Depending on the severity of circumstance, formerly incarcerated African American fathers may be referred to a program like *Catholic Charities* (www.catholiccharitiesks.org) that provides food, clothing, and support obtaining legal documents like birth certificates and government issued identification cards. To support the need to secure employment, formerly incarcerated African American fathers may be encouraged to seek assistance from a program like *M.E.N.S. Wear, Inc.* (www.menswearinc.org) that teaches employability skills while helping men develop a positive image by adorning themselves in professional-like attire.

The probability formerly incarcerated African American fathers will return to the community in debt is high. Child support arrearages likely contribute to the debt formerly incarcerated African American fathers hold (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; May, 2004). To avoid an ultimate arrest on the basis of child support debt (Brito, 2013; Evans, 2014), formerly incarcerated African American fathers may seek assistance from resources in the community to prevent further violation of their child support order. A resource like

Connections to Success (www.connectionstosuccess.org) may be sought to receive individualized child support assistance and participate in a child support debt compromise program. A steady compliance with child support by formerly incarcerated African American fathers may reduce the experience of tension and difficulty from their maternal counterpart, and help assure needs of the child are afforded in their absence (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Solomon-Fears, 2009).

The function of mentoring and the reference of wisdom for performing mentoring behaviors has cultural implications. The research findings suggest that fathers, generally speaking, take role-modeling cues from their fathers. However, there is a high probability that the role-modeling wisdom held by formerly incarcerated African American fathers was accepted from their mother or a social figure within the community as a result of father absence or the perception of “bad” fathering (Coles, 2001; Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009). Furthermore, African American fathers share the burden of maturing children in what Johnson and Stanford (2002) refers to as racial discipline. The reality of living in a society where racialized inequality exists requires a specific focus on teaching and developing the social consciousness of children that lead to a capacity to confidently navigate the challenges of discrimination and prejudice (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes et al., 2006; Johnson & Stanford, 2002; McAdoo, 2002). Since building community through care and support is part of the African American culture, formerly incarcerated African American fathers may be encouraged to seek the support of positive persons in the community to realize success in mentoring (Geither, 2012).

The struggle to rediscover life beyond incarceration while negotiating an environment affected by racialized tension may motivate formerly incarcerated African American fathers to go beyond themselves seeking strength and the resolve to persevere. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers may be encouraged to seek assistance from a program like *ReEngage, Inc.* (www.reengageinc.org) that empowers African American men to develop plans and strategies to overcome barriers. Upon return to the community, African American fathers will be prone to sensory deprivation having to adjust to life with a significantly reduced amount of restraint and control (Bonner, 2006; Haney, 2012; Hanser, 2010). Receiving ongoing assistance from a program like *Beyond the Conviction* (www.beyondtheconviction.org), founded by formerly incarcerated men who use a support group model to help former incarcerates adjust to life in the community, may be highly desired by formerly incarcerated African American fathers.

Consistency and fairness in discipline are particularly important for African American fathers who perceive inevitable social challenges and high risk factors related to the experience of life and living within the United States (Geddes, 2008; Gordon, Nichter, & Henriksen, 2012). As a consequence of stigma related to race and a history of criminal justice system involvement, formerly incarcerated African Americans experience discrimination in the community that likely produces psychological distress (Turney, Lee, and Comfort, 2013), and requires specialized attention toward sustained measures of positive coping. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers diagnosed with a stigmatized medical condition like HIV/AIDS may experience a more intense degree of psychological distress requiring specialized attention (Galvan, Davis, Banks, &

Bing, 2008). Because the African American culture has deep roots as a spiritually grounded community, formerly incarcerated African American fathers may pursue aid and support from a local church organization. Churches and religious-based organizations within the African American community offer an array of culturally specific services and programs that could meet the needs of formerly incarcerated African American fathers (Unnever, 2014).

Gaining the capacity to exercise self-discipline, maintain healthy family relationships, and cope with social stressors would be constructive for formerly incarcerated African American fathers. Learning how to be a positive contributing member of society, exercising self-discipline, positively channeling negative energy, and being active as a responsible father will be essential. Connecting with favorably productive people in the community will help formerly incarcerated African American fathers practice responsible behaviors that would positively increase their capacity for success during the process of reintegration and in nurturing the father-child relationship.

Summary

The labor of parenting is instinctively and deliberately achieved by absorbing the condition in which life and living occur (Haas & O'Brien, 2010; Kolvin, Miller, Fleeting & Kolvin, 1988). As social perceptions and attitudes concerning the function and authority of parenting change the expression of fathering changes (Dick, 2011). The necessity of male presence and involvement in parenting has been a steady thread in our nation's fabric, yet interest in the lived experience of parenting has fared marginally for formerly incarcerated African American fathers.

The realities that have an impact on community reintegration efforts following an incarceration were duly noted. Each reality becomes a distraction as formerly incarcerated African American fathers attempt to, for example, find meaning in life and gauge the trustworthiness of others immediately following an incarceration. Pre and post release, formerly incarcerated African American fathers tend to experience an increase of anxiety and disappointment partly due to the new sense of freedom and the knowledge of changes within family and community (Hanser, 2010).

The current emphasis on the male presence and participation in parenting is of importance to those seeking to build and enhance the quality of life as experienced by the most vulnerable children of society (Geddes, 2008). Unfavorable trends of elevated incarceration rates amongst African American men within the United States are of critical interest relative to the status of youth development and socialization (Kolvin et al, 1988; Murray, 2007; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Whelan, 1954). Following an incarceration, the responsibility of parenting being presented in conjunction with social reintegration may be, for some African American fathers, a duty that becomes second to others. On the other hand, formerly incarcerated African American fathers may see the duty of parenting as life's saving grace (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2001; Dill et al., 2016) reinforcing a reinvented identity, purpose, authority, and pursuit of self-discipline (Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Martinez, 2010; Nelson, Deess & Allen, 2011).

In the forthcoming chapter, I present the research design and research methodology. I explain transcendental phenomenology and how it provides the systematic structure necessary to describe the meaning and reality of parenting for

formerly incarcerated African American fathers using the lens of social constructionism.

The issues of trustworthiness and the ethical procedures related to this study are discussed before concluding with the chapter summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children while obligated to community supervision. I aspired to make a contribution to the current base of knowledge because I view an investigation of this kind as necessary to the advancement of work with formerly incarcerated African American fathers. The framework of transcendental phenomenology and social constructionism was used to capture the lived experience of the fathers. In this chapter, I provide an overview of my research design, methodology, role in the study, data collection, and analysis procedures. I also consider concerns related to trustworthiness and ethics as they related to my investigation.

Research Design and Rationale

The central question for research was developed taking into account the reported impact of incarceration on African American men (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Dyer, 2005; Lynch & Sabol, 2004; Pearson & Davis, 2003; Perry & Bright, 2012; Tripp, 2001; Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006; Woldoff & Washington, 2008), and the present deficit of available knowledge about the experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers. I attempted to answer the following question: What are the parenting experiences of African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision following an incarceration? Generating a trustworthy and sound answer to

this question required careful selection of a research design that would be compatible with the purposes of investigation.

Developing a research design is an important process that requires much consideration to assure the production of a work that is both relevant and of quality. Such a design relies on efficiency, effectiveness, and successful functioning of all components (Maxwell, 2013). The decision for adopting a research design required careful consideration of my subject, research question, assumptions, worldviews, and preferred strategy for inquiry. With all these things considered, I decided that a qualitative approach would be most suitable for my research.

Qualitative research is an approach used for conducting a scholarly inquiry. The qualitative research approach focuses on describing and understanding meanings attributed to a human experience or social problem (Christians & Carey, 1989; Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Research in the qualitative design tradition traverse disciplines and subjects with its many perspectives and approaches related to cultural and interpretive studies (Christians & Carey, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Qualitative researchers are not concerned with numbers, which is a chief characteristic of the quantitative tradition, but with using words to inductively focus on the individual meanings of a human experience or social problem (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Malterud, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Merriam, 2002; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). Because qualitative research is unstructured and open to interpretation, it requires reflection and ongoing inquiry; going from general to specific (Flick, 2014; Maxwell 2009; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). My effort to

understand the lived experience of African American fathers following an incarceration is attuned with the creative process of investigation held by the qualitative research tradition.

In this study, I intended to describe the meaning and significance of human interaction and activity, which is a central objective of qualitative inquiry (Christians & Carey, 1989; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). I view the parenting experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers as a matter that warrants and needs intense contemplation and continuous examination. Use of the qualitative research tradition aided the generation of knowledge on the parenting experience for formerly incarcerated African American fathers and inspired a cause for further exploration.

The use of theory in qualitative research is valuable to the investigation process as it helps inquirers keep an aim toward realizing intended goals (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). The theory is applied in various ways to properly align the process of investigation (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Somekh & Lewin, 2011). In sharing their individual research activities, for example, Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) used the viewpoint of black feminist theory to explain issues of power and representation in research with African American women. Weiner-Levy (2009) used a feminist ethical perspective to conduct research with Israeli Druze women who were experiencing exclusion due to personal pursuits deemed contrary to the cultural norm. In the same way, the theoretical perspective of social constructionism described the representation of experience as

expressed by the formerly incarcerated African American fathers who participated in this study.

I used the model of transcendental phenomenology to guide my research inquiry. The model of transcendental phenomenology fulfilled the means to describe lived experience from a fresh perspective (Husserl, 1913/1962; Husserl, 1913/1982). From the standpoint of Husserl, individuals' initial understanding of meaning originates from their experience with a phenomenon through their senses and must be described, explained, and made sense of by way of interpretation. The knowledge about experiences that we have is only known by our perceptions and senses which are stimulated to bring forth all conscious awareness (Husserl, 1913/962; Husserl, 1913/1982; Patton, 2015). The technique of transcendental phenomenology brought a valuable strategic focus toward achieving the purposes of this study.

The theoretical orientation of social constructionism illuminates the influence of culture on our personal selves that translate into how we see things in the world (Burr, 2015; Cunliffe, 2003; Patton, 2015). The idea of reality, as per social constructionism, is based on the context and value of some structure of experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Patton, 2015). A persons' reality is built and influenced in accordance with an understanding of his or her social context. Because of its use to describe constructions of reality, I view social constructionism as an appropriate theory for answering my research question.

I considered and subsequently rejected alternative approaches for answering the research question. The research question may be addressed using a narrative approach

focusing on two individual participants as the unit of analysis. The narrative approach to inquiry has the purpose of telling the story of a lived experience (Miller, 2007; Moen, 2006) as opposed to describing the meaning of a lived experience as in phenomenological research. This distinguishing factor led me to reject the possibility of using narrative research to achieve the purposes of this study. The approach of ecological psychology focuses on the intersection of human behavior and the environment, assuming what is necessary in search of new understanding about the human experience (Besthorn, 2002; Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). The primary focus of an ecological psychology investigation may be the individual; however, the lived experience of a person in action within a natural environment is the focus of investigation (Charles & Sommer, 2012). I would have had to change the focus of my study to adopt ecological psychology as an approach to research. For this reason, ecological psychology was rejected.

Given the circulation of evidence on the adverse impact incarceration has on family relationship (see Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Dyer, 2005; Hirsch, Dietrich, Landau, Schneider, Ackelsberg, Bernstein-Baker, & Hohenstein, 2002; LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005; Murray, 2007; Pearson & Davis, 2003; QCEA, 2011), the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to community supervision warrants practical exploration. An increase in understanding of fathering around this particular circumstance presents an opportunity to examine further the perceived impact reintegration has on the African American father, the family unit, and community. With statistical determinations suggesting African American males are a

significant portion of the criminal justice involved population (Nunez-Neto, 2008; Perry & Bright, 2012; Petersilia, 1999; Petersilia, 2005; Uggen, Manza, & Thompson, 2006), establishing further insight into the experience of fathering for African American fathers creates the ability to conceive and establish fresh approaches that are most applicable toward work with this population.

The central point of interest for this study was the experience of parenting. The concentrated effort was specifically on the designation of fathering emphasizing my sole concern for the paternal experiences of the African American male. As presented in Chapter 1, I identify fathering as meaningful behaviors of interaction with children that involves play, development, support, discipline, and other activities expressly qualified as fathering by the research participant. Incarceration was recognized as an extended absence from the community due to institutional confinement for a continuous period of three or more years since the time of arrest.

Role of the Researcher

My primary researcher role as related to data collection was to be the primary instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Seidman, 2013). The method of qualitative interviewing invites and nurtures a mutual researcher-participant relationship that exists on the basis of trust and respect (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher-participant relationship entertains reciprocal exchanges during the process of engagement yielding to information-rich data. In order to successfully build rapport to obtain information-rich data, Rubin and Rubin (2012) advised researchers to present themselves in a way that is meaningful to participants. I recognize this suggestion as a relational technique expected

to reassure the needed opportunity for honest dialogue. Applying the advice of Rubin & Rubin (2012), I presented myself to participants not as a general researcher, but as a researcher concerned with making the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers known to the public. I gained the acceptance of participants by clarifying my role as a voice articulating the lived reality of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers. In this way, qualitative interviewing as an interpersonal process was established and then encouraged (Josselson, 2013) ultimately producing a collaborated effort of constructed lived experience. The function of my role as the researcher was important, however, the distinct features of who I am as a person were additionally important and had bearing on my perceived position and the presence of potential bias.

Being a female researcher without a history of incarceration, having conducted research with formerly incarcerated males, accentuated the distinct gender and status differences in the researcher-participant relationship. The reality of having a non-parent status added to the difference that existed in relation to formerly incarcerated fathers. The given differences affirm an “outsider” identity. The term “outsider” represents the position of a researcher who performs an investigation with participants not sharing a cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage, or imagined community (Fine, 1994; LaSala, 2003; Weiner-Levy, 2009). Existing research concerning the researcher-participant relationship suggests that the position of an outsider on the part of the researcher increases the likelihood for maintaining objective and neutral while upholding personal and professional boundaries (Mullings, 1999).

On the contrary, “insider” represents the position of a researcher who performs an investigation with participants sharing cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national, religious heritage, imagined community, and other relevant qualities (Al-Makhamreh & Lewandohundt, 2008; Bhopal, 2001; Ganga-Scott, 2006; Weiner-Levy, 2009). My identity as an African American with inner-city upbringing presented a commonality for the researcher-participant relationship. As an insider, researchers are believed to obtain acceptance (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), establish legitimacy with participants (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008), and gain trust and openness leading to an extensive collection of meaningful data during the investigation process (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008). Tinker and Armstrong (2008) argue that researchers inevitably assume both the insider and outsider role at varying points in the research process. In spite of the obvious differences previously mentioned, the presence of similarities existed and varied among research participants influencing a need to shift insider/outsider positioning (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008) throughout the data collection process.

My personal and professional endeavors have been heavily influenced by my identity as an African American female growing up in an inner-city within the eastern region of the United States. The direction of my personal and professional pursuits was swayed by other elements of my individuality to include personality, Christian-based values and beliefs, innate ability, occupation as a licensed social worker, and the impressions of all lived experiences. Each of these factors created the potential for bias. Acknowledging the potential for bias was essential in minimizing its influence during the research process (Chenail, 2011; Shenton, 2004). My challenge as the researcher was to

reject any inclination to assume as opposed to inquisitively learning all there is to know about the participants' experience of the phenomenon (Chenail, 2011). Additionally present was the challenge to successfully exercise the skills necessary to attain the participants' acceptance and trust to candidly disclose all that was necessary to achieve the goals of the investigation (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Tinker & Armstrong, 2008).

The environment in which I lived during childhood was oppressive and depressing. I lived surrounded by an assortment of negative lifestyles perpetuating the stereotypes connected to the African American community. A lack of purpose and drive for education, spirituality, and prosperity seemed common. Prior to my first year as an undergraduate student, I devoted myself to enhancing the lives of those stimulated and nurtured by the inept customs of the urban culture. My drive to empower members of the African American community sparked a decision to pursue Social Work as a career that began and continued in working with the population of incarcerated adults. The experience gained over the course of the last 15 years working with the population in different regions of the country made it possible for me to build rapport, gain acceptance and trust to effectively conduct the process of data collection. I recognized the evident challenge of acknowledging presumptions and managing them with discipline and skill. My presumptions as the researcher were documented and reported to include the influence of beliefs, values, knowledge, and experiences during the research process.

Researcher bias is a crucial matter for all researchers to consider and carefully work through (Chenail, 2011; Krefting, 1990; Shenton, 2004). Established strategies exist to support efforts to ensure neutrality and objectivity in research (Chenail, 2011; Hycner,

1985; Krefting, 1990; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Shenton, 2004). For this study, the presence of researcher bias was managed by committing to the practice of maintaining an audit trail. Further management of bias was accomplished by executing the process of epoche / bracketing as specifically known to phenomenological research. Phenomenological epoche requires active reflection and annotation of thoughts and feelings that arise potentially influencing the outcome of research. Member checks were conducted to make certain my presumptions and preferences did not influence the collection of data before the process of analysis. The participants were offered opportunities to review and correct collected data to assure that their statements and views are reflected accurately.

Methodology

The Midwest region of the United States was the geographic location of interest for this study, specifically the Kansas City metropolitan area. The Kansas City metropolitan area is a two-state region spreading across 14 counties located along the border of the Kansas and Missouri River (Mid-America Regional Council, 2014a). The focus was solely on the Kansas side of the two-state region which is estimated to have a combined population of over 969,000 (Mid-America Regional Council, 2014b).

The research location, the Kansas City metropolitan area on the side of Kansas, consists of 6 counties (i.e. Atchison, Douglas, Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami, and Wyandotte) having a combined total of 38 municipalities. Approximately 5,848 persons comprised the community supervision population in the state of Kansas at the close of the year 2012 (Cadue, 2013b). At the end of May 2013, there were 5,646 individuals under

post release supervision which comprised of in-state and out of state residents supervised in Kansas (Cadue, 2013a). The statistical data available was not sufficient in noting demographics specifically identifying fathers among the population. Consequently, the size of the population of fathers with community supervision conditions within the Kansas City metropolitan area of the state of Kansas was unknown.

Participant Selection Logic

As an investigator making decisions about research design, the issues of sampling strategy and sample size were relevant prior to the collection of data. The method of qualitative research design allows for the use of a purposeful sampling approach that focuses on identifying individuals that will provide information-rich data to describe or evaluate the phenomenon relevant to a study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). For this study, the decisions I made regarding sampling strategy required critical thinking to address the questions of who, what, when, and how of the process (Marshall, 1996; Mason, 2010). The decisions I made about selection criteria defined the specific standards of research participation in detail for all interested individuals (Englander, 2012; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). The determination I made regarding sample size required a bit more of critical thinking (Patton, 2015; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). In the following sections, I offer an explanation on the decisions concerning sampling strategy, selection criteria, and sample size as related to this study.

Sampling Strategy. Having a sampling strategy that aids the data collection process was certainly valuable. A criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy was used

to depict lived experiences from the participants' perspective. My rationale for the use of criterion-based purposeful sampling was to assure specific focus on the phenomenon of interest by way of selecting subjects that would deliver information-rich material. Importantly, criterion-based purposeful sampling is not used to make generalizations, but for the intent of gaining meaningful insight into an identified phenomenon (Patton, 2015). I view purposeful sampling, in particular, as appropriate and necessary for securing the participants most suitable for informing this study (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Morrow, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007).

The recruitment of research participants began with initial contact to community sources that included the state department of corrections, local offices for community corrections, and local public libraries. My initial contact with the state department of corrections was for identifying the community corrections offices that service the highest number of community supervised males. I visited the identified local community corrections offices and petitioned to post my research announcement flyer (see Appendix A) in client accessible areas to announce the need for research participants. I contacted the local public libraries initially to obtain the guidelines and process for space reservation and to make advance reservation for three information sessions. The research announcement flyer was distributed by way of posting in public libraries and other local settings that potentially attracted members of the targeted population. All interested individuals were asked, per a statement on the research announcement flyer, to contact me with questions or to communicate interest in this study. The individuals that responded to the call for research participation acted voluntarily and were not permitted

to participate if their participation was understood or was being used as a coercive technique or alternative to established community supervision conditions.

Selection criteria. Determination of eligibility and subsequent selection for participation in this study was based on the participants expressed verification of meeting all predetermined criteria. The individuals that voluntarily participated in this study needed to affirm being a male person having a recent incarceration experience lasting for a minimum period of three years. The individuals needed to affirm having a recent release happening within 6-12 months of study participation with day reporting as a condition of mandatory community supervision. The participants needed to affirm being between the ages of 28 and 50 years and currently residing in an urban community within or no more than 25 miles outside the targeted geographical location at the time of participation.

The age prerequisite criterion was a noteworthy deciding factor for research participation. The established age range criterion is consistent with research conducted by Glaze and Maruschak (2010) on the demographics of incarcerated parents. Glaze and Maruschak found that more than half of male state and federal incarcerates were a parent to minor children with 63% to 74% between the ages of 25 and 55. The population of male incarcerates within the state of Kansas (92% of the total corrections population) and the state of Missouri (approximately 90% of the total corrections population) partially corresponds with the age demographic of incarcerated fathers determined by Glaze and Maruschak (Roberts, Goddard, Graves, & Williams, 2013). The population of incarcerated males within the state of Kansas will likely return to the community with

conditions of community supervision (Roberts, Goddard, Graves, & Williams, 2013) representing the arrival of over 4,000 reintegrating offenders returning annually to the Kansas City Metropolitan area (Geither, 2012; McDonald & Holsinger, 2010). I made the decision to set the age range criterion to begin at 28 with a maximum age limit of 50. The age range criterion ensured that selected participants represented the most concentrated group of criminal justice involved African American males returning to the community. As a result of the Kansas and Missouri Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision, selected participants may represent residents of Kansas with previous confinement within a Kansas or Missouri correctional facility (Billinger, 2013).

To further establish eligibility for participation individuals were asked to affirm non-custodial parental obligation for at least one child over the age of three years and under the age of 17 years living outside participant's home. I presented a copy of the Participant Eligibility form (Appendix B) once a verbal assertion to meeting study criteria was given. The review of and written signature on the Participant Eligibility form by each participant validated and confirmed eligibility (the meeting of predetermined criteria) for selection and participation in this study. The interested individuals who revealed having an offense that was sexual in nature as noted on the Participant Eligibility form were determined ineligible for participation.

Every individual that expressed an interest was given an opportunity to receive more details about this study. I invited potential participants to attend one of three information sessions held at the local public library to openly explain the nature of this study and its activities (i.e. time requirements, outlined activities, the location of events,

compensation, etc.). The individuals that attended the information session was informed of the challenges and potential risks related to active involvement. I provided this information in writing as well as verbally through the open forum to allow for a public platform of information exchange. All participants were notified that a written agreement of consent was a firm prerequisite for participation.

Sample Size. The sample size in qualitative design is determined by the knowledge a researcher wants to discover, the reason the knowledge discovery is needed, the consequence of not knowing, the advantages of knowing, and the available time and resources necessary for discovery (Patton, 2015; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). Schindler and Coley (2007) performed a qualitative study investigating the issue of parenting with nine homeless fathers. The authors engaged each participant for 45-90 minutes by telephone or in-person using in-depth interviewing as their data collection strategy. Kenemore and Roldan (2006) conducted qualitative research on the reintegration experience following an incarceration with 12 probation involved adults, eight of whom were males. The study subjected each participant to 10 one-hour open-ended interviews. Martinez (2009) performed qualitative research on 12 formerly incarcerated males of Los Angeles County to explore issues of community reintegration. The author engaged each informant in open-ended interviews to gather the necessary data for the study. Milner (2003) and Sheris, (2011), both completing dissertation requirements, performed research using samples below 15 participants and adopted interviewing as the strategy for data collection.

Qualitative inquiry is commonly known to have a small sample size within its design. Identifying individuals, settings, and activities that will produce the information necessary to answer developed research questions is noted as the primary concern for qualitative researchers as opposed to sampling size (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, the manner in which to determine sample size in qualitative inquiry is quite unclear. There is no definitive rule that can be applied (Creswell, 2013; Marshall, 1996; Mason, 2010; Patton, 2015). There are no statistical formulas to define sample size such as in quantitative design that uses a sample size analysis relying on statistics (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias, 2008). Because of the depth and breadth of qualitative inquiry, it is believed the discretionary judgment of the designer and stakeholders to decide the best approach to establishing a sufficient sample size. The use of a small sample is acceptable in qualitative inquiry and conducive to information-rich investigation and the intention of not producing generalizations (Creswell, 2013). With concerns for saturation, the need to achieve results with more depth as opposed to breadth, and constraints on time in conducting doctoral research, I upheld the goal of engaging six to ten participants in research.

I considered several factors of concern to determine the sample size for this study. The factors of concern included the purpose of inquiry, time availability, budget, access restrictions to the research site, and the amount of extensive detail needed to answer the developed research question. As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to examine lived experience as personally perceived by formerly incarcerated African American fathers who are parenting minor children while obligated to community

supervision. The research sites of choice had access restrictions due to their community-based nature (i.e. public library). The issues of feasibility (i.e. posting of research flyer, no involvement, no request for assistance or partnership), transportation (i.e. participants solely responsible for own transportation), and the nature of my professional status (corrections professional working in the state of Kansas) was considered and determined to be satisfactorily tailored to work with a small sample of participants. The decisions made regarding feasibility and transportation in addition to my professional status yielded favorable access to a Kansas state regulated community corrections setting to request advertising space announcing this research opportunity.

Procedures. The information listed below reflects the action steps that were necessary for participant recruitment, participant selection, and data collection.

1. Received IRB approval on October 22, 2015 (approval # 10-22-15-0256384).
2. Contacted the department of corrections, local community corrections offices, and local public libraries to establish the ability to advertise the need for research participants using an announcement flyer.
3. Posted and disseminated research announcement flyer (see Appendix A) in highly accessible areas within local community corrections offices, on bulletin boards of local public libraries, and around other community settings that attracted members of the targeted population.
4. Potential participants that made contact by phone or email to express interest were invited to attend one of three information sessions held at a

local public library. Each session had an allotted time of one hour.

Potential participants were encouraged to attend the information session within the allotted hour to receive details about this study and answers to questions regarding involvement. Potential participants that attended an information session and expressed a desire to participate were asked to review established criteria and affirm eligibility. The Participant Eligibility form (see Appendix B) was provided for written signature to validate eligibility.

5. Eligible participants were asked to provide initial informed consent and were then scheduled for an interview as per his availability. The local public library was the preferred location for interviewing; however, a change in location was entertained as necessary considering the circumstance of the participant. Only public locations were accepted as an alternative meeting location.
6. Interviews began with participants reviewing details about this study including associated activities, the role of participant, potential risks, community resources to assist with debriefing needs following the interview experience, and status of compensation. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of participation in this study that supported their ability to terminate the interview process and withdraw their voluntary involvement status at any time. Participants then reviewed

and completed the informed consent form. A copy of the form was provided to each participant.

7. Participants were provided the participant information sheet (see Appendix C) to complete. I answered all related questions.
8. The first 5-10 minutes of the interview was used to establish rapport with participants which were necessary to encourage openness and trust. Prior to the first question being asked participants were reminded that the interviewing process would include digital audio recording.
9. Interview questions were presented using an interview protocol (see Appendix E) to conduct standardized open-ended interviews with participants. The entire interview dialog was recorded and digitally tracked using an audio recording device that assured data accuracy and provided the ability to prepare for follow-up interviewing.
10. The interview process consumed 60-90 minutes of time. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were provided with a list of community resources to assist with debriefing whether or not distress was experienced.
11. Participants were asked to assist in confirming the accuracy of the information gathered by reviewing the interview transcript once available.
12. Participants completing the first interview were asked to agree to a follow-up interview. I scheduled the date and time of the meeting that was set in accordance with participant availability.

13. Participants were asked to identify a location in their community to advertise this research study that was both accessible and visible to potentially eligible individuals.
14. The recording device was checked after each interview to assure process was recorded as intended.
15. Post-interview notes were taken immediately following the interview and after listening to the audio recording prior to transcription. Post-interview notes were taken for the purpose of processing details about the interview setting, the actual interview, the information received, impression of the researcher, and any issues observed that required some degree of adjustment for follow-up interviews.
16. Participant interviews were transcribed within 72 hours following contact. Transcripts received an alphanumeric label to correspond with the associated research participant.
17. The transcription of each interview was reviewed once transcribed to take notes relevant to the information gathered.
18. Transcripts were made available and provided to participants for review in the manner requested (i.e. email or printed copy hand delivered or mailed) after the 72-hour period designated for transcription following an interview.
19. Follow-up interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach and use of an interview guide. Follow-up interviews with participants

asked and explored questions on predetermined topics or subjects that came to be of interest during or following the first interview with the participant. Procedures 7-18 were followed.

20. Participants requesting changes to their transcript were asked to submit that request in writing (i.e. remarks on the transcript, email, etc.). An alternative submission (i.e. phone call, brief meeting at the local public library) was considered according to needs of the participant. Verification of transcripts was requested again of participants following any changes made. The transcript verification process ended once participant agreed to its full accuracy.
21. The data collected was organized and analyzed using phenomenological research processes and the aid of a qualitative software program known as NVivo (version 11). Details regarding the analysis process can be found in the section titled “Data Analysis and Interpretation” of this current chapter.
22. After the data collection phase, I sent a “Thank You” letter to all participants and offered the ability to receive a summary of this study’s results once the dissertation was finalized and approved. Participants were advised to provide instructions on the manner of receipt for their summary of this study’s results.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers spend a great deal of time gathering data to satisfy the needs expressly identified for their study (Maxwell, 2009; Richards, 2015). Researchers have options regarding collection techniques and the management of data. For this study, I used in-depth interviewing which is the conventional method chosen in qualitative research for data collection. This method is one that is preferred by naturalistic researchers because it supports the collaborative relational connection between researcher and participant who generate knowledge that is valuable to the world (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The strengths and weaknesses of in-depth qualitative interviewing have been noted (Bowen, 2005; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007; Langford, 2000; Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2000; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Sturges & Hanrahan; 2004; Whiting, 2008), yet its appeal and effectiveness related to the purposes of qualitative research remain firm. The researcher-participant relationship is crucial in regards to the outcome of in-depth interviewing (Josselson, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Underlying forces pertinent to the researcher-participant relationship such as the negotiation of trust, cooperation, boundaries, disclosure, and reciprocity, effect the process of information gathering, and the degree of its depth and quality (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). Nonetheless, in-depth interviewing, executed skillfully, allows the researcher to explore experiences in great detail to understand and describe meaning while reaching across barriers, often as an amateur, forming knowledge about the experience to share with the world (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Researcher conduct in-depth interviews by creating open-ended questions intended to draw specific information from interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Interviewing is an act of communication and referred to as a purpose-driven conversation (Janesick, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) that requires a different kind of preparation and skill separate from that of observation. Interviews can be performed in a variety of ways yet its application is only suitable according to the nature of inquiry and its purposes.

My use of in-depth interviewing as a method for data collection was appropriate because it allowed the fathers to express in their own words the lived experience of parenting while obligated to community supervision. More specifically, I applied the method of phenomenological interviewing which is a specialized form of in-depth qualitative interviewing based in the tradition of phenomenology and characterized by the execution of specific processes (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). The process of phenomenological interviewing begins with epoche/bracketing, continues with phenomenological reduction, and concludes with structural synthesis. These processes as related to phenomenological interviewing are discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

In this study, I used a standardized open-ended approach for initial interviews and a semi-structured open-ended approach for all follow-up interviews. According to Patton (2015), the standardized approach is the best way to guard against variations, and the process of questioning will remain consistent for each interview. A standardized open-

ended interview approach is noted uncomplicated and organized in regards to data analysis (Devers & Frankel, 2000) as the researcher is able to quickly retrieve responses to research questions for each participant (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

The semi-structured open-ended interview approach provided a level of flexibility not available using the standardized approach (Galletta, 2013; Whiting, 2008). Use of the semi-structured interviewing technique allowed for my previously determined topic to be explored conversationally with probes and spontaneity (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The semi-structured technique also permits unexpectedly arising topics relevant to answering the research question to be introduced and probed during the interviewing process (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Whiting, 2008).

Instrumentation. The primary instrument for this study was the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Seidman, 2013). In this role, I sought to learn as much as possible about parenting as experienced by the fathers in this study (Chenail, 2011; Vagle, 2014). The standardized open-ended interview technique I used to focus the data gathering process was structured using an interview protocol (Appendix E). The creation of an interview protocol was necessary to provide a starting point for the data collection process (Josselson, 2013), facilitate disclosure of the participants experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), obtain rich thick descriptions of experience (Moustakas, 1994), reduce the probability of researcher bias (Qu & Dumay, 2011), and establish a basis for follow-up interviewing.

The interview protocol was designed using the model for interview guide construction put forth by Kici and Westhoff (2004). In Kici and Westhoff's model the

interview guide is divided into three segments, (1) the opening phase that is set to inform the research participant, (2) the main phase that is set to gather information pertinent to the research question, and (3) the closing phase that is set to debrief with the research participant and review next steps of the investigation process. Following the model promoted by Kici and Westhoff, I designed the opening phase of the interview protocol to include an introduction reminding research participants of this study's purposes, the timeframe for the interview, review of the informed consent, and completion of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C). I used the Participant Information Sheet to gather background information about each participant and to provide a warm-up for participants before asking core interview questions. According to Jacob and Ferguson (2012), it is best to start with the basic questions first. I designed the closing phase of the interview protocol to include comments thanking participants for their time, solicitation of immediate impressions by research participants, and distribution of available resource contacts within the community offering debriefing assistance if desired following the interview.

I designed the main phase of the interview protocol using carefully constructed pre-formulated questions in accordance with my review of the scholarly literature (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The main phase included a theme-based sequence of ten questions that were asked to elicit substantive information necessary to answer the research question (Kici & Westhoff, 2004). I used the interview protocol to ask each participant the same sequence of theme-based questions assuming that the questions were phrased in such a way to elicit relevant information (Qu & Dumay, 2011),

and assuming research participants were the subject experts qualified to provide the material needed to inform the research question (Vagle, 2014).

The questions I created for the interview protocol was structured according to the mini-tour and subjective open-ended question type (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013). I used mini-tour questions to explore or reconstruct the details of a particular event or experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used subjective questions to focus on the thinking and feeling of experience (Seidman, 2013). Keeping with the Kici and Westhoff model, I formulated the interview questions using simple, clear, unbiased language with short and easy to understand explanations. General guidelines offered in addition to Kici and Westhoff (2004) were used to formulate the questions within the interview protocol. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) advised the mixed use of descriptive, narrative, and evaluative questions to allow for free-flowing disclosure. The guideline was also suggested by Jacob and Ferguson (2012) and was therefore applied in the construction of interview questions.

I created the principal questions within the main phase of the interview protocol using the phrase “please describe” as opposed to “what” and “why” to avoid impressions of preconception or bias (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), to prevent the participant from having a sense of being evaluated, devalued (Kici & Westhoff, 2004; Qu & Dumay, 2011), and to diminish power shifting within the researcher-participant relationship (Jong & Jung, 2015; Nunkoosing, 2005). The wording of the questions focused on the description of experience particularly seeking information that does not coincide with what is already

known and understood about the parenting experience as related to formerly incarcerated African American fathers (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

I established content validity by reviewing and testing of the interview protocol. The criteria put forth by Kici and Westhoff (2004) for the construction of interview guides was modified and used to coordinate a review of the interview protocol. A review process to establish content validity was advised and performed by Kici and Westhoff (2004), and Havens and Vasey (2005) in order to evaluate the structural quality and relevance of the instrument. I took the advice of these researchers and coordinated a review process for the interview protocol. The reviewers evaluated the sequence of questions, language, clarity, complexity, opinion of possible interpretation, and overall fitness to the population and research question. I provided the criteria for the review in the form of a list of 17 assessment questions that was explained to each reviewer. The first review occurred following the second draft of the protocol and was completed by a pastor/counselor with experience working with the targeted population. After I received feedback from the first reviewer I made the suggested revisions before arranging for the second review.

The second review to establish content validity occurred after the third draft of the protocol. The review was completed by a community-based attorney that has experience working with the targeted population. After receiving feedback from the second reviewer I made the suggested revisions. The interview protocol was also tested by members of the targeted population to establish validity. Using members of the targeted population for content validation is an approach that is acceptable and recommended (Hammer, Bennett,

& Wiseman, 2003; Haynes, Richard, & Kubany, 1995; Vogt, King, & King, 2004). I conducted two consecutive test interviews with members of the targeted population who reside outside the research location. I received feedback about the interview protocol following each test interview and made the revisions as suggested.

Kici and Westhoff (2004) advised construction of interview guides that are simple, clear and easy to read. To ensure this criterion was met, I assessed the interview protocol for comprehension according to the English language development standards outlined by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium (WIDA, 2012). Additionally, I tested the interview protocol tested using the Flesch-Kincaid readability formula for reading ease and grade level (www.readability-score.com). The test produced a reading ease score of 70 and a grade level score of 6.4. Using multiple readability formulas, the interview protocol was scored at an average grade level of 7.4. Overall, the readability tests indicated that the interview protocol satisfied the readability standard set for text read by persons amid the general public.

Special considerations. As a researcher becomes accustomed to the art of interviewing using modern designations (i.e. web-based interviewing, blogs, chat talks, etc.), cultural and ethical implications must be carefully considered (Patton, 2015). For instance, language barriers may require interpreter assistance or request by the participant to make use of modern technologies (i.e. email, video conference, phone conference, chat, etc.). It is important to contemplate the consequences of using modern technologies to avoid potential breaches of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and conflict of interest standards (Mertens, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative interviewing traditionally

caters to the researcher-participant dynamic as a human relationship (Josselson, 2013), and is thought essential to the data gathering process (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Use of modern technologies in place of direct relational connection weakens the researcher-participant relationship and eliminates the act of immersing self in the investigation process (Meho, 2006; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). For these reasons, I used the traditional direct person-to-person method of interviewing to avoid the disadvantages associated with the use of modern technologies.

I carefully avoided the use of closed-ended questions as they can hinder the ability to capture the information needed to answer the research question. The use of judgmental language in the delivery of questions and responding judgmentally through non-verbal gestures during an interview was also avoided (Kici & Westhoff, 2004; Nunkoosing, 2005). Speaking clearly, providing an overview of the purpose and expectations, and keeping track of time during interviews was important to the quality of data I gathered and my ability to establish rapport with the fathers (Maxwell, 2013; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Another factor I considered involved the potential for participant distress due to the sharing of sensitive information during the process of interviewing (Nunkoosing, 2005; Patton, 2015). I maintained awareness as to the verbal and non-verbal cues given by fathers that indicated a reaction requiring special attention. In these special circumstances, I delivered a response that was respectful, supportive, and non-coercive (Josselson, 2013). I offered and reminded the fathers of their ability to refuse any sharing of information, and had the ability to request the withholding of information from being reported (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I actively considered the concern for anonymity and confidentiality. In qualitative research, the matter of confidentiality is habitually included in discussions about ethical procedures to protect and reduce harm to research participants (Clark, 2006; Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2012; Kaiser, 2009; Meho, 2006). The problem regarding focus on confidentiality is that the representation of its application in research is sometimes confused and as well impossible to uphold as a guarantee (Corbie-Smith, Thomas, William, & Moody-Ayers, 1999; Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2006). The term of confidentiality is quite frequently used synonymously with anonymity, and the indication of anonymity is misplaced (Piazza & Bering, 2008; Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2006).

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) advised that anonymity is all that qualitative researchers can offer research participants. The claim of this constraint is solely due to the definition of the term confidentiality which is based on the indication of secrecy and censorship (Flick, von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004; Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2012). The idea of anonymity is based on the indication of being unknown, unidentified, and undistinguished which also entails privacy (Piazza & Bering, 2008). Qualitative researchers are not able to offer or promise true confidentiality without abandoning research purposes that partially exist to guide the practice of making public subjective experiences (Nunkoosing, 2005). True anonymity occurs only when there is no connection to the identity of the participant and the respective data, and identification is unable to be made by no person including the researcher (Piazza & Bering, 2008; Whiting, 2008). In that, the assurance of anonymity appears to be all there is to offer.

The position of anonymity and confidentiality require proactive consideration to assure minimal risk and harm to participants. I incorporated the conditions for anonymity and confidentiality into the processes for this study bearing in mind the importance of clear application. I made a full disclosure of the research purposes, risks, benefits, and activities to all research participants (Jong & Junk, 2015). The documentation for voluntary consent addressed concerns of anonymity and confidentiality. I required the eligible fathers to acknowledge and assent to the conditions of anonymity and confidentiality before allowed to continue with research participation (Whelan, 2007; Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008).

I exercised the conditions of anonymity by replacing participant identity information with alphanumeric codes that were known only by the researcher (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). I recorded the research interviews and the audio files were destroyed immediately following the process of transcriptions (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). My knowledge about the fathers' involvement in this study was not advertised or shared in order to uphold confidentiality (Kaiser, 2009; Ogden, 2008). My discussion about and relation to the fathers' involvement was restricted to the faculty members of the dissertation committee (Flick, von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004). I notified the fathers of the legal limits of confidentiality and the circumstances that would require public disclosure (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2012; Israel, 2004).

While engaged in the interviewing process I sought to protect the interests of participants and the research purposes while proactively applying safety measures for the

sake of self and interviewee (Nelson, 2004; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is important to emphasize my safety in the process of inquiry since the idea of protection and security in research is largely concerned with the research participant (Patterson, Gregory, & Thorne, 1999). The personal protection and security of the researcher warrant attention especially in research with high-risk populations and with purposes around sensitive subjects (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). A qualitative study, conducted by Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) with visitors and officers from county jails of a northeastern state of the United States, compared the use of in-person and telephone in-depth interviews and acknowledged that there is a concern for researcher safety in qualitative field research.

The issue of safety has been genuinely offered as a factor of high importance (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007; Langford, 2000; Patterson, Gregory, & Thorne, 1999; Patton, 2015; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Researchers are therefore advised to calculate potential risks of harm prior to the data collection process and execute strategic actions to minimize and eliminate risks (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong; Langford, 2000; Patton, 2015). In accordance with the recommendations put forth by Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2007), Langford (2000), Nelson (2004), and Patterson, Gregory, and Thorne (1999), I created a safety protocol (see Appendix D) to minimize risks during the research process. I modified the safety protocol as necessary throughout the research process to account for unforeseen concerns of risks to safety. I upheld the safety protocol as a priority before, during, and after all participant contact.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative research is flexible in that guidelines and procedures for implementation are not definitive. Exercising a broad range of creativity is legitimately allowed in respect to the purposes and the conceptual lens of research. When it comes to the specific approach to analysis, the choice and scope of activity depend on the analytical intellect and style of the researcher. As a qualitative researcher, I must be confident in his or her ability to perform the activities of their study and should apply complicated processes only if it is appropriate and feasible. I developed this study in a manner that is appropriate and practical. The strategies and techniques used cater to creativity and my style as a Social Work practitioner.

The techniques accepted by transcendental phenomenology were incorporated to capture the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children while obligated to community supervision conditions. Particularly, I recorded the meaning of lived experience as described by the fathers by performing the tasks of phenomenological epoche, transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. I performed three note-taking activities prior to the application of the above phenomenological techniques to stimulate thought, awareness, and logical understanding of the collected data.

During the process of investigation, I acquired raw data using the technique of interviewing. I began specific strategies for the organization and analysis of data began conclusion of the first participant interview and continued simultaneously throughout the data collection process. The decision to progress through the data collection and analysis

activity in this manner comes in view of the advice offered to qualitative researchers (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015; Siedman, 2013). During the process of investigation, as declared by Maxwell (2013), qualitative researchers bear a tendency to postpone data analysis inadvertently creating a mass accumulation of data that advances the already challenging nature of the activity. Maxwell's statement is consistent with the sentiment presented by Merriam (2002) who believes the putting off of data analysis is to surrender the need for credibility and reliability, provoking a catastrophe.

To counteract any potential inclination to suspend analysis, I adopted a systematic approach to the task of data organization and analysis. In that, I accomplished the first step in data analysis by performing a post-interview note-taking activity to capture details concerning the interview setting, the actual interview process, information received, impressions related to thoughts and feelings, and emerging topics appropriate for future exploration. I conducted the interviews using an audio recording device that was replayed establishing a second post-interview note-taking activity. I subsequently transcribed the recorded interviews to bring forth written accounts of interactions with each father. As presented by Kowal and O'Connell (2004), transcripts reproduce the transitory nature of conversation into a printed form allowing for its use in research analysis, complementing what was recorded and digitally tracked through the use of an audio recording device. The process of transcription, and my reading and thinking about interview transcripts facilitated the third post-interview note-taking activity. Creswell (2013), Maxwell (2013), and Merriam (2002) support the use of all three strategies as valuable opportunities to

bring about meaningful thought, critical awareness, and logical understanding of the research data.

Phenomenological Epoche. Husserl's idea of epoche, also known as bracketing (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015), requires a suspension of one's established system of knowledge to embrace that which freshly enters into consciousness (Kockelmans, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). A deliberate disregard for prior knowledge, beliefs, experiences, motivations, judgments, and the like, is an indispensable practice that inhibits the direct influence of such biases that will inevitably direct one's seeing and thinking (Kockelmans, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). Kockelmans presentation on the meaning of epoche as put forth by Husserl is to shift one's attitude (i.e. outlook, position, mindset, opinion) to attain the ability to reduce the experienced world to a world of phenomena. I performed the Phenomenological epoche as advised by Moustakas, specific-concentrated focus and reflective-meditation. Researchers are advised to apply focus to a specific situation or issue and, in isolation, attend to existing thoughts and feelings related to the situation or issue, setting aside all biases to return to view the situation or issue through new eyes. Reflective-meditation, different than specific-concentrated focus, permits the movement of biases in and out of consciousness, being open and responsive to them as with all unbiased awareness. The biases are identified, annotated, and reviewed until its influence on consciousness ceases allowing for an uninfluenced view of the situation or issue.

Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction. The transcendental phenomenological reduction technique, the second phase of the analysis process, focuses on the generation of textual descriptions relevant to the phenomenon being studied. To perform this technique a repetitive process of looking and describing the specific qualities relevant to the experienced phenomenon was required (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). As presented by Moustakas (1994), researchers must engage self in a process of skilled, well-defined contemplation giving considerable attention to the qualities and characteristics of experience to clearly identify and articulate meaning. The inability to reflect stifles the production of relevant depictions of the phenomenon. To perform transcendental phenomenological reduction, the researcher is tasked with applying the techniques of epoche / bracketing and horizontalization leading to a textual description of the phenomenon. I performed the transcendental phenomenological reduction as advised by Groenewald (2002), Hycner (1985), and Moustakas (1994).

The first phase of the reduction process, epoche or bracketing, requires the researcher to isolate the text of collected data (i.e. statements, phrases) that connects directly to the specific experience or phenomenon being studied (Groenewald, 2004; Moran, 2000; Patton, 2015). What remains following the process is the contents of consciousness itself (Moran, 2000), the data in its purest form. Looking at the phenomenon from different vantage points produces variations in appearance that as well alters the illumination of meaning or the perception of what previously appeared (Moustakas, 1994). The identification of new features of an experience, known as horizons, creates an unlimited discovery of possibilities for perception. The properties

present or appearing in relation to a particular experience, horizons, conveys the very nature of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher considers each horizon and textural quality with equal value to understand and describe the experience or phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). The horizons and textural qualities are then organized into units of meaning removing redundant and overlapping themes (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). Ultimately, the clusters of meaning become a narrative portrayal of the ingredients, parts, or the “what” of the phenomenon being studied excluding essence (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

In particular, it is important to acknowledge the need to execute persistently the activity of epoche or bracketing during the phase of transcendental phenomenological reduction. A deliberate suspension and disregard for one’s system of prior knowledge is invaluable and necessary in phenomenological data analysis. Consistent with this point, Hycner (1985), Moran (2000), Moustakas (1994), Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) acknowledges the value in suspending beliefs, feelings, preferences, inclinations, expectations, and understandings to produce a work that is exceptional in accordance with phenomenological principle.

Imaginative Variation. Following the activity of transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation focuses on creating structural descriptions of experience with the phenomenon. Specifically, imaginative variation is concerned with “how” the phenomenon is experienced in the world (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). The imagination is used to illuminate the states,

circumstances, and positions to bring visual understanding and characterization of our experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The states, circumstances, and positions that exist or are present gives support to, foundation or basis of, or cause for the phenomenon. In other words, imaginative variation or structural meaning is noesis, “the act of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging – all of which are embedded with meanings that are concealed and hidden from consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 69).

I performed imaginative variation as advised by Moustakas who outlines the corresponding steps as follows: (1) open consideration for the unpredictable fluctuating appearances of potential structural meanings that form the basis for textual meanings, (2) the seeing and accepting the themes and contexts that justify the appearance of the phenomenon, (3) consideration for universal structures (i.e. time, space, body, relation to self, relation to others, etc.) that give rise to the feelings and thoughts related to the phenomenon, and (4) a search for illustrative examples that clearly demonstrate the constant structural themes that make possible structural descriptions of the phenomenon. Imaginative variation opens a boundless pit of possibilities of the phenomenon to be reflectively discovered and explored. I returned to the process of reflection which was necessary in this phase of the process to minimize the interference of researcher bias (Hycner, 1985).

Textural-Structural Synthesis. The final phase of the process, textural-structural synthesis, is an effort to blend into a functioning or unified whole the textural and structural descriptions previously produced. The delineation of parts or units of meaning (i.e. noematic and noetic phases) are intuitively fused together to arrive at a whole entity

consisting of meaning and essences (Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). As advised by Moustakas, I accomplished textural-structural synthesis by composing a statement that presents the meanings and essences in the context of time and place from the perspective of the fathers. Hycner (1985) suggests acknowledging the meaningful differences that exist among participants; a step I incorporated into the performance of this final phase of analysis.

Use of Technology. Establishing a clear strategy on how data will be handled is essential for satisfying researcher obligations like data organization, search and retrieval, analysis, and the reporting of findings (Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2013). Contemporary strategies for the collection and management of data likely involve the use of computer software programs in hope to minimize the time-consuming demand of the research process. My use of computer software permitted and supported a straightforward stress-free management of data (Richards, 2015; Weitzman, 2000). Several research software options were available for use. I followed the advice of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) who said the election of a computer software program to conduct research should be based on research methodology and the capacity of use as established by the software's capabilities.

I used the computer software program NVivo 11, developed by QSR International, to store, manage, and analyze data obtained during the data collection process to satisfy the need for data organization, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, reliability, and reporting. All the materials obtained in the process of conducting this

study (i.e. recruitment items, audio recordings, transcripts, note-taking activities, coding and analysis data) were managed using Microsoft Word and NVivo 11.

My method of collecting physical paper documents (i.e. participant eligibility, informed consent, participant information) helped to expedite the early processes of investigation. The paper documents were subsequently scanned and uploaded into the NVivo 11 software program and downloaded on a password protected computer located in my home office. Once I received the paper documents they were placed and sealed in a privacy envelope kept in my possession until arriving at the location where the process of electronic storing occurred. The standardized and semi-structured interviews were conducted using a password protected digital recorder that remained in my possession until the transcription process was complete. I transcribed all digital recordings using Microsoft Word and subsequently uploaded to NVivo 11 for management and storage.

Ultimately, all the data was scanned, transcribed, and uploaded to be managed and maintained electronically. I backed up all the data using a password protected USB storage device and cloud storage account to avoid loss, damage, and recovery failure. The documents and data associated with this study will be maintained for 5 years except for the digital recordings that were destroyed immediately following transcription. At the close of the 5th year, all documents and data will be destroyed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The concern for trustworthiness is grounded in the need to produce meaningful, credible, and empirically sound findings as a result of qualitative inquiry (Given & Saumure, 2008; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004; Toma, 2011). The idea of trustworthiness

has been extended and adopted as an alternative to the conventional model for assessing the quality of research inquiry (Guba, 1981; Siedman, 2013). In quantitative research, the standard of judgment is measured by the evidence of internal validity – whether the cause for the conclusions expressed are directly correlated or associated with the variables introduced, external validity – whether the research is universally applicable to larger populations and settings, reliability – whether the research instrument is suitable or fit to consistently produce the same results, and objectivity – whether conclusions are communicable, consistent, and attested by outside observations and findings (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Krefting, 1991).

The language, focus, and strategy of quantitative criteria is commonly applied in accordance with statistical control and manipulation methodologies that can clearly restrain probable threats in advance (Creswell, 2014; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Guba, 1981; Maxwell, 2013). On the contrary, the qualitative approach, where rich descriptions are at the heart of inquiry, maintains obligation to control for probable threats at every point of the research process (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2009; Patton, 2015). Considering the differences in assumptions and positions when it comes to the scientific and naturalistic paradigms, the language, focus, and strategy used to judge the quality of scientific research has been determined ineffective and inappropriate for qualitative inquiry (Guba, 1981; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Siedman, 2013). As a replacement, I used the four standards of measure as given in the model presented by Guba (1981), the evidence of *credibility*, *dependability*, *transferability*, and

confirmability, to ensure the trustworthiness standards of quality and empirical soundness were reached.

Credibility

The approach to addressing the concern for credibility underlines the belief held by naturalistic inquirers that multiple realities exist in contact with participants (Cunliffe, 2003; Guba, 1981; Merriam, 2002; Moen, 2006). The multiple realities that emerge are shaped by factor patterns that are expected to influence the process and closing stage of interpretation (Guba, 1981). In that, I used specific strategies during and after inquiry to increase the likelihood of producing reasonable and valuable conclusions. I used the strategies of peer briefing and member checking during inquiry (Cho & Trent, 2006; Guba, 1981; Patton, 2015). I was subject to continual review of methods and insights gained during the process of investigation due to having the status of doctoral candidate (Bowen, 2005; Guba, 1981; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The faculty members of my dissertation committee performed the function of peer debriefing to guide the progression of the research, to assure high-quality, and firm credibility (Bowen, 2005; Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

With its earliest use in the 1920s (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013), member checking has become an established technique in qualitative inquiry to develop positive rapport and support the right of informed consent with research participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Member checking is understood as being at the heart of credibility and has been yielded high esteem and respect (Guba, 1981). Following the data collection

process, I engaged each father in the member checking process by offering them the opportunity to view their transcript for accuracy.

I made an effort to establish what Guba (1981) refers to as structural corroboration once the data collection process was completed. Intentionally searching through the data and interpretations to identify all discrepancies present is structural corroboration. I reviewed the data generated from interviewing the fathers to identify the information that was not in agreement with social constructionist views. I explored alternative logical conclusions for the data points that did not support the established interpretive direction of the investigation. All discrepancies were located, acknowledged and reported. The final effort to establish credibility was in returning to member checking to assess the full account of inquiry.

Transferability

The Naturalist perspective upholds the belief that truth is connected to time, space, and context (Guba, 1981; Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004). With this study framed in the qualitative tradition, the goal was not to produce generalizations that would cross time, space, and context (Guba, 1981; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). The findings were too specific to environment and individual to appropriately assume a broad perspective (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). The aim of qualitative inquiry in regards to transferability is to establish practical conclusions that may perhaps be transferable depending on the characteristics discovered. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to describe the meaning fathers in this study ascribed to the experience of fathering in the context of post incarceration supervision. To account for the situational uniqueness

of the inquiry, I used several techniques to produce context-relevant findings sufficient to assess the degree to which transfer can occur.

My recruitment of participants involved a sampling strategy that became the first technique employed to establish transferability. The sampling strategy, criterion-based purposeful sampling, helped me obtain the most relevant data possible to represent participants' experience of parenting. The sampling strategy facilitated selection of the fathers who had direct experience in fathering and was capable of providing information-rich material to inform my research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000; Guba, 1981; Morrow, 2005).

During the investigation process, I collected thick descriptive data to provide the basis for assessing the transferable fitness of the characteristics uncovered. As put forward by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), a data accounting sheet may be used to track the collection of data obtained by each participant. I incorporated the technique of using a data accounting sheet to provide a visual report on the progress of content collected in answering the research question. The data accounting sheet helped me plan and focus subsequent participant contacts after the initial contact to achieve the goal of obtaining thick content-rich descriptive data.

Once the phase of data collection was complete, the final technique to establish transferability was to develop thick descriptions from the data obtained. According to Morrow (2005), thick descriptions of data is not just in relation to the participant's experience with the phenomenon, but also includes detailed reporting on the context and culture of experience with the phenomenon and the point of saturation. In this study, I

explored fathering and described it from the perspective of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to community supervision. Thick descriptions consisted of cultural characteristics related to African American men with incarceration histories. I explored the context in which fathering experiences occurred and described them from the perspective of the fathers. According to Morrow (2005), acquiring a variety of sources for the collection of data is necessary to achieve richness, breadth, depth, and saturation. In-depth interviewing was the primary source to acquire data; however, I used post interview notes and member checks were used to attain the point of data saturation.

Dependability

Researchers utilizing qualitative design have to take account for the instabilities that potentially arise in data collection. The concern is in relation to the procedures used to acquire, analyze and interpret the research data. Additionally, the consistency and general acceptability of processes used are of concern for the sake of subsequent replication and scrutiny of the research inquiry (Krefting, 1991; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). To account for the reality of instability, and to produce credible trustworthy research, I developed an audit trail for this study. The creation of the audit process was initially introduced in the 1980s by Edward Scott Halpern whose dissertation fashioned the process after financial auditing practices in the world of accounting (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2006; Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). Audit trails are encouraged for use by qualitative researchers (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2013; Morrow, 2005; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988;

Shenton, 2004; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009); however, Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) question whether the technique devalues the intuitive decisions likely to be made by qualitative researchers during the analysis I used this technique to establish dependability during the research inquiry.

The audit trail consisted of raw data (i.e. interview transcripts, memos, notes, data accounting sheet, etc.), categorized data (i.e. transcendental phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation), and analyzed data (i.e. textural-structural synthesis). The audit trail catered to a data-oriented approach as discussed by Shenton (2004) to furnish records outlining the stages of progression during the inquiry. According to Schwandt and Halpern (1988), an audit trail must be organized in such a way that supports the ongoing management of data, controls the potential for error, and increases the researcher's adherence to a code of integrity throughout the process. Advocates of the audit trail refer to the method of preparation and implementation put forth by Schwandt and Halpern (1988) who emphasizes the involvement of an auditor to guide the procedures of organization with the investigator. My auditor was the faculty member appointed as the chairperson of my dissertation committee. The faculty member reviewed and accepted all plans and tasks regarding the organization, management, and close of the audit trail.

Following data inquiry, a dependability audit was conducted (Guba, 1981; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). The purpose of the dependability audit was to determine whether the processes incorporated to collect, categorize and analyze data were aligned with generally accepted practice (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). The

dependability audit was performed by the faculty member appointed as chairperson of my dissertation committee.

Confirmability

Although considered an exaggeration as a method to establish trustworthiness and quality (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004), confirmability has become a credible criterion in qualitative inquiry. Confirmability is concerned with the products, results or outcomes of inquiry and their consistency with the data gathered (Guba, 1981; Morrow, 1995). To assure the findings of the research investigation are not distorted, I retained the burden of demonstrating integrity during the research process. As a naturalistic inquirer, integrity is critical since the potential for the researcher's experiences and base of knowledge to influence outcomes is extremely probable. To account for the natural reality of this effect, I established confirmability during the research inquiry with the practice of reflexivity.

Reflexivity is defined by Guba (1981) as a deliberate disclosure of assumptions that influenced the development of research questions and research conclusions. Maxwell (2013) is certain that expending efforts to limit any impression the researcher has on inquiry is not of particular importance. The principal aim of reflexivity, according to Maxwell (2013), is to understand how the researcher has influenced the interview process and described conclusions. To arrive at this end, I completed the task of reflexive journaling on a daily basis to record all reactions to the research process and procedures (i.e. attitude, thoughts, emotions, shifts, changes, etc.) (Flick, 2014).

Reflexive journaling is a proactive response to the threats of researcher bias, fault, and inconsistency concerning research data (Bowen, 2005; Koch & Harrington, 1998;

Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). For research findings to qualify as a reliable and credible source of authority, disclosure regarding the experience, training, and personal history of the researcher is necessary (Patton, 2015; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012; Van Manen, 1990; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). The information regarding my experience, training, and personal history and its impact on the research process was acknowledged in the practice of reflexive journaling. As encouraged by Koch and Harrington (1998), the self-awareness and self-correction noted by way of reflexive journaling was subsequently incorporated into the final report on the research for this study.

My final attempt to establish confirmability occurred after data inquiry was complete. As like with dependability, a confirmability audit was conducted by the faculty member appointed as chairperson of my dissertation committee. The confirmability audit is believed to be the chief strategy for establishing credibility and trustworthiness as related to the outcomes of inquiry (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). However, Schwandt and Halpern (1988) state that confirmability auditing is particularly challenging because of the difficulty in documenting interpretations and conclusions as opposed to the tracking of processes. Because of this limitation, the accuracy and safekeeping of research-related documentation were crucial.

Confirmability audits are intended to assess whether findings are consistent with the data gathered during the phase of collection (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Morrow; 2005), and that all discrepancies are acknowledged and reported (Lietz & Zayas, 2010; Meyrick, 2006). The auditor judged my research outcomes to determine if conclusions were logical,

reasonable and free of researcher bias (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Maxwell, 2013; Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Concerns and Procedures

The ethical considerations relevant to this inquiry include (a) exploitation of participants, (b) full disclosure and consent of participation, (c) researcher partiality due to values and personal background, (d) anonymity and confidentiality, (e) misconduct toward or disempowerment of participants, and (f) sensitivity to the special needs of participants in the research process.

I kept the fathers of this study informed through direct communication and by way of detailed documentation of the benefits and challenges. Neither participant was coached or coerced to participate (Kvale, 2007; Mertens, 2014). Each father was at liberty to seek additional understanding or clarity regarding this study as well as decline participation at any point in time (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I communicated changes regarding the research process as related to participant involvement in a timely fashion using a means that was appropriate and expedient. In the event a father declined or withdrew from the research process I made attempts to identify an alternative candidate using the primary criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy.

Qualitative inquiry poses alarm for the well-being of participants in that research is being conducted in a safe and ethically sound manner (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). The practice of open communication with the fathers in regards to voluntary consent, anonymity, and confidentiality was my operating standard. I made the fathers aware of the nature of this

study, and as well the interview schedule and all unanticipated changes that affected participation (Josselson, 2013; Whelan, 2008; Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008). I addressed the issue of confidentiality by notifying the fathers of the extent their participation would be disclosed (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2012; Israel, 2004). I shared all my interactions with the fathers with all faculty members appointed to oversee this study's research activity. I made the fathers aware of this certainty, and, therefore, was informed of the established plan to uphold anonymity (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). The actual identity of the fathers was protected by the previously mentioned record-keeping plan. Each father was personified through the representation of their experience to ensure the safeguarding of identity, and to reduce the risk of direct harm. Through my use of member checking participants had the opportunity to certify their voice as it was to be represented in this study.

The concern for participants experiencing abuse during the research process called for proactive measures to lessen the risk of any occurrence. The potential for participants to become distressed, agitated, or irritated during the interviewing process was acknowledged. Prior to the start of an interview, I asked the fathers to inform me if an experience of discomfort, a sense of heightened anxiety, or emotional pain occurred. I offered fathers an opportunity to take a break or end the interviewing process (Rubin & Rubin, 2015). None of the fathers experienced discomfort requiring immediate attention or assistance from the crisis response service (Josselson, 2013). None of the fathers required transfer to a medical or mental health facility or needed me to provide on-site support prior to medical transfer. I gave a listing of community support and assistance

programs to each father at the conclusion of their interview whether or not distress was experienced (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014).

Researchers are advised to acknowledge and operate under an established set of ethical standards to reduce the potential for harm during the research process (Josselson, 2013; Kvale, 2007; Mertens, 2014; Morrow, 2005; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000; Patton, 2015; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014; Seidman, 2013). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the authority for which my standards of ethical practice were derived. The NASW Code of Ethics outlines core values that practitioners must uphold that include (a) social justice, (b) dignity and worth of a person, and (c) integrity (NASW, 2010). During the research process I regularly reviewed and was reminded of my commitment to uphold standards of ethical practice regardless of personal convictions, beliefs, and preferences, for the sake of self, the father participants, and my colleagues within the academic and human services community. I maintained my focus on the research goals; keeping in mind the value this type of research holds for practitioners in society.

In order to acknowledge objectivity, remain fair, and unemotional during the research process (The National Academies Press, 2009) it was necessary for me to have an open and honest conversation with someone unaffiliated with the research inquiry to provide critical feedback relevant to my involvement in the research process (Corbin, Strauss, 2015; Dickinson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). An independent professional, who remained unknown and uninvolved in the research, was identified prior to the start of the data collection process. I kept a working relationship with this

professional until the conclusion of the research project for the purpose of preserving physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Lastly, monetary payment for research participation is an ongoing controversy. Attending to the double-sided conversation regarding payment to research participants was necessary to make an informed decision regarding the position most suitable for this study. Sears (2001) outlined current models used to make decisions regarding participant compensation that I considered. The influence of monetary payment or compensation was of concern for several reasons, (1) participants may disregard limitations and risks (McNeil, 1997; Slomka, McCurdy, Ratliff, Timpson, & Williams, 2007), (2) participants' motivation may be primarily based on payment and fail to be honest about eligibility and experience (Bentley & Thacker, 2004; Russell, Moralejo, & Burgess, 2000), (3) there is potential for perceived coercion or exploitation (Corbie-Smith, Thomas, Williams, & Moody-Ayers, 1999; Wilkinson & Moore, 1999), and (4), it may potentially lessen the importance of consent to participate in research (Head, 2009).

Although monetary compensation is intended to support a successful recruitment process, the risk of offering an incentive to participate in this study may have been greater than the intended benefit. My assumption was that all identified participants would voluntarily share their experiences willingly because of the advantage of having their stories told, and their voices heard with the potential for large-scale exposure. Therefore, the fathers identified and subsequently engaged in this study was asked and chose to be involved of his own accord without the persuasion or coercion of compensation.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the research design to communicate the methods and tools that were used to conduct this transcendental phenomenological study. To make known the lived experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to community supervision, I used an in-depth interviewing technique. The interviewing process helped me acquire thick descriptive data to inform my research question. The data gathered during the interview process was analyzed using phenomenological techniques that allowed me to develop logical, reasonable, unbiased conclusions. My case for ensuring quality and trustworthiness of research was also presented.

The forthcoming chapter gives an account of the lived experience of fathering as expressed by the fathers in this study during two separate interview encounters. The information pertaining to this study's research setting, participant demographics, data collection, and analysis procedures is reported. I will present the evidence of trustworthiness before concluding with a chapter summary.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children while obligated to post release supervision. I intended to raise awareness about these fathers' experience and influence the development of culturally relevant interventions that strengthen and support family structures with formerly incarcerated African American fathers. The research location for this study, the Kansas City metropolitan area, experiences an annual increase in the population by 4,000 persons due to the release of incarcerated males who are likely subject to mandatory post release supervision (Geither, 2012; McDonald & Holsinger, 2010; Roberts, Goddard, Graves, & Williams, 2013). The statistical reports I retrieved were limited concerning post release supervised individuals. Consequently, the number of formerly incarcerated African American fathers participating in community supervision within the state of Kansas, specifically within the Kansas City metropolitan area, was unknown at the time of this study's reporting. Glaze and Maruschak (2010), however, found that more than half of male state incarcerates within the United States are parents of a minor child. Furthermore, 92% of the total corrections population within the state of Kansas is estimated to be males who are expected to return to the community under post release supervision (Roberts, Goddard, Graves, & Williams, 2013).

Based on the statistical reports, I viewed African American fathers as being a sizeable portion of the population of criminal justice involved persons. I conducted my

investigation with formerly incarcerated African American fathers serving post release supervision to expand the base of knowledge presently available concerning their experience in parenting. To capture the reality of lived experience as expressed by participants, I posed the research question: What are the parenting experiences of African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision following an incarceration? In this chapter, I give an overview of the research setting, the characteristics of participants, details on data collection and the results before concluding with a chapter summary.

Setting

I collected the data for this investigation in a natural setting that was known and familiar to each father. A total of five different local city and county public libraries served as the designated space to conduct interviews. Each father was engaged on two separate occasions: the initial interview and follow-up interview. With the exception of two follow-up interviews, all interviews took place in a private study room of the library. One follow-up interview was completed by phone while one follow-up interview was completed on a community bench within 50 feet of the fathers' home. I conducted the phone follow-up interview with participant Timothy because he was confined to his home by community supervision authorities. I used an alternative meeting location for my interview with participant Darrin because he was confined to a one block radius of his home by community supervision authorities.

Demographics

In this study, I interviewed nine formerly incarcerated African American fathers who had returned to the community within 6 to 12 months of study participation. All the

fathers said they resided and currently participated in the parole supervision program within the Kansas City metropolitan area, or 25 miles outside of the area. Once determined eligible for participation, the fathers shared demographic information by completing the participant eligibility form (see Appendix B) and the participant information sheet (see Appendix C). All the fathers said that the information they gave on both forms was accurate and granted permission for its use. I have summarized this information in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 provides the information shared on the participant eligibility form in addition to the individuals' highest grade level completed and job title as stated on the participant information sheet.

I replaced the names of participants with an alphanumeric label, and this alternative label was used to manage the flow of all data gathered from and forwarded to each father. In an effort to maintain confidentiality, I convey the alphanumeric code assigned to each father by using a randomly chosen pseudonym. I use the assigned pseudonym to discuss each participants' characteristics and experience as gathered during the data collection process. I introduce the nine participants in this study according to the date of their initial interview.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Variables

Participant	Age	Nature of conviction	Prison term	Custody status	Reporting frequency	Highest grade	Job
Jeffrey	45	Drug	12 yrs.	Parole	Monthly	1 yr. college	Carpenter
Micah	37	Drug, assault	13 yrs.	Parole	Monthly	12th	Cook
Willie	40	Aggravated battery	3 yrs.	Parole	Biweekly	GED	Construction
Richard	49	Robbery	9 yrs., 8 mos.	Parole	Weekly	GED	Cook
Darrin	28	Drug	3 yrs.	Parole & Probation	Weekly	1 yr. college	Construction
Timothy	28	Robbery	3 yrs., 4 mos.	Parole	Biweekly	12th	Machine Operator
Harold	49	Drug, theft	3 yrs., 6 mos.	Parole	Monthly	8th	Unemployed
Corey	35	Kidnapping, aggravated assault	3 yrs. 8 mos.	Parole	Monthly	Some college	Retired Military
Jason	28	Drug	4 yrs. 6 mos.	Parole	Monthly	12th	Landscaping

The information in Table 2 provides an overview of parenting-related characteristics that were shared by participants on the participant information sheet.

Table 2

Parental-Related Characteristics of Participants

Participant	# of children	Age/gender of Minor(s)	Custody status of minor(s)	Frequency of contact w/minor(s)	Maternal parent defined	Relationship w/maternal parent
Jeffrey	9	3, male	Joint	Daily	Fiancé	Intimate
Micah	4	14, female 17, female	Partial Partial	Weekly Daily ^b	Past Past	Strained Strained
Willie	5	11, female 12, female	None None	Varies Varies	Past Past	Damaged Damaged
Richard	5	12, female 14, female 14, female	None None None	Weekly Weekly Weekly	Past ^a	Strained
Darrin	2	2, male 6, female	Partial Partial	Daily Daily	Past ^a	Strained
Timothy	2	3, male 6, male	Joint None	Daily Biweekly	Current Past	Intimate Strained
Harold	1	9, female	None	Varies	Past	Positive
Corey	2	10, female 12, male	Joint Joint	2x/month Daily	Wife ^a	Positive
Jason	1	10, female	None	2x/month	Past	Strained

^aMinors have the same maternal parent; ^bContact is indirect via phone and Facebook.

Participant 1: Jeffrey

Jeffrey is a 45-year-old African American father with 2 adult daughters, 6 adult sons, and 1 son who is of minor age. His son, 3 years of age, was focused on in this study. Jeffrey spent 12 years in a correctional facility in the state of Missouri as the result of a drug related conviction. He was transferred thereafter to the state of Kansas to be monitored under parole supervision with the Kansas Department of Corrections. Jeffrey reported being employed as a full-time temporary carpenter and reported spending time with his children every 3 months. While engaged in this study, Jeffrey was successfully released from parole supervision and is hoping to marry his fiancé, the mother of his 3-year-old son, in the near future.

Participant 2: Micah

Micah is a 37-year-old African American father with 1 adult daughter, 1 adult son, and 2 daughters who are of minor age. His daughters, 14 and 17 years of age, were focused on in this study. Micah spent 13 years in a correctional facility in the state of Kansas as the result of a conviction related to drugs and a conviction related to assault. At the time of this study, he was being monitored under parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with hope for a successful release in the near future. Micah reported being employed as a full-time cook and reported spending time with his 14-year-old daughter twice a week, connecting with his 17-year-old daughter by phone and through Facebook. Micah reported having a monthly check-in requirement to his parole officer, and a weekly requirement to pay for and attend parenting class every Thursday as part of the conditions of his parole supervision.

Participant 3: Willie

Willie is a 40-year-old African American father with 2 adult daughters, 1 adult son, and 2 daughters who are of minor age. His daughters, 11 and 12 years of age, were focused on in this study. Willie spent 3 years in a correctional facility in the state of Kansas as the result of an aggravated battery conviction. At the time of this study, he was being monitored under parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with hope for a successful release sometime during the year 2017. Willie reported being employed as a full-time construction worker and reported seeing his children as often as made possible. According to Willie, he prefers to see his children every day but admits to having a damaged relationship with the mothers of his 11-year-old and 12-year-old daughters that affect his ability to spend time with each of them. Willie reported having a weekly check-in requirement to see his parole officer and a weekly requirement to pay for and attend drug class as part of the conditions of his parole supervision.

Participant 4: Richard

Richard is a 49-year-old African American father with 1 adult daughter, 1 adult son, and 3 daughters who are of minor age. His daughters 12, 14 and 14 years of age, were focused on in this study. Richard spent 9 years and 8 months in a correctional facility in the state of Kansas as the result of a robbery conviction. At the time of this study, he was being monitored under parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with hope for a successful release sometime during the year 2017. Richard reported having full-time temporary employment as a dietary cook in the healthcare industry. He also reported seeing his children every weekend and sometimes during the

week when he visited them while they were at school. Richard reported having a weekly check-in requirement to see his parole officer that included submitting to mandatory drug testing. He reported a weekly requirement to pay for and attend several classes that included drug treatment and parenting support. He also reported a requirement to avoid any contact with local law enforcement as part of the conditions of his parole supervision. After the initial interviewing process was completed with Richard he became inaccessible. Approximately 30 days after his initial interview I learned that Richard was re-incarcerated as a result of him violating the conditions of parole supervision.

Participant 5: Darrin

Darrin is a 28-year-old African American father with 2 children who are of minor age. Both of his minor children, son age 2 and daughter age 6, were focused on in this study. Darrin spent 3 years in a correctional facility in the state of Kansas as the result of a drug related conviction. At the time of this study, he reported being monitored under probation and parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with no knowledge of when he would be released from either supervision type. Darrin reported being employed as a full-time temporary laborer in the construction industry. He reported having partial custody of both of his children who he sees every day. Darrin reported having a weekly check-in requirement to see his parole officer as part of the conditions of his parole supervision.

Participant 6: Timothy

Timothy is a 28-year-old African American father with 2 children who are of minor age. Both of his minor children, son age 3 and son age 6, were focused on in this

study. Timothy spent 3 years in a correctional facility within the state of Kansas and Missouri as the result of a robbery conviction. At the time of this study, he reported being monitored under parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with no knowledge of when he would be released from parole supervision. Timothy reported being employed as a full-time temporary machine operator. He reported having joint custody of his 3-year-old son who lives with him and sees him every day. In regards to his 6-year-old son, Timothy reported that he sees him every other week. Timothy reported having a bi-weekly check-in requirement to see his parole officer as part of the conditions of his parole supervision.

Participant 7: Harold

Harold is a 49-year-old African American father with 1 daughter who is of minor age. His daughter, 9 years of age, was focused on in this study. Harold spent 3 years and 6 months in a correctional facility within the state of Kansas and Missouri as the result of a conviction related to drugs and a conviction related to theft. At the time of this study, he reported being monitored under parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with no knowledge of when he would be released from parole supervision. Harold reported being unemployed, but occasionally takes advantage of small odd jobs. He reported not having custody of his daughter and seeing her once or twice a month. Harold reported having a monthly check-in requirement to see his parole officer that includes submitting to mandatory drug testing. He reported having a weekly requirement to pay for and attend drug class as part of the conditions of his parole supervision.

Participant 8: Corey

Corey is a 35-year-old African American father with 2 children who are of minor age. Both of his minor children, daughter age 10 and son age 12, were focused on in this study. Corey spent 3 years and 8 months in a correctional facility in the state of Kansas as the result of a kidnapping and aggravated assault conviction. At the time of this study, he reported being monitored under parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with no knowledge of when he would be released from parole supervision. Corey is a retired military officer previously serving with the United States Army. Corey reported being retired, unemployed, and having no immediate intent to secure employment in any capacity. Since choosing not to maintain full-time employment, Corey spends his time reading, exploring future entrepreneurial opportunities, caring for his son, and setting goals for he and his family. Corey reported having joint custody of both his children. His 12-year-old son lives with him and his 10-year-old daughter, who lives with her mother, sees him twice a month. Corey reported having a monthly check-in requirement by phone with his parole officer, and a check-in requirement to see his parole officer every three months as part of the conditions of his parole.

Participant 9: Jason

Jason is a 28-year-old African American father with 1 daughter who is of minor age. His daughter, 10 years of age, was focused on in this study. Jason spent 4 years and 6 months in a correctional facility in the state of Kansas as the result of a drug related conviction. At the time of this study, he reported being monitored under parole supervision by the Kansas Department of Corrections with no knowledge of when he

would be released from parole supervision. Jason reported being employed as a full-time temporary landscaper. He reported having no custody of his daughter who he sees every other weekend. Jason reported having a monthly check-in requirement to see his parole officer as part of the conditions of his parole supervision.

Data Collection, Management, Storage

The recruitment of participants began October 22, 2015, and concluded on May 15, 2016. I identified the fathers in this study using a criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy. I announced the need for volunteers to participate in this study using a detailed flyer. I initially posted the flyer in public areas within all the communities targeted for this study including public libraries, community centers, police stations, and on community boards. I distributed the flyer to individuals at local grocery stores, banks, barbershops, restaurants, and retail stores. The criteria of “formerly incarcerated” and “under community supervision” made recruitment efforts in the community challenging. According to Jeffrey, the first identified eligible participant for this study, active supervisees will not openly expose or disclose their involvement with the criminal justice system to the general public for reasons related to stigma, prejudice, and discrimination.

After thirty days of failed success in recruitment, I contacted the state department of corrections for permission to post a flyer announcing the research opportunity within local community corrections offices. Within 10 days, I received permission from the state department of corrections to post my announcement within the local community corrections offices covering the targeted research location. My professional experience as a Social Worker in the field of corrections led me to instinctively become acquainted with

the personnel managing the local community corrections offices. Building a positive rapport with the local community corrections office personnel was critically important for ensuring that my research opportunity was received, posted, and visible in client accessible areas. The rapport I developed with the local community corrections offices made it possible for me to be invited to hold information sessions at the local office for the purpose of recruitment. There were three information sessions conducted at three different local community corrections offices covering the targeted research location.

Interest to voluntarily participate was communicated verbally in person, over the phone, and in writing using email. The individuals identified in person and who expressed interest by phone or email was invited to attend a meeting at the local public library. I asked potential participants to confirm their ability to volunteer for my research opportunity by reviewing and completing the participant eligibility form (see Appendix B). Once eligibility was confirmed, I provided the fathers with the informed consent and participant information sheet (see Appendix C) for review and completion before the process of interviewing began. I gave a copy of the informed consent to each father participating in the study. The signed informed consent and completed participant information sheet was collected and sealed in a privacy envelope that remained in my possession.

I engaged the fathers in two separate interviewing processes using a standardized and semi-structured open-ended approach. The initial interview was guided by an interview protocol, and the follow-up interview was guided by information gathered during the initial interview. I conducted each interview using a series of open-ended

questions. I recorded and digitally tracked all initial and follow-up interviews using an audio recording device and subsequently transcribed the collected data as presented in detail in Chapter 3. The initial interview was an average duration of 80 minutes in length and the follow-up interview was an average of 30 minutes in length. I completed a total of 17 interviews with nine formerly incarcerated African American fathers.

At the conclusion of each initial interview, I provided the fathers with a list of community resources and then scheduled their follow-up interview. During this time, participants made decisions regarding receipt of the interview transcript that was reviewed for accuracy and used to establish a basis for the follow-up interview. I completed post interview notes immediately after the interview, after initial review of the audio recording, and after interview transcription. I offered the fathers three options for receipt of their interview transcript that included email, USPS priority delivery, and in-person delivery. The method chosen fluctuated among the fathers. All three of the options given was used a minimum of four times during the data collection process. A verbal or written approval of the initial interview transcript was received prior to the follow-up meeting.

The follow-up interview was completed with eight of the nine eligible fathers engaged in this study. I asked the fathers to make decisions about the transcript verification process after each follow-up interview. Additionally, I reminded the fathers about their ability to receive a copy of the official study results and expressed my desire to show my appreciation for their participation with a “Thank You” letter. The eight remaining fathers provided me with instructions on the receipt of a “Thank You” letter

and copy of the official study results. I forwarded all “Thank You” letters to participants after their verbal or written approval of the follow-up interview transcript was received.

All the forms I collected and generated during the stage of data collection was scanned and uploaded to a password protected computer located at my home. I destroyed the original paper/handwritten documents after a digital copy was created. The audio file of each interview was destroyed immediately following the process of transcription. All the data related to this study was managed, stored, and is being maintained in accordance with the described details presented in Chapter 3.

My goal for this study was to engage a sample of six to ten African American fathers in research. During the period of recruitment 37 individuals expressed an interest to voluntarily participate in this study. Of the 37 individuals that expressed an interest, 21 was found ineligible during the initial screening, four was confirmed eligible but withdrew prior to the initial interview, and three was confirmed eligible then became ineligible during initial interview due to making assertions that went against this study’s selection criteria. Richard, a confirmed eligible participant, was actively engaged in research but was reincarcerated after his initial interview. The concluded the phase of data collection after eight eligible participants completed both the initial and follow-up interview.

Achieving Data Analysis

Four phases of specific strategies were performed to complete an analysis of the raw data gathered while using the in-depth interview technique. The analysis of data was not postponed, but began at the conclusion of the first participant interview and continued

simultaneously throughout the interviewing process with each father (Maxwell, 2013). I performed a post interview note-taking activity prior to leaving the interview site. The activity allowed me to record details about the interview setting, the interview process, the information gathered during the interview, and any impressions related to thoughts, feelings, and areas to explore during follow-up interviewing. A post interview note-taking activity was performed a second time when reviewing the audio recorded interview prior to transcription. I completed my transcription using Microsoft Word and subsequently transferred the transcribed data to NVivo 11 to complete the text-based analysis electronically. During the process of transcription, I recorded my impressions and then expanded them after transcription while reading and thinking about the interview encounter. I performed the strategy of post interview note-taking at three different key points in order to generate meaningful thoughts, gain critical awareness, and logical understanding of the described experience (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2002).

The post interview note-taking strategy guided the process of reflective meditation also known as phenomenological epoche (Kockelmans, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). Reflective meditation required me to identify and isolate the specific situations and issues disclosed by participants that triggered a bias response. I consciously attended to my pre-existing thoughts and feelings, recorded and reviewed them several times in order to decrease their influence on my seeing and thinking about the articulated experience of participants. The process of post interview note-taking and reflective meditation concluded the first phase of data analysis.

The second phase of data analysis was transcendental phenomenological reduction which focused on identifying relevant structures or textural descriptions of the parenting experience as articulated by fathers in this study. I used the selective reading approach to review and isolate statements and phrases that relate specifically to the parenting experience (Groenewald, 2004; Moran, 2000; Patton, 2015; Van Manen, 1990). I considered the isolated statements and phrases from various points of view and organized them into thematic units of descriptive experience. The thematic units or themes of descriptive experience represented the parts or the “what” of the parenting experience (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015) as articulated by the fathers.

The third phase of data analysis was imaginative variation that focused on identifying relevant structural descriptions that formed the basis for textural descriptions of the parenting experience. I performed imaginative variation as instructed by Moustakas (1994) and involved exploring and considering the context of experience that provoked the feelings and thoughts shared by the fathers related to parenting. The illustrative examples in the data gathered was isolated and reviewed to uncover the states, circumstances, and positions that support the experience of parenting as articulated by the fathers. The structural themes represented the “how” of experience in parenting as articulated by the fathers (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Textural-Structural Synthesis was the final phase of data analysis. I fused together the textural and structural descriptions in the context of time and place forming a composed statement that represents the meanings and essences of parenting as

experienced by the fathers. I identified the differences that exist among the fathers for the purpose of reporting.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a formulated model used to establish the quality of research. I used the model for trustworthiness presented by Guba (1981) to assess the quality of this phenomenological study. I measured the standard of quality by the evidence of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These four standards of measure was defined and explained in Chapter 3. An explanation on how different strategies were used to establish each standard of measure is outlined below.

Credibility

The concern regarding credibility is centered on a belief held by naturalistic inquirers that multiple realities exist in contacts with participants (Cunliffe, 2003; Guba, 1981; Merriam, 2002; Moen, 2006). For this study, I incorporated specific strategies to help minimize the influence of emerging realities. The first strategy, peer briefing, was a continual standard of protocol due to my status as a doctoral candidate. The methods and insights presented related to my investigation was reviewed at every stage by the faculty members of my dissertation committee. I received ongoing feedback to improve the quality of the research and assure a high-quality standard was achieved (Bowen, 2005; Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

The second strategy, member checking, was satisfied by giving the fathers two opportunities to review transcripts. I presented the first opportunity for review after the initial interview, and the second opportunity was presented after the second interview.

Each of the fathers corresponded with me either by phone or email to discuss the information recorded in their transcript and to make known any changes needed. Each father was asked to provide approval after rechecking the data for requested changes. The fathers communicated their approval in-person, by phone, or by email. Their communicated approval gave me permission to move the data analysis process forward. All the fathers actively engaged in both member checking occasions except for Richard who was not available to engage in this two stage process due to reincarceration.

The third strategy, structural corroboration, occurred after all the data was gathered. I thoroughly searched the data for discrepancies. Any discrepancy identified was reported.

Transferability

The goal of transferability was not to produce generalizations, but to establish practical conclusions applicable to formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole supervision (Guba, 1981; Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2013; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2005). I achieved transferability by exercising appropriate and relevant strategies during and after the research inquiry. The first strategy I used was criterion-based purposeful sampling. Criterion-based purposeful sampling was necessary for me to ensure the information gathered was specific to the experience and context being targeted. I made known the criteria for participation by a clearly displaying my research flyer in accessible areas in the community, and by hand delivering the flyer to potential participants. I required all potential participants to affirm their eligibility for participation before being accepted.

The second strategy was the technique of qualitative interviewing. I viewed the individuals accepted for participation as capable of providing information-rich material to inform my research question. I engaged all the eligible fathers in two separate in-depth interviewing events, responding to a series of open-ended questions, for the purpose of describing the details related to their experience as formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole supervision. I recorded the responses given by each father and digitally tracked their responses using an audio recording device. I subsequently transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed all the data recorded during the interviewing process.

A data accounting sheet, the third strategy for transferability, was completed after each interview contact to track the responses given by each father, and to devise an interview plan for my follow-up encounter (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). The description of experience shared by the African American fathers in this study, in addition to post interview notes and member checks, helped me achieve data richness, breadth, depth, and saturation (Morrow, 2005). Lastly, I developed thick descriptions from the data gathered taking into consideration the time, context, and cultural factors of experience reported during each interview encounter (Guba, 1981; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). My goal was to establish practical conclusions applicable to formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole supervision. The description of experience given by the African American fathers in this study is specifically applicable to fathers living according to the same unique cultural context of experience.

Dependability

In this study, my aim was to achieve dependability by maintaining consistency in the data collection process. An audit trail process helped me to establish consistency by reducing the potential for any data collection instability. I developed the audit trail using raw data, categorized data, and analyzed data which presents the phases of progression in working with the data. I consistently organized, managed, and stored electronically the information-rich material gathered by each father using the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. My development and use of an audit trail process helped me to manage the flow of data and to easily identify errors requiring correction.

A dependability audit was performed by the faculty member appointed as chairperson for my dissertation committee. The faculty member completing the audit found my audit trail acceptable according to current qualitative research practices.

Confirmability

I established trustworthiness and quality by showing evidence aligned with investigative integrity. The idea of investigative integrity, findings being consistent with the data gathered, was my goal in establishing confirmability. The first strategy I exercised aimed at preventing distortions of findings was completed prior to data collection. The research instrument, an interview protocol (see Appendix E), was evaluated for overall fitness to the research population and research question (Havens & Vasey, 2005; Kici & Westhoff, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 3, I drafted the criteria for evaluating the interview protocol and presented it to the protocol reviewers. The interview protocol was first reviewed by a pastor/counselor and then reviewed by a

community-based attorney; both individuals with extensive experience working with the targeted population. I also coordinated the voluntary testing of the interview protocol with members of the targeted population who are not participants in this study. I conducted a test interview with two members of the targeted population as the final effort to produce an easy to understand, unbiased, and relevant research instrument (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013).

A second strategy was exercised at the point of initial contact with potential research participants. To have consistent findings it is necessary to gather raw data that is reliable and applicable. In part, my goal was to achieve confirmability by building a positive rapport with participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Tinker & Armstrong, 2008). During initial contact with potential participants, my position as the researcher and professional status as a licensed social worker was revealed. The presentation of my disclosure included a brief history working with individuals connected to the criminal justice system and defining the goals for this study. My introduction clearly communicating these two points was critical in building camaraderie. My effort made to be honest with potential participants, in addition to being perceived an insider as an African American woman, helped to create a safe atmosphere for open and honest disclosure during each interview encounter. Throughout the data collection process, I remained inquisitive seeking to learn from the expert informant, the formerly incarcerated African American father (Chenail, 2011), and rejected the inclination to make assumptions.

The third strategy, reflexive journaling, was used to capture attitudes, thoughts, emotions, shifts, and changes throughout the data collection and analysis process (Flick, 2014; Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012; Whitemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). I conducted a three-part note taking process following every interview encounter to record the details about the interview setting along with impressions regarding the interview. During analysis, I reviewed my pre-recorded notes often and recorded new notes were taken as the process of analysis moved forward.

A confirmability audit was performed by the faculty member appointed as chairperson for my dissertation committee. The faculty member conducting the audit determined that my research findings are free of investigator bias.

Presentation of Findings

All nine participants were engaged in a series of open-ended questions to capture their experience of parenting as a formerly incarcerated African American father obligated to parole supervision. Using Microsoft Word and NVivo 11, the data gathered from the fathers during in-depth interview contact was first organized according to each open-ended question asked. I explored the organized data and discovered 701 general units of experience. I examined the units of experience and then organized them into 70 clusters of experience. I reviewed and judged the clusters for redundancy among illustrations of experience and the ability to combine or group like clusters. At the conclusion of this process, I reduced the clusters from 70 experiences to 20 experiences and then arranged them into three classifications. I examined the clusters of experience once more according to classification and that led to the identification of nine central

themes representing the experience of parenting following incarceration as articulated by the African American fathers in this study. A summarized view of the clusters of experience, classifications, and central themes is presented in Table 3.

I focused the investigative process of this study to answer the research question: What are the parenting experiences of African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision following an incarceration? The units of experience I identified was are relevant and necessary to answering the research question. I present the results of investigation in accordance with the identified central themes to describe the lived experience as articulated by the fathers. The excerpts of the fathers' responses to the interview questions is void of identity characteristics and disclosures about their location. The inclusion of this information poses a breach to confidentiality.

Identity and Role

The thoughts and feelings presented about self and role as an African American father obligated to parole supervision is the focus for this classification. This classification includes three central themes: *A Father at the Crossroad*, *Surviving on the Edge*, and *By the Way...I've Changed*. I presented the questions related to this classification during the initial and follow-up in-depth interview encounter with the fathers.

Table 3

Central Themes from Clusters of Experience

<u>Clusters of experience</u>	<u>Classification</u>	<u>Central themes</u>
African American father on parole Thinking/feeling as a father	Identity and Role	A father at the crossroad Surviving on the Edge By the way...I've changed
Acceptance by children Admission of guilt to children Apology/forgiveness to children Explanation for absence to children Interactions most gratifying/problematic Learning who children are Parenting practices Parenting conflicts Perception of parole Promise to children Rejection by children Seeing children first time Sense of failure/regret	Fathers in Action	It's been too long without you It hurt me but helped us I'm the father It's father time
Ability to be a father Biggest accomplishment Lessons by children Motivation while on parole Unique about experience	Living Beyond Day 30	No family, No life A work in progress

A father at the crossroad. At the start of their initial in-depth interview, I deliberately asked the fathers first to describe what it means to be an African American father on parole. This question helped to facilitate a relaxed, comfortable, and safe atmosphere for honest open disclosure. The question also acted as a precursor to the more sensitive questions that followed; bringing into context the individuals whose experiences were represented in this study. Being an African American father on parole was interpreted negatively by most of the fathers. This central theme is based on the perceptions held by most of the fathers that parole and its associated mandates can inconveniently interfere, interrupt, or interject activities of being a father and contribute to one being isolated within the community. Although a few of the fathers seemingly was surprised by the question, each offered a response.

When asked to describe what it means to be an African American father obligated to parole supervision, Jeffrey responded by saying “that’s a tough one.” After pausing briefly, he stated the need to automatically accept that parole will be “in your business”:

That’s a tough one. To be an African American father comes with responsibilities of making your child, son or daughter, better than you are. Teach them not to make mistakes that you have made...walk and do the right things. Being under supervision as a father you have to allow these people to be in your business...when you’re going to see your child, what you’re doing for your child, how you gonna take care of your child. The supervision part is really rough because there are things that you wanna do with your child that they make hard for you.

Jeffrey continued explaining by stating:

It's when you wanna spend time with your child they wanna know where you gonna be, how long you gone be with your child, or and if the mother of your child is gonna be around while you're there. So quality time you have to make basically a schedule for them. And that makes it hard because sometimes you don't know how much time you're gonna have...under supervision you have a certain time to be out and you have to get back to wherever they have you at. So, that's hard.

Micah agrees with Jeffrey about there being some difficulty as a parolee, but his perspective places an emphasis on the child support system:

Well right now it means...it's kinda a stressful situation because I mean, with being on parole and...having to deal with child support system right now and having to deal with the different things that happen to be taken out of my check because of child support. Back child support. So it's like...I feel like I'm under a lot of pressure. Pressure sometimes gets to my nerves... cause I feel like I'm under a lot of pressure, but I don't feel like it's nothing I can't bare though...

When asked to explain where he believes the pressure comes, Micah explained:

The child support system as far as like them taking 65 dollars out of my check every two weeks. I feel like that's like my responsibility as a man to pay back child support, but I don't want it to where it be a burden on me to where I be struggling to where you know I don't have means to pay no other than my child support... If I work at a fast food sometimes be slow so that next week I probably

wouldn't be able to work as many hours. So I might only get 30 hours instead of 40 hours. Plus along with the other taxes being taken out along with everything else. I've learned to adjust and accept the fact that I gotta pay child support and pay it properly...

Willie's interpretation of being an African American father on parole was also expressed in view of pressure. In Willie's view, parole acts as a restrictive force more so for African American males than any other because of pressure from the community:

I believe it's a little bit more strict for us. I believe the boots on our neck and everything else like that to really prove that we can become part of the community based on what our crime might have been or whatever. There isn't really any leniency for us I believe. I truly believe that the justice system is one-sided. We get a lot of the negative backlash with everything I believe.

Willie was asked to share more regarding his understanding:

I believe the community sees African American males as a threat to community safety. We have been responsible for a lot of violence in the past and that's what people remember. It's one of those things we're constantly having to fight through whether we're doing an awesome job or when we're just getting out looking for work and stuff like that. I believe skin color plays a big role in whether or not you get hired or not and no skill.

Darrin agrees with Willie that the community influences what it means to be an African American father on parole. He responded from a perspective of color and race:

To me, when it comes to color...color is a big thing. I can see it. Even though they don't say it, I can see it. Prison, big thing. Out here, not really big to me cause I stay in my environment. I mess with my kids, my sister and them, the people I love...that African American stuff it only affects me for real when I get around them people. And I see they reaction, the way they treat me, the way they acknowledge me...I hate being on probation. I hate all of it...just something I have to go through...for the problems I done made for myself. Consequences.

Darrin continued sharing his understanding:

As a African American I feel like we limited. We're already looked down upon. We have to shine in some area to even be looked at like we're doing something or being somebody. And I ain't saying to the world I'm just saying as our self, we feel like we nobody. Because that's how society treats us and if we ain't out here doing the most, it's hard to comfort ourselves.

Jason has a subtle interpretation compared to Darrin on the meaning of being an African American father on parole. His statement of "just another black man" seems to suggest a common and reasonable moment in an African American father's life, and therefore does not believe parole is significant as an African American father:

It means it's just another black man that got a hold on him. I don't think it makes it harder at all cause if you gonna be a father, you gonna be a father whether you on supervision or not. Although a little harder, yeah. Because getting out of prison it's hard to get jobs. So it's probably harder to take care of your kids at times with parole fees and all that. Once you get a job it shouldn't be too hard.

Corey has a similar interpretation of being an African American father on parole when it comes to his use of the term “just” that suggests a common and reasonable moment in the life of an African American father. However, he explains there is a “cycle” created by the “system” where the significance of the African American father on parole has been reduced inanimately to a symbol of being:

Honestly, from the top of my head the first thing that pops up is just another number. And the reason why I feel that way, briefly and quickly said, is because I feel like there’s so many African American men that either set themselves up or is not paying attention enough. End up in the system and then become part of the system. I hate to say it like that, but some of them ain’t smart enough to catch on to the cycle and take they self out of the cycle...I would have to say just another number...when people quote-unquote care about you they put more into it. Just like a father caring for a child, or a mother caring for a child. You put so much of yourself into that child to make sure they come up in a certain manner. In my aspect with dealing with the system...you feel like just another number.

Something that needs to be done minimum. It feels like minimal effort.

Harold’s understanding of what it means to be an African American father on parole is in full contrast to the other fathers. He interprets being an African American father on parole as a “benefit” that promotes a fathers’ personal and relational well-being:

It’s benefit really cause it’s getting you on the right track of life. You know what I mean. Cause you’re in a situation where you need some help. So under the supervision phase, you can’t do certain things like you wanna do so that distracts

stuff from you doing what you wanna do. Like I say, if I wasn't under supervision there ain't no telling what I'd be doing. I'll be probably wilding out or something, or anything. But I know I can't do nothing. That's helping me. It's rough around here but I don't care about no money or nothing. I got life. I'm living right now, I'm breathing real good, I can go get me a meal. I go home and eat. Like I said, you gotta get yourself together to take care of yourself.

Richard was asked to share what it means to be an African American father on parole. He acknowledged that, as an African American father, being on parole "it's hard." However, he could not offer an explanation on what it means to be an African American father on parole.

Surviving on the edge. This central theme is based on the expressed views of the fathers describing their feelings about being an African American father obligated to parole supervision. When sharing their feelings, the fathers associated fear with being a supervised parolee that could negatively affect their ability to be an active father. When given the opportunity to discuss his fears about being an African American father obligated to parole supervision, Jeffrey stated:

That they would send you back. That they would take you away from your family for the least little thing that you do. Being under supervision, the cops already know you on parole...and you can't even get arrested for traffic ticket or any of that. And the first thing that they do is take you away from your family again. So the fears being an African American father under supervision is the fear of having your children do your time with you again. That society won't let you be a father.

They rather for you to be a dad because a dad can come and go, but a father gone stay there...so my fears is that they'll take you away from your family again. As much as they can.

Jeffrey's expressed concern is in response to his belief that society is opposed to African American males being fathers. Timothy responded by saying, "getting locked back up, being stereotyped, and job firing you. It's a whole bunch of negative to it having that label on you." His expressed fear is about parole being a "label" that subjects one to things that are harmful or bad. Harold stated having a fear of being re-incarcerated as a result of a substance use habit:

...they probably would lock me up for giving them a dirty u.a. [urine analysis] for marijuana or something. Locking me up, taking me away from my daughter, my family, my life for a drug issue I'm trying to accomplish. I'm in drug class and I'm not hurting nobody...my fears is not being able to see her or something happening to me or something happening to her. That's my fear.

Harold acknowledges his issue with marijuana and it being a potential cause for him to lose the ability to be an active father and present member in his family. When Jason was given an opportunity to share about fears of being an African American father on parole supervision, he stated:

Just that I'm on supervision and they kinda got a control on my life. I kinda fear doing anything wrong and going back for a p.v. [parole violation] or something. That's what I fear...not being able to be a father to my kid. That's my number one fear.

Jason's expressed concern is about making a mistake while on parole that would result in him losing the ability to be a father. In contrast to the other fathers, Corey expressed a fear that is solely based on his understanding of society. Corey responded by saying:

...societal views point blank, period.... Societal stereotypes bother me because I don't say everybody's racist. I don't say everybody has a issue with African American, minorities or whatever, but there are people that do. There are some people that might not be a race issue but just a stereotype issue. Cause we hear if you're African American or a black person, or you look like this, or you are here in this area, or you done did this, or this done happened to you before then you're this way... Don't judge somebody by what has, or what has been...A lot of people sometimes feed into that. A lot of ignorant people feed into it and that's what kills me.

Corey's expressed concern is about being judged by society because of his "hardship." He advised, "...don't talk about something you haven't experienced yourself.... don't sit there and try to be pro-self judging someone over something you never went through." Corey communicated that people should first learn the person and "then judge that person accordingly." Richard also described his fear in a way that is different than the other fathers:

You could best believe I'm afraid out here cause of things that I did do in the past, you know. My life then wasn't a easy picking out here.... I did a lot of dirt in my life and like I tell them in class, I run into a lot of people out here in the streets and stuff.... I can sit back and remember I done did something to them so I'm

worried about if they gone do something to me. So that's why I say sometimes I'm in fear. But I'm not afraid, I'm just in fear.

Richard's fear is about the potential to experience retaliation because of happenings in the past. At the end of his statement, Richard clarified that his expression of being "afraid" is a concern and not a debilitating internal sense of emotion.

By the way...I've changed. This central theme describes the understanding fathers had about incarceration and reentry. All the fathers of this study served lengthy sentences and claimed that their extended time away from home gave them plenty of time to think. The fathers were asked to share their thoughts and feelings by explaining how incarceration effected their view of self as a father. Richard, who takes pride in caring for his twin daughters, expressed feeling like he let his children down. He explained, "I never been in any of my kids life when they was young." Richard continued:

When I left my kids was babies, but then when I come out here they was like 12 years old, 11 and 12 years old. So I was wondering how I was gonna adapt to that, but my kids they love they father so I gotta show them love in return and do what a dad supposed to do.

Incarceration for Richard made him feel like a failure as he exclaimed "I let them down." Despite the feeling of failure, he recognized that his kids "love they father" and that influenced him to "take care his kids." A sense of failure was also expressed by Jeffrey who asserted, "I failed my children, my parents, I failed myself." Incarceration led Jeffrey to conclude, "you can't discipline your kids over the phone." By claiming "I failed" Jeffrey recognized his personal responsibility as a father which stands without

connection to the criminal justice system. Darrin referenced the confiscation of his personal property upon incarceration. Regarding incarceration he said, “it changed everything...they took everything from me.” Darrin continued sharing his thoughts:

“If I would have never went to prison...I would’ve never changed. I’ve always been a good dad with my daughter...cause I had so much money...going to prison made me see what I’m showing them.”

Incarceration for Darrin led him to experience loss and forced him to question his understanding of reality. Prior to his incarceration, being a father was about what his money could buy. During the time of incarceration, Darrin indicated a shift in his understanding to consider what he was teaching his kids by the lifestyle he was leading. Incarceration led Darrin to conclude that money is not everything:

...I chose my kids over everything else...I was all about money...I came home and tried to be so much more.

Harold also explained how incarceration led him to experience loss:

It really affected me...I wasn’t there for my daughter when she was born. To be there to talk to her, to feed her, to hug her, to hear her when she cry, to see the tears cover her eyes. I didn’t get to see none of that...

Incarceration for Harold separated him from his daughter, caused him to miss a portion of her life, and prevented him from building a relationship. The loss of time with his daughter due to incarceration, along with being a witness to the circumstances of his friends, has sparked a sense of urgency for Harold to build a “beautiful relationship” with his daughter.

I'm in the same situation right now as my friends is. They had they daughter when they wasn't around they momma. They didn't have no communication with they daughter. But now they daughters grewed up. They got beautiful relationship. But I don't wanna wait that long. I wanna have some relationship with my daughter right now while she's nine years old. I done missed that nine years really cause I been incarcerated during that time.

Micah acknowledged his "baby mother" for helping him realize "I wasn't right for my child." In sharing how incarceration changed his thoughts and feelings about being a father, Micah stated:

...at that time of my life I felt like that was a burden to me. Cause of course I had my little cloudy ways of thinking...I was probably out there a little bit too tough out in the streets...I'm pretty much straighten up myself...so my integrity is strong for my kids.

He continued by explaining what he told his youngest daughter:

...you only got one father. I don't care if you got a father-in-law or whatever. You only got one father so you better learn to get to know me. Cause my father he's like 56 something like that, and my brother he hates him. He's like "aww he ain't never done nothing for me," but I said "but you know what when he gone, he gone." How many people you know that dreads when they father or they mother gone and they don't have no chance to get the chance to know them... get to know me. I wanna get to know you cause we don't know if we gone...tomorrow ain't promised to nobody...

Micah also explained having to change for the sake of connecting with his daughter, “I’m having to adjust to her personality...she was raised under different ways than the way I was raised.” Micah stated that his change is related to having an “anger problem.” He associated the offense that led to incarceration with his battle with anger. He expressed gaining “a little bit more acceptance” which helps him to stay calm. Micah openly credits this calming ability to his time away from home due to incarceration. For Micah, incarceration helped him to learn the need to have self-control, flexibility, and to find value in being a father. Incarceration triggered the feeling of shame and disappointment for Jason as a father:

...my feelings was hurt about being incarcerated again and not being there for my daughter...but, it didn’t really effect my thinking...it just made me wanna get out and do better.

A strengthened sense of desire to be a father overshadowed Jason’s emotional pain leading to a vow to “do better”. On the other hand, Willie expressed that incarceration gave him a cause for concern about being a father:

...how do I explain myself to my child or my children when they’re doing something that could lead them to be incarcerated and stuff. How am I gonna justify where I’m coming from versus where they’re at? ...It just made me really wanna latch on them and be like, “look I seen guys and girls your age coming in and out of prison and everything else like that. I really would like you to slow down. Don’t be in a rush to live now. You got your whole life ahead of you...finish school.”

Willie recognized the impact his life had on his children as well as the responsibility he had toward them through observing youth in prison while incarcerated. He explained, “I know my decision to parent really started with them.” For Willie, incarceration helped him to realize the duty of role modeling as a father and to think of himself as a mentor for his children. Timothy claimed that incarceration helped him to reach a state of maturity as a father:

If I didn't get incarcerated, then I don't think I would've been able to show them how to be a man...it kinda opened my eyes up and I learned a whole bunch of stuff that may have turned me...from a boy into a man.

Incarceration led Timothy to conclude that he does not want to be unknown or replaced by another:

...I don't want my kids to look at me like “that's not my daddy” or looking at somebody else like that's their father or something like that.

Timothy claimed that he first has to be his best as a father so his children can be their best. Additionally, he expressed the importance of being a father who is reliable and resourceful.

...it may sound selfish, but...take care of yourself first...if I don't got nothing, they don't got nothing... kinda create my own foundation so that if they need something and I'll be able to do that. Daddy can do that. Daddy ain't gotta go to grandma and ask her for this and that...do what a typical father would do.

Incarceration helped Timothy embrace his identity as a father by considering the responsibility and active role to take in his children's life.

Fathers in Action

For this classification, there were four central themes identified: *It's Been Too Long Without You*, *I'm Their Father*, *It Hurt Me but Helped Us*, and *It's Father Time*. The central themes focus on the lived experience of returning back to the community. The details communicated in this section are about thoughts, feelings, and stories that illustrated the happenings of returning back to the community as a father on parole supervision.

It's been too long without you. Most of the fathers in this study was eager to see their children upon release from prison. This central theme is based on the thoughts and feelings held by fathers when seeing their children for the first time. Their accounts described feelings of anxiousness and wondering what the child thinks about their father. Each of the fathers presented a different understanding of their first encounter with their children upon release from prison. When asked to describe what it was like seeing his daughter for the first time, Harold said, "it was beautiful!" He offered an account of that day:

When I seen her I was in the car. When I seen her she was walking to the car and I was just looking at her out the window. She was getting out of school. I'm sitting in the car and I see my daughter running out to the car and she looking all happy and stuff. She get in the car and I'm like "What's up?!" She was like "Nothing. How you doing?" I said "You looking pretty." ...So we got in and went to her house and we got to talking and stuff. Then we got on the highway and went to my house and spent 3 days together. We just sit around and talked. Played

just a little bit, but we sat around and talked. We ate. She played with my nieces and my nephews and stuff. It was nice. Like love at first site or something.

Harold said he was “excited and felt relieved.” While incarcerated he did not see his daughter. Although he was away for “so long” he said the time spent with his daughter was “like she been there all the time. I was relieved instantly. That love was there. It’s just that it’s been missing. We ain’t seen each other.” Darrin described himself as being “happy” when he seen his children for the first time. His son didn’t know him because he was incarcerated before the time of his birth:

My son didn’t talk to me. He was kinda acting scared. My daughter ran, “Daddy!”

That’s what made him like, “Who he?” You know I seen him start looking at me like, “Who he?” She over there, “Daddy!” She love me. Straight Daddy’s girl.

Love’s me. My daughter is 6 now. She just, “Dad!” I’m talking about, there was a party when I walked in the house and dude just wouldn’t mess with me. She just sit there and messed with me for like, I think I chilled with her for like two days.

Darrin continued and said, “I felt good, but I thought I would feel a little bit better.” He was asked to share more about his feelings and described a sense of “comfort” with his children present, but a sense of loss and despair when they were gone:

I felt good. But, I thought I would feel a little bit better. Because I was so hyped up about seeing these kids and everything. And that made me feel so good and everything. But, I just thought that was the only thing I needed in life when I got out of prison. Like “Once I get that I’m good. I don’t need nothing else. I’m gone push myself.” They gave me my comfort I wanted. I was comfortable. I was good.

But soon as they left it was like I ain't have no life. You know, they left and it was just like "What now?" You know what I mean. She ain't gone let you have them. You can't keep them every day. It just went from me being so excited to the day that they left. It was just like everything started going back downhill. So it was just like man, I didn't know what to do about life for real. I almost drug myself back into that hole for real.

Timothy portrayed a similar circumstance regarding his first time seeing his children. His youngest son was born after he was incarcerated but visited with him "a couple times" while in prison. Timothy visited his youngest son first and described feeling rejected by him.

I would see him playing and coming towards his grandma and his momma and auntie and it wasn't none of that for me. Right off the back it wasn't like that. Like I'm tryna let him know. I'm tryna hug him and kiss him and stuff like that. He might take a hug and a kiss, but he didn't really know who's this dude kissing me or whatever. It kinda made me sad cause he was showing them more love than he was showing towards me. I didn't expect it, but it's something that I kinda thought maybe that would happen. He wouldn't just be open to me right off the back.

Jeffery described his first encounter with his children as being "emotional." He stated he was "teary eyed" and he "just hugged them." Jason's daughter was present at the facility when he was released:

I came out the gate and she was standing there with my mom. She ran to me. I hugged her. Told her “I love you.” And she told me she love me back. I told her, I said “I’m hungry.” She said “Me too.” “We gone go get some breakfast.”

Jason laughed several times while sharing his short story. He continued:

I just asked her how she been doing. How she doing in school. Has she been helping her mom out around the house. How she feel that I’m back home, is she happy or not...I was just happy. It was like it was not real. I was happy. It seemed like it wasn’t real. Just excited. Kinda nervous cause I hadn’t seen her in visits, but to do like 4 and a half years and then get out and just be able to be around her with no guards or nothing. I was kinda nervous a little bit because I didn’t know how she thought of me as a dad.

Jason explained that his daughter told what she thought of him as a dad, “she loves me. Yeah, she just told me she love me and told me don’t go back. Told me stay out.” When Corey was asked to describe the first time he saw his children and stated he saw them the first day he was released. He said, “I told them I love them.” Corey had mixed feelings, “had a real warm side but happy feeling inside,” but “sad because I missed so much.” Corey said he “had a lot of thoughts going through my head the moment I saw them, but I was happy that I could see them and spend time with them. I embraced them. I was emotional. Teary eyed. Told them I love them.” Willie expressed his thoughts and feelings about the first time he saw his daughters:

I was just thinking like, Am I gonna be able to carry a conversation with her or am I just gonna sit there and stare at her. I did more staring than I did carrying a

conversation. But I was happy. I was smiling from ear to ear the whole time...I was like "Your sister been telling me you play the violin, you like to dance and sing, and everything else." She was like "Yes I do." I asked her about the songs that she plays, and she says she plays everything. So I don't know what everything is. I don't know if that's classical or anything else, but I know I just couldn't help but just sit there and just stare at them. I barely ate cause I was just staring at them the whole time. I was excited just to be there. I got hugs. Just a wonderful day.

Micah was asked to share his first encounter with his daughter, "I said she look just like me and I gave her a hug." He gave a burst of laughter and then repeated himself, "she look just like me and I gave her a hug." Micah was asked to share more and said, "she just smiled and got in the car" and began laughing.

It hurt me but helped us. The fathers described efforts to restore the relationship with their children that was mentally and emotionally challenging. This central theme is based on the statements made by fathers to restore the relationship with their children. Most of the fathers expressed a sense of failure and regret. For instance, when talking about his thoughts and feelings about returning to the community as a father, Richard said "I feel I let them down." Jeffrey had that same sentiment:

I let my kids down cause I left them out here to defend for they selves even though they had mothers...it was my responsibility to raise my kids with the mothers. I failed my children, my parents, I failed myself...not being in they life

all the time or always being there for them was a choice that I made and that was something that I regret.

Timothy expressed a sense of failure and regret by claiming he was “careless” acting selfishly:

Sometimes I’ll put myself before their responsibilities and I wasn’t really looking at the bigger picture as far as what a child really needs from their father. I wasn’t really giving them that.

Darrin explained, “I wasted my life running around being this n**** for a whole lot of people that don’t even mean nothing to me.” Willie’s sense of failure and regret was similar. He said, “I was detached. I really wasn’t home. I was always in the streets.”

Micah’s sense of failure and regret was also similar to Darrin and Willie:

I didn’t have a chance to raise her, or I didn’t have a chance to change her diaper, I didn’t have a chance to teach her how to be a little woman or teach her how to be respectful...at the time of my life I felt like that was a burden to me...I was probably out there a little bit too tough out in the streets...”

After seeing their children for the first time some of the fathers gave some kind of explanation for their absence. Jeffrey is a former gang member and was fully engaged in street life that involved the distribution of drugs. Because of his lifestyle, he chose to stay away from his children as a way to protect them. Jeffrey stated that the mothers of his children spoke favorably on his behalf to his children, “ya’ll thought he was a bad father for not giving you time, he was a good father because he allowed ya’ll not to see or not be in the vicinity where you could get hurt.” Jeffrey chose to change his life while

incarcerated. He described his explanation to his children regarding his absence prior to incarceration:

...they wanted the time, and I had to be the one to tell 'em that "it was never ya'll it was always me. My lifestyle was...I had made this decision before yall was born, but I never thought that it would get to the point to where I couldn't carry or take yall with me anywhere. The neighborhood gym I could take yall to, the mall downtown I could take yall to, but other neighborhoods I couldn't...I couldn't"
...it's not a good feeling when you can't leave your neighborhood. And when you do leave your neighborhood you have to have all this protection or you have to be with a whole bunch of people. I never wanted my kids to experience none of that. So, "if me wanting to save ya'll lives caused me not to spend time with ya'll, that's my fault." And they understand it now.

Harold stated that he explained the reason for his absence to his daughter, but did not offer the details of his conversation. He said, "I just told her my situation that I been in trouble." Willie explained that his daughter just asked him questions, "...what you do? Why you do it? Did you do this? Did you do that..." Corey, a veteran of the US Army, explained that his children experienced extended absences from him due to deployment:

I gotta admit my kids done seen me go and come a lot with the military. When they became rapid deployments it was me there for like maybe 6 months, 4 months, bam gone. Then with me getting out and finally being around them again then it was like just 6 months, bam he's gone. He's gone for 3 something years and then all of a sudden he pops back up again. You know I can understand. I

tried to review it from a child's perspective. You know "This dude he do magic tricks. Bam! Gone! And then he pop up like, what's up ya'll!" It was kinda hard because before when I was in the military I could explain to an extent. "I'm going over here. I'm going to do such and such." Or I could say "Okay, daddy's going to war." "Well, what's war?" "Such and such and such and such and such." But it was different.

Corey stated that he made the decision not to discuss the reason for his incarceration absence with his children:

I never wanted to explain to them the situation especially now at that age. And not even now I still haven't explained to them yet. I would rather wait until they get to a age, maybe 15 or so, and I'll sit down and I'll explain to them the situation. But all I told them is "I'm sorry that I had to be gone. It's probably my fault." I said more in depth with it "It's my fault and I hope ya'll still love me and forgive me." I said "I'll just do my best never to be away from you again." I said "I thought after me getting out of the military, I thought me going away from ya'll and leaving ya'll for long period of time would've changed" but I said "I messed that up." And then I said "I'm gonna really do everything in my power that I can not to let this happen again."

Corey explained that he apologized to his children without intending to take full responsibility, accept blame, or admit guilt:

I'm sorry that I had to be gone. It's probably my fault...I hope ya'll still love me and forgive me...sorry, I really am. I'm truly sorry that I had to put you through something because of my ignorance.

Admitting guilt was necessary for Jeffrey to mend the relationship with his children:

I have two boys by the same young lady. And, they always was angry and I had to tell them "your animosity should never be with her or with him cause he was here when I didn't wanna be here...she never left you. I'm the one you should have animosity with ...you should be angry with." I have a son that I had custody of...I had to give him back to his mother and he did not like that at all, and he felt abandoned. "The choices that I made was my mistake...don't hold any animosity towards your mother, it's my fault."

Some of the fathers made confessions of commitment to their children. For instance, Micah expressed his devotion to his children and said, "I'm not gone give up on them...I got a strong intuition to be in their life...I always pay child support...and stay out for her...she wasn't asked to be here...I'll give her my last." Willie confessed his commitment and said, "I want them to know that I'm there through anything...I love my kids...I'll do anything for my kids. I want them to know that." When Richard picked up his kids from school on the day of his release he attempted to evoke a strong sense of confidence. He assured them his commitment stating, "hey, believe me, everything gonna be all right." Corey expressed commitment to his children by being present all the time. Currently unemployed and living each day attending to the needs of his children, he confessed his commitment stating, "I been steadily showing them that 'guess what? I

ain't going nowhere. I'm here." Corey promised his children, "I'll do my best never to be away from you again...I'm gonna really do everything in my power that I can not to let this happen again...I'm gone show you that daddy's gone be here..."

A few of the fathers articulated being rejected by their children initially. For instance, Harold's daughter, who lives 3 hours away, told him "I don't want you to come over my house." He believes his daughter asked him to stay away because she knew he would only be around for a couple of hours before returning home. Jeffrey described pleading with his daughter for a chance to be a part of his grandchildren's life and was told, "it's gone take a minute. You have to earn that trust back." Jeffrey explained that the message from his daughter "hurt, but it was the truth because I knew I had lied to my kids a lot...they love me enough to tell me that." Micah talked about his daughter constantly reminding him of his absence by "bringing up the fact that I was in prison for 13 years and she been making it on her own for 13 years..." Despite the rejection, the fathers remained dedicated to creating a lasting bond with their children and was able to arrive at a place of acceptance by their children. For instance, Jeffrey explained while holding back tears that his children said to him, "That's my father...that's what we wanted to clear the air...just keep doing what you have to do. We accept what you can do." Jason expressed that when he heard his daughter say, "I love you...don't go back" it made him "feel bad." He explained by saying "...I mean it kinda felt good though...she loves me and I'm hearing it from her...give me a reason to not get in trouble again."

I'm the father. This central theme is based on the stories shared by fathers to illustrate the challenges they faced involving the mother of their children, and persons

holding guardianship. In many of the illustrated accounts, the fathers explained efforts to coordinate, compromise, and fully exercise their perceived parental right as a father. The illustrations were offered after sentiment toward the mother or guardian as held by the father was expressed. For instance, when asked about his relationship with the mother of his children, Richard declared “I hate those son of a guns.” He described a damaged relationship with issues around substance abuse. Richard stated that his children “don’t wanna see their mom” and shared a story of his previous encounter with her:

I called myself being a man and say “Hey. If you wanna see her I’ll let you see her.” But when she did come to see her she was intoxicated. I didn’t want that around. You know what I’m saying. So I asked her to leave. She wouldn’t leave... I called the police on her. But I did step up and be a man and say “... I’ll help her get out of jail.” But...when I helped get her out of jail I said “This is how we gone do this. That was the first time of you seeing your daughter in about 4 years, 5 years and this is how you gone act.” I said “No. You keep your distance. I’ll keep my distance.” I get phone calls from her right now and be wondering how she got my number. She’ll ask me could I see them, could I bring this for them. I don’t need your help. You take that on back to the store.

Richard also discussed a conflict regarding his expectation to respect his role as the father and allow him to act like the father to his children:

Knowing that when they come over they’re at ease because my sister she rides them. I don’t ride them and sometimes I have to call her and be like “Sis, you need to back up and take 10 steps.” But then she’ll get mad at them and she’ll say

something to 'em then they come back and they tell me. That kinda like pisses me off because they're not doing nothing they're supposed to do. They supposed to come to me and tell me what's going on.

Darrin also described a conflict regarding expectation, but from a different perspective. The relationship with his children's mother is strained and he explained that "I think the main deal with her is she be trying to hurt me." He talked about a time she demanded him to "come get my son" and he responded by saying "you know I ain't got no license. I ain't never have a license in my life." Darrin believes his children's mother "don't care like I do." He went on to say, "I ain't saying she don't care. Them her kids, she gotta care. But she don't care to the extent I care. And maybe because I don't have them all the time." Although he does not have his children all the time, Darrin expects their mother to care for them as he does when they are with him. He questions whether she is tired or lazy:

I can't really say why she is the way she is sometimes. And she ain't a bad mom. I don't like when my son always walk around with a dirty butt. I done seen my son with a dirty diaper and she take her time and wait to change it and I'm like "Man, change this dude diaper! Here, come here man. Change his diaper immediately if he poop or pee. That's how he get rashes and stuff." Like she'll rather sleep all day then sit down and play the games with the kids or something. That's what she'll do. She'll sleep all day. And I be like "Man!" She ain't installing herself into them kids. I feel she deal with them cause she have to. Not to say she don't

love them. Them her kids, she love them. But I feel like it's more of a "I gotta do it" than "I wanna do it."

Micah talks about his conflict of expectation with his daughter's mother who wants him to be his daughter's friend. Micah refuses to embrace his daughter as a friend because she does not respect him as her father:

...my youngest daughter...I believe that she just need to be introduced to what I'm trying to introduce her to, but with her mother more or like trying to say you gotta be her friend before her father. So that's the big dilemma...was a big dilemma, but I'm trying to tell her I don't have friends that disrespect me. I don't know no person in the world is gonna have a friend that disrespect them nor allow them to disrespect them so we can't build no kinda bond unless we build it on respect first. So me and her mother we wrestling back and forth with that.

The fathers described instances where they were prevented from seeing their children. Richard stated, "from the mom to the grand-mom, you know. That's a painful feeling when you wanna be in your kids' corner you got somebody that won't let you." Darrin described this kind of conflict regarding his children:

I go over there to get my son, man they talking bout he sleep. "Listen, it's 11:30, 12. Okay, I understand he sleep but this is the only ride I got to come get him. I got to get all his stuff. Take him way out south. This the only ride I got." "Well, I'm just gone call you when he wakes up." I was like "I always have to do this. I shouldn't have to do this for ya'll to really see what ya'll doing." "Well, I'll just call you when he wakes up." Like I told her "You don't call me when he wakes

up. You don't do that." I said "Look, this what I said when I stop messing with your daughter is that ya'll gone keep the kids from me. Okay, it's not his choice to come with me or not."

Darrin continued by describing how his children's mother works to control his active involvement:

They manipulate my kids man...this how they grandma does it or they momma, they'll be like "Do you wanna go with your daddy or do you wanna stay with your momma?" And I just look at them and I be like "Why'd you do that?!" "What did I do?" I tell them soon as they do it. I do not be faking. As soon as they do it "Why'd you do that?! You just conned the boy into staying here. You conned him into it. He was ready to go and you just did that for no reason." "No I didn't. You can still take him." "But now he wants to trip. Now you got him tripping like I'm taking him from ya'll. When he just was thinking 'I'm bout to go with my dad' now you done tricked it into like I'm taking him away from ya'll. It shouldn't be like that. He should feel happy like he did when I walked in and then you gonna con him into staying." "Well, he doesn't wanna go so we're not gonna make him go." I said "See, ya'll keeping...whatever ya'll wanna say look at the situations. Ya'll keeping the kids from me. I'm trying. Ya'll keeping the kids from me. I gotta walk out of here after trying to get my kids without them. For what? ...Just because you conned him and now he saying no, now you're like well we're not gonna make him go. Man, he shouldn't even have that choice. I'm his daddy! If I come get him he gotta come with me!"

Jason described how his daughter's mother blocks him from making a connection:

She just basically tells my daughter that I don't care about her, I got another kid on the way, another family. Just childish stuff she shouldn't be saying to a 10, or 11-year-old kid.

Harold talked about taking care of his daughter and emphasized "I'm the daddy. Momma is fine, but I'm the daddy." After he was released from prison, Harold attempted to arrange an extended visit with his daughter and was denied by her mother:

I said "I want my daughter to come over my house for a week." She told me "She ain't big enough. She ain't grown enough." "What do you mean?! That's my baby, what do you mean?!" She thinking about me messing with some other girl, gone have my daughter around this other girl. I don't got no girl right now, I don't want no girl right now. What the f***! That's our issue... "She's too young." She's 10 years old. She would love to come over my house with my sisters, and my niece, and nephews, my other little niece. She would love to come over and play. What do you mean? But she just on some bull crap right now. Like I say, I told her "Well I'll just take you to court. I'll just go get me a job and get me some custody, and take you to court and get custody of my own baby. If that's how you wanna play it." Then that's when she got mad. I went and told her it's a change in plans.

Micah discussed having a conflict with his child's mother who prevented him from checking on his daughter:

...me and my baby mother had words and I was telling her that's not right you keeping me from my child. She said, "no I'm not." I said, "well pretty much you is if I can't go up and see how she's doing in school when I was able to, but now all of a sudden you took me off the list and everything else. And I can't go into your house so how I'm gone expect to see her?" "Well you can write her and text her and everything else." "But still I would like to see how she's doing in school maybe I wanna go up there... I was able to... when I first got out me and you was cool... I was able to go up there. You signed my name and everything else, but now you see that I'm branching out in the world and you don't like the fact that I'm branching out in the world and trying to find myself. So you decide to take me off my daughter's thing so I can't see her in school, so I can't see how she's doing in school."

Harold believes he understands the reason for the conflict with his daughters' mother. He believes his daughter's mother resents him and stated:

"If I don't wanna be with her I ain't gonna be able to really connect with my daughter. If I'm with her it'll be wide open. She know that we not gonna be together. She probably holding some of that against me which is keeping my daughter away from me."

Jason has a similar understanding and believes his daughter's mother resents him for having another child. He says, "her mom's kinda upset cause I got another kid on the way. So she uses it to where it's like I gotta see my daughter on her terms or when she feels like I get to see my daughter."

Darrin presented a conflict with his children's mother regarding their different approach to parenting. He expressed an issue with his kids being disrespectful and doing something to change that behavior. He stated, "I feel like I get somewhere. And then when I see the kids a week later, a couple days later, it's the same s***." Darrin continued:

...she can't vent to these kids about what they need to do, how they need to do it, and make them understand it. Make them wanna do the positive thing. She to me is just like "Well, ya'll better not be doing this or that." And leave it at that. Son go crazy, he over here tripping, yelling at her. "No!" Like that. "Hey girl, stop letting him do that. I'm not gone let him disrespect you like that. Stop letting him do that." She yell at me because he yelling at her. Like "He cool. I got him." "No! My son not gone be disrespectful like that. Stop letting him yell at you like that. Dude ain't even cried. He yelling at you. He yelling at you with a attitude and you letting that ride."

Darrin continued by explaining how he would handle the issue with his son:

Me, I would've seen that from the rear "Yo, hold up boy! Calm down boy. Come talk to Dad. Why you yelling? You need a whooping or something? Why you yelling son? Why you think you could yell at me?" That's how you should be acknowledging them situations. Just anything. I just feel like she don't handle situations the way she supposed to. She's just nonchalant about everything. So that's not teaching the kids nothing. She's teaching them that the negative things

that they're doing is good. That's a bad a** kid growing up. I was one. No! My kids ain't gone do that.

Micah also described an issue with disrespect with his daughter. He explained:

I been in prison most of the time she been born. I didn't even know she was my daughter and whatever the case might be...so I get out and... I'm having to adjust to her personality. She come and visit me a few times, but I'm having to adjust to her personality and how she is and with me being a Black African American her mother being Caucasian she was raised under different ways than the way I was raised. So right now we clashing because you know she seem to feel like its ok to be disrespectful to her elders and she disrespectful to her mother so she feel like she can be disrespectful and say whatever she want to me so we clash.

Micah explained that his daughter is “more like the parent and my baby momma is like the daughter, but according to his daughters' mother he is “the juvenile and she's the adult;” she meaning his daughter.

It's father time. Most of the fathers articulated having frequent contact with their children since the time of release. The accounts presented were primarily related to discipline and play. All the fathers shared in some way their thoughts, feelings, and perceived responsibility as a father. This central theme is based on the expressed views of participants describing what they do as a father. Most of the fathers are employed and spend time with their children at the end of their work day. It is believed highly important to spend quality time and the fathers articulated quality time with their child as a top priority. Richard was asked to give his thoughts about quality time and stated that “it

means a lot” because he is “making up for lost time.” Darrin agrees with Richard’s view and said that quality time “means everything. It means a lot. I feel like I’m installing myself into them...I feel I need to install myself in them because they momma ain’t gone give them what I can give them.” Jeffrey’s view of quality time, “a highlight of my day...it brightens my day even if I have a bad day. He makes me forget about what happened the day before.”

Jason agrees that quality time is important. He said, “it means everything cause that’s my kid...it’s all I got for real.” Jason stated that “a dad is something I pride myself on cause I didn’t have it.” For Timothy, “as long as he’s happy I think that’s quality time. Harold agrees with Timothy that quality time is all about making his daughter happy and “for us to be together as one.” Willie said, quality time “means a lot” because “I’m getting to know them as they are now, young adults.” See Table 4 for participants’ estimate of the total amount of quality time they spent with their children during the course of a week.

Table 4

Participants' Estimated Total Quality Time Spent with Children per Week

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Jeffrey	30 hours
Micah	4-5 hours
Willie	14 hours
Richard	54 hours
Darrin	20 hours
Timothy	48-55 hours
Harold	Varies
Corey	8-10 hours (24/7 on weekend)
Jason	12 hours

During quality time, the fathers expressed engaging their children in ways that were affordable and convenient. Timothy presented cooking as one of his favorite ways to spend quality time with his children. He enjoys cooking, but also sees it as a way to communicate to his children that he is a safe person:

You know, something that daddy's giving, that daddy won't hurt you. You know they could see that me and they momma get along. I guess you would say maybe little stuff to us but maybe was big stuff to them. Like say I just changed his diaper or something. Something that a momma would do, as like nurturing him. You know what I'm saying. So that's gone give him that connection like "He's changing my poopy diaper." You know what I'm saying. "Who's gonna do that? Momma does that, who else gone do that? Daddy doing that? He must really love me."

Richard enjoys taking his daughters on road trips outside of town. When he decides to stay home with the kids, he picks them up from his sister's house to his apartment, and they just "be free":

...they be happy to come over...to play their little games, to watch the videos. Do what they want. To be free. You know, be free. "You got two bedrooms. Just do what ya'll do. Ya'll got everything ya'll need from the food, to the zoom zoom wam wam's, just have fun. Just make sure you do your homework before you start doing this."

Richard was asked to explain what he means by "zoom zoom wam wam." He laughed while responding and explained, "...zoom zoom wam wam means sunflower seeds, potato chips, and all that." Richard stated that these items are part of being "free" while at his house "because my sister she don't allow them to eat no type of junk food in the house so they gotta eat it outside."

Jeffrey spends most of his spare time with his youngest son. He gave his explanation while holding back his tears:

As a father, things that I do is what my youngest son and I... we go to the park...we do barber shops together...we play basketball. We do whatever interests that he has as far as a two-year-old could have. With my older children it's just spend time, talk...they give me advice and I give them advice. I sit and watch my grandkids play and I talk to them...I be the father that they needed me to be back then, now.

Micah likes to take his daughter to basketball games. Other than that, they communicate a lot by Facebook since “sometimes...she get a little busy.”

Some of the fathers expressed spending their time teaching their children how to make right decisions and to be respectful. For instance, Corey stated that there were some “behavioral patterns” that needed to change related to his son:

I told him off the back, I was like “Guess what? Daddy’s back. You gone change that. You gone have to change that cause that’s unacceptable to me. I don’t want you going around thinking just because you see this on tv or you see somebody else doing this that it’s acceptable. It’s not acceptable. Society accepts a lot of things that are unacceptable and I know that for a fact.” And I said “I don’t want you to run around carrying yourself and become just another number.” That’s the way I put it.

Corey continued by giving an example of what needed to change:

Like for instance, he like to sag his pants. To me it’s whore-ish. They went and explained where it came from numerous times. To me, it’s a lack of respect. I don’t care what anybody else have to say about it. It’s a lack of respect. I mean you got grown men walking around doing this. I’ll be d***** if I’m a grown...I can wear my pants at a reachable height. I won’t let my son run around and have that disrespectfulness about his self. I don’t. And that’s one thing I told him he was gonna have to change. He struggled with it for about a week, but he changed it. Because he knew I wasn’t gone play. He carry his self like he sees his father carry his self and that’s why I make sure that whatever I do now that I present

myself as reasonable and responsible as I can. I try to watch what I do cause I know everything he tries to do now he tries to do as a reflection of me.

Corey has established discipline as a practice he exercises as a father. Unlike Corey, Richard said, “I don’t believe in disciplining my kids.” He declared himself to be a good father and then explained:

They’re real respectful. They pretty much like me, you know. They don’t disrespect nobody. They talk to everybody politely and they can see that I’m doing a good job when they come over there. Because I don’t even let company come over my house when my kids is around.

Darrin described his approach to discipline and said, “I don’t never just go off and then leave my kids crying...I talk to my kids and I make them understand...”:

I have to sit down and talk to my kids. “Hey man, you’re not gone get a attitude and you’re not gone sit there and cry and yell and do all of that because I told you no.” I gotta tell my kids. I just had a talk with them yesterday. “Ya’ll gone learn how to accept no. What ya’ll gone do when somebody tell ya’ll no? Nobody in this world gets everything they want. What ya’ll gone do when somebody tell ya’ll no? Say okay.” That’s what they started saying, “Okay.” “And accept it. And once you start doing that then I’m gone start giving you what you want.

Some of the fathers expressed the most difficult and rewarding activity they have to do with their children as a father. Richard candidly explained that the most difficult activity for him is taking his daughters to see a doctor:

Only thing that kinda like throws me off is like when one of my sisters ask me to take the kids to the doctor. I be like “Woa!’ You know, I can’t. I ain’t ready for that one there... I can’t explain it. I just ain’t ready for that. I’m trying to put myself in there to say, “Hey, I gotta do this.” When it comes to the little girl talk, “hey sis, you need to pull up and talk about that. I ain’t comfortable talking about that right there.”

Richard laughed at himself as he continued explaining:

I don’t like going to the doctors. That’s what it is. I look at it like this, when I see me having to take them to the doctor or something I be like, “Is you in pain? Is you alright?” You know, cause I’m concerned.

The most rewarding activity for Richard is doing anything to spend time with his daughters. Harold expressed that the most difficult activity for him is talking to his daughter on the phone. He desires to see his daughter more frequently, but find it difficult due to her distance. The most rewarding activity is “being with her in person-to-person...at the park...playing with the dogs.” For Corey, the most difficult activity is discipline. He said it is difficult because “you have to find a path and a pattern with children to discipline them and correct them that works for you and the child.” The most rewarding activity is “seeing them achieve at stuff...just spending time with them.” Jeffrey said the most difficult for him is taking his children to certain places where he is subject to being confronted by his past. Jeffrey’s response to being asked to share his most rewarding activity is like the response that was given by Corey, “seeing them accomplish the goals that they set for they self, and seeing that they are doing better than

I was and I am.” He also added, it is rewarding to see “the smiles on they face when we talk now and they listen to me.

Darrin said the most difficult for him is simply “getting through to them sometimes.” The most rewarding is “just seeing them happy having fun.” Willie denies encountering any problems but says it is rewarding for him to “see them and they give me hugs. Or when I talk to them on the phone and they say ‘I love you daddy.’” Jason’s response is similar to Corey’s in that discipline is most difficult. Jason said, “...her and her ipad...cause she can’t stay off of it and I don’t like it.” The most rewarding activity for Jason is “school programs and stuff...playing with them” and “when I get a smile out of them or laugh out of them.”

Although spending quality time with children was expressed as important to the fathers, the difficulty in spending quality time was not always related to performing a parenting activity. A conflict was presented by Jeffrey related to the amount of time spent with his children. The conflict involves only the children themselves. He described his struggle with balancing his time for work, seeing his children, and returning back home to meet his curfew:

I would work from 8’o clock in the morning till 5. They gave me till 9 or 9:30 to get back in the building. And between that...them 4 and a half hours I had to go see children on north side, west side, and the south side. So, I had to get my food on the run, catch this bus, give this child some time [pointing north], catch this bus, give these two some time [pointing west], and then catch another bus give this one some time [pointing south], and get back in the building. And I usually

would walk back to the building eating my food. That was a typical day, and get up and do the same thing the next day.

The problem was not having enough personal time and needing to split his personal time amongst his children that often led to disappointment:

On Saturdays and Sundays, you was allowed 8 hours out the building if you had a job. And of course you want to give yourself some me time...and in the process of your me time you try to give whatever child you didn't give time to Saturday you would give it to 'em Sunday and you would hope that they would understand why they didn't see you both days. And explaining that and having to deal with that it was rough. Because when you hear your kids say 'well daddy you was gone for this long and I wanna see you every day'...'well, son or well, you know, daughter I can't see you every day. I have to split my time up with all of yall. If I could get yall all in one place then you'll see me every day, but' it wasn't gone happen. I had... "first you have to understand your mother don't get along with this person's mother, so I can't get her to drop you off to your brothers' because of their disagreements'. And explaining the disagreements and then having to say that it was my fault.

Micah expressed a similar challenge with his daughter. He decided to focus his time, money, and passion on his youngest daughter and believed it might create a problem.

"The 18-year-old might be getting upset and jealous cause I'm spending and talking to her more [14-year-old] versus her [18-year-old].

Living Beyond Day 30

There are two central themes in this classification: *No Family, No Life* and *A Work in Progress*. The central themes focus on lived experience after the first 30 days of release. The questions related to this classification of experience was presented toward the end of the interview encounter as a means to diffuse any negative thoughts or emotions triggered during the interviewing process.

No family no life. The fathers expressed the need to have their children in their life. This central theme, No Family, No Life, is based on the fathers expressed views about their motivations while under parole supervision. Most of the fathers expressed being motivated by their children to maintain a “better” life. For instance, Richard said, “I know they motivate me and I motivate myself.” He explained that his motivation would change if he lost his job or if he learns his children are mad at him. Corey expressed being motivated by his children and by family:

Everything is possible if you’re willing to fight for it...I’m willing to continue to strive for my goals to better myself for a betterment of my children and my family. I mean that’s why I’m really motivated... I’m motivated off of family. I’m motivated off of that love now... for me to not have my family would be something drastic for my mind to have to wrap itself around.

Jeffrey expressed being motivated by his children and the opportunity to prove society wrong:

I have to walk a straight and narrow all the time and I do it because of my children...not because of what they want me to do...I'm no longer in it...I'm no longer your property, I'm my own now so I live now for my kids.

Darrin also expressed being motivated by his children to maintain a “better” life. He places emphases on having care and concern for the life of his son in relationship to his nephew:

...my nephew, I been his Pops since he was two. His dad went to the feds...when I went to prison I seen he turned to everything I was. And the man I see him becoming is the man I used to be. So I run from that now. I see what's changed him cause a lot of things changed me in and out of my life. So I see what changed him and it affects me so dearly that that happened to that boy. I'm not gone let that happen to my son.

Darrin expressed that his inability to see his children would be a “problem” and would cause his motivation to change. But he said, “I don't think that will ever happen for the simple fact I'm such a good dad to them.” The fathers were asked to share what they believe is unique about their experience as African American fathers on parole. Jeffrey acknowledged the changes he noticed within himself:

The uniqueness is that I came out... a better man and a better father to my children. I came out different than what I went in. I went in as a boy at the age of 35. I went in as a boy, thinking like a boy because of the choices I made in life...and came out a man, more responsible. Thinking more positive and thinking

about everything that I have to take care of. Not that I need to take care of but I have to take care of and that was my kids and myself.

When given the opportunity to answer the question, Jason said “supervision kinda makes you be a better father whether you want to or not...” Harold’s response is comparable to what Jason said. According to Harold, the uniqueness is having the status of parole that gives you access to “help.” He said, “it’s like a reviving in your life...it’s something to benefit you, something that helps you.” Willie believes his unique experience as an African American father on parole supervision is all about what he does. According to Willie:

...Because we’re not gonna do the same things. We’re not gonna see the things the same way. Our interaction with our parole officer might not be the same. So I think how I would choose to live under supervision is unique in its own way...I can be that statistic that a father completely gives up on his children and lets them go down whatever road they wanna go down. Ultimately end up incarcerating themselves or even end up dead. But I choose to think and live a different way other than that. My children’s life is important. Making it off parole is important. So I think it is unique the way I live it.

Timothy explained what he believes is unique about his experience:

Even though I gotta report and stuff like that, I don’t let it hurt my pride. I used to think like that’s kiddie stuff. I’m not about to do that. I’m grown. I’m a man. I don’t let it get to me. I still come home and then be a father to him and do what I need to do. I don’t let it hurt my pride.

Jeffrey responded similar to Timothy, “I didn’t let my struggles hold me down...I didn’t let ‘em make me fall.” Micah expressed that his need to have to “sell” himself as someone on parole is unique:

Is me selling myself despite the record of being on parole and being a father.... I mean white father on parole stand a better of a chance of getting a job.... the likelihood of him getting a job versus me filling out for the same job he probably get it before I would. That’s just my opinion though...I done seen some strange things happen...

Darrin expressed a uniqueness due to his ability to mentor his children and other youth regarding the street life and involvement in the criminal justice system:

Besides the fact that I’m living through it, I can always tell my kids about what’s gone happen before something happen. I can always vent to them about “You don’t wanna do this. Cause after that then you got parole.” You know what I’m saying. Cause I done lived it. That’s why I say I can, I think I’m gone be very important to these kids. Not just my kids but all kids I be around because I done lived it.

The fathers were asked to share their biggest accomplishment as a father since returning to the community. Willie presented his struggle with his son who repeatedly refused his efforts to re-connect:

Getting in contact with my daughter was one. Now I get the chance to see my son which is the other. Well with my son he was gonna make it as difficult as possible [laughed] to meet with him. Cause he was making it real difficult. He was

shooting me down in the text messages and stuff like that. He even asked his mom if he came to see me if she'd come with him and stuff like that. But for him to be like, "I'll be with my sister when I see you next time." I was just smiling from ear to ear when I read that. It was like "Yes! I got him." [laughing]

Harrold said that his biggest accomplishment was "getting involved with my daughter and for the first time in life I listened to my momma..." Timothy articulated being referred to as "daddy" was an honor and claimed it to be his biggest accomplishment:

Being realized that I am their dad. They all call me daddy. Cause I was young. I was 21 when I went in. I was there for them, but I wasn't like other fathers that I seen. I wasn't there like that. So for them to call me daddy that's a accomplishment. And I didn't just like "You better be calling me daddy! I'm your daddy!" They just did it. They just realized that. I don't know if it just came natural.

Richard said "earning my daughters and them trust...[and] getting my health back together" was his biggest accomplishment. While in tears, Jeffrey gave his response, "my biggest accomplishment is being able to look my children in the face and tell 'em I was wrong. And to show 'em that here I stand a better father." Micah stated that his biggest accomplishment is about accepting the role and responsibility of father:

Being able...to me its stepping up to be the father. Straight up, cause it's so easy to step down and say...I don't wanna...be bothered with that kid or that kid.
Stepping up is my biggest accomplishment to myself.

Jason explained that his biggest accomplishment is about being present as a father:

I would say I was able to make it to see my daughter's birthday and a lot of school plays, and school things that I missed out on. Daddy daughter days and stuff like that. Those were my accomplishments as being a dad.

For Darrin, his biggest accomplishment was about acquiring a stable home and achieving a bond with his son;

My biggest accomplishment is with my kids, getting a crib to be able to spend time with them every day... the way my son looks at me like my daughter does now. That's a big accomplishment. From what he was... wouldn't come around me to when I walk in he's like her, "Daddy!" I love that. I never come home or come around and I don't get that. Soon as they see me, hands in the air. It's a party. I be like "Yeah!" That's all I need. That's all I need.

A work in progress. The fathers shared knowledge gained about themselves through interactions with their children. This central theme is based on the insights the fathers expressed about themselves while engaged in their role as parents. As a result of spending time with his daughter, Jason came to realize he is "too nice" because of how his father treated him as a child:

I have learned that I'm a little too nice as a dad to her. I think that's just me kinda...I don't know how to say it. Cause when I was younger like when my dad was around he wasn't nice. He was mean...when I was younger and got older I used to tell myself when I have my first kid I'm not gonna be nothing like him. Like whooping my kid and punishing and all that. That's not me. I see she knows that so she kinda uses it to her advantage.

Willie came to realize that he is not gonna be “perfect” as a father and that he has an opportunity to start anew with his children:

...to have this opportunity again, it just makes me realize how precious every moment is that I spend with my daughter. And then how precious is this day's gonna be when I see my son for the first time. And then when I see my youngest and how it all comes together. I'm not saying that we're gonna be perfect in every way, but it begins a new chapter in my life. One that is gonna be filled with whatever I allow it to be filled with.... there's gonna have to be an even balance with both of them cause I'm not gonna get everything right all the time. I'm probably not gonna always say what they are expecting to hear.

Corey realized his diminished ability to cope in public:

...I have a real issue now sometimes doing stuff in public. I done kinda gotten over a lot of it. When I say gotten over it I really haven't gotten over it, but I kinda been able to cope with a lot of it and still go and do stuff. They like to go do stuff and I do too. I really do, but at first it was a lot of anxiety. I didn't really wanna be there type of feeling. I couldn't take it. Worried about this situation, that situation. It took time, some medication to help.... That was kind of a biggie for me... Just going out in public. Like I said I worry about me, situations and moments... I can't really say fearful. It's more like the what if's. But I had to really focus my mind and say “you can't really worry about the what if's all the time” Just got no control over it.

Richard's children helped him to recognize an ongoing problem with drinking, smoking, and disposition:

...when they did come over and I used to go outside and I come back in cause I don't drink or smoke in the house, they see a little difference in me and then they smell it. So "Dad we don't approve of you drinking." When they got to telling me that right there that's a lesson and I'm gonna learn from it. So I backed up off everything and they see me being a better person now. Cause I used to say something real slick or real sharp and they look at me like "Huh, what did he just say?" And when I see them get up and go in the bedroom then don't come back out for a minute I said, "no, this is not them." But my oldest twin she come to me, she like "Dad we just giving you chance enough to cool off." Whoa! Now you just told me something. You giving me chance enough to back up off of this stuff.

Timothy's children helped him to realize how significant he is in the lives of his children and that his life is of value:

That I am important. I'm more important than I thought I was. They make me feel more important than anything. Ain't too many people that's gone call on you or want you so when they do I feel I'm somebody.

Some of the participants shared thoughts about their success as a father since returning back to the community. Richard described himself as a "good father...back on track. Performing all the duties." However, he believed parole keeps him from reaching his full potential as a father. "I could be a d*** good father and a father figure...as it stands right

now my hands are tied right now. I just need to release some of this time.” Darrin considers himself “fully qualified” as a father and provider for his children:

I feel like I’m fully qualified... I’ve always been a type of supporter. I’ve always bought my kids everything. My daughter was spoiled when I came home. I can’t spoil my son like I want to but, he got the things he want. He go to the store with me, he pick out what he want. He get j’s [Jordan’s] and stuff like that....

personally I feel like I can give my kids anything. And I will give them anything as long as it’s for the best of them.

Jason explained that since returning to the community “it’s been hard for me to be a father besides paying my child support every month.” He shared that his difficulty was in part due to the struggle with his daughter’s mother. He stated, “when I do get to talk to her I tell her I love her. I tell just because she has a brother on the way don’t mean I’m gone love her any less.” For Jason, his success as a father is winning the battle against his daughter’s mother to keep her fully persuaded that he “love her.” At the time of his release, Willie expressed that initially, he felt “a little inadequate as a father.” After spending time connecting with his children his impression of himself as a father changed. Willie claimed, “I feel better. I feel like I’m getting the hang of it.”

The fathers developed aspirations related to their role and identity as a result of interactions with their children. The fathers’ dreams forecast a positive image of self and a more meaningful quality of life for their children (see Table 5). The expressed hopes and dreams of the fathers see forward to a life without parole which remains for each of them a work in progress.

Table 5

Participants' Expressed Dreams as Fathers on Parole

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Excerpt</u>
Jeffrey	I hope that they don't follow in my footsteps ...as African American men we have to stand together to prove society wrong. And that's what I would love to prove to society, but I need other African American men to understand we got to get rid of the big I's and the little u's and must come together and take care of our children the way we supposed to
Micah	...to be a better father than what my father was to me...I know that in my mind, my heart, I wanna be a better father than my father was to me. I put that in my mind I wanna be able to be responsible.
Willie	I desire relationship. A real one. A chance to prove that I can give love as well as receive it. I just wanna give back for everything that I've taken. I want the opportunity to do that...make amends with those that [I] have hurt...
Richard	I just wanna have that bond with them.
Darrin	I don't want these kids growing up going through the things I went through. None of them. Plus...the only thing I'm gone leave on this earth to remember me by...If I'm gone be remembered, I wanna be remembered by the kids.
Timothy	That my kids respect me more, every day they pay attention to me, listen to me.
Harold	I want my daughter with me...for us to have that bond, that space...for us to be together...
Corey	I want our family, I want kids, I want a wife or a spouse or somebody to believe in or who can believe in me. I just wanna watch my kids grow and enjoy life.
Jason	I always wanted my kids to have a dad that they can rely on and talk to. I just want me and my daughters' mom to be able to communicate more...

Summary

In this chapter, my research investigation on the lived experiences of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole supervision was described. The details of execution regarding the criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy and qualitative in-depth interviewing technique was outlined. An explanation of the strategies used to achieve trustworthiness during and after the investigation process was outlined. The strategies used in this study include peer briefing, member checks, criterion-based sampling, audit trail, post-interview notes, reflexive journaling, structural corroboration, and auditing. All the data related to this study was collected, organized, managed and stored using Microsoft Word and NVivo 11. The details regarding these procedures was outlined consistent with the explanations provided in Chapter 3.

Information in this chapter also include details about the natural and familiar setting where the nine African American fathers were engaged in two separate interviewing encounters. The nine African American fathers engaged in research voluntarily by written consent and willingly shared characteristics about themselves that can be reviewed in the “participant profiles” section of this chapter. All of the fathers was given a “Thank You” letter for their participation and offered a copy of this study’s results upon publication.

My research investigation generated a total of 17 open-ended question based interview transcripts representing over 20 hours of audio narrative. After being member checked and approved, I electronically organized the transcripts which led to the identification of 701 general units of experience. The data was reviewed extensively and

was reduced to 20 clusters of meaningful experience. I arranged the clusters were arranged into three classifications representing nine central themes.

The first classification, Identity and Role, focused on the fathers' view of self and their role as a parent. This first classification corresponded to three central themes: A Father at the Crossroad, Surviving on the Edge, and By the Way...I've Changed. What it means to be a father was expressed as difficult due to the cause of parole and community pressures. Returning to prison was identified as a fear that negatively impacts their ability to actively engage as a father. The fathers also expressed a sense of failure due to incarceration, but a strong motivation to prove ability to be active in the life of their children.

The second classification, Father in Action, focused on the activities and events happening in the father's lives with their children since returning to the community. This second classification corresponded to four central themes: It's Been Too Long Without You, It Hurt Me but Helped Us, I'm the Father, and It's Father Time. The fathers discussed the thoughts and feelings held when seeing their children for the first time after release. Most of them reported being excited, happy, and relieved. A discussion about conversations had with their children to restore relationship after incarceration was reported. All of the fathers expressed a need to apologize to their children for their absence. These efforts were articulated as both mentally and emotionally challenging. The fathers shared stories of conflict with persons challenging their efforts to connect with their children. Most of the stories involved conflict with their child's mother. The Fathers also described how they engage and spend quality time with their children.

The third classification, Living Beyond Day 30, focused on fathers giving a perspective on their life after being 30 days in the community. This third classification corresponded to two central themes: No Family No Life, and A Work in Progress. The fathers shared lessons they learned through interactions with their children. Overall, the fathers communicated the need for help and to consistently be the best father to their children.

A unique description of lived experience was noted with every story articulated by the African American fathers that participated in this study. It is clear that the experience of parenting communicated by the African American fathers in this study deviate away from traditional conceptions of father and the fathering experience. Although the narratives created by the African American fathers in this study are distinct accounts of their lived experience of parenting, all the participants shared a significant common characteristic – a strong deep-seated desire to have a healthy intimate relationship with their children.

In Chapter 5, I provide an interpretation of the findings in the context of social constructionism. The limitation of trustworthiness and the potential impact of positive social change is discussed. A few recommendations for future research are given. Finally, I share my reflections as the researcher along with a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Introduction

In this transcendental phenomenological study, I explored the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children while obligated to community supervision. The purpose of this study was to advance knowledge and understanding of the experience and to influence the design of culturally relevant interventions intended to strengthen and support family structures for formerly incarcerated African American fathers. Specifically, I sought to support family reunification and restoration efforts involving formerly incarcerated African American fathers and provide insight and influence in the formation and implementation of family welfare policy. Expanding knowledge about the parenting experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers on parole may assist the efforts of practitioners to build and improve the life trajectory of the fathers themselves, their children, and the African American community.

A total of nine formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole supervision participated in this study. Each father reported returning to the Kansas City metropolitan area following incarceration within 6 to 12 months of study participation. All the fathers in this study reported having at least one minor child with whom he was actively involved. While actively participating in this study, the fathers completed two in-depth interviews.

I recorded and digitally tracked the interviews using an audio recording device. I subsequently transcribed and stored the interview data using Microsoft Word and NVivo

11. I organized the transcribed data into clusters of experience and then defined them according to three classifications comprised of nine central themes representing the fathers' experience of parenting. The first classification, Identity and Role, relates to three central themes: A Father at the Crossroad, Surviving on the Edge, and By the Way...I've Changed. The second classification, Father in Action, relates to four central themes: It's Been Too Long Without You, It Hurt Me but Helped Us, I'm the Father, and It's Father Time. The third classification, Living Beyond Day 30, relates to two central themes: No Family No Life, and A Work in Progress.

In this chapter, I present the research findings according to the perspective of social constructionism. I compare the findings to the literature presented in Chapter 2. The limitations to trustworthiness that arose during the process of investigation is described. I also share the potential impact for positive social change. Finally, my reflections as the researcher are given along with a concluding message that captures the key essence of this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of this transcendental phenomenological study clarified my understanding of the lived experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to mandatory parole supervision. I acquired the information needed to understand this lived experience by conducting qualitative in-depth interviews with nine African American fathers recently returned to the Kansas City metropolitan area under a mandatory commitment of parole supervision. One central research question

was used to guide my exploration: What are the lived experiences of African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision following an incarceration?

I identified a total of nine central themes that represent the lived experience of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers under parole supervision. In order to describe the meaning and reality of the fathers' lived experience, I explain the central themes of experience using the tenets of social constructionism. As presented with detail in Chapter 1, scholars who have adopted the social constructionism perspective favor the idea that all understanding of everyday life is shaped by human interaction and activity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985). Each theme is presented from the perspective of the African American fathers involved in this study and highlights the influence of human social relationships on the construction of knowledge about their lived experience.

Theme 1: A Father at the Crossroad

The first central theme, A Father at the Crossroad, represents the perceived real meaning of the identity and role formation "African American father on parole" as shared by the fathers involved in this study. Most of the fathers articulated a negative consciousness of meaning about being an African American father on parole. The fathers described the meaning of being an African American father on parole as being a man forced to surrender to a life of deliberate disregard for personal privacy by others. The fathers described it to mean suffering a state of constant mental strain, and an enduring battle with acceptance and fairness, avoidance and isolation, and value and worth. According to these fathers, an African American father on parole means to be a man with

an existence that has been objectified, and whose social participation is limited by systemic and individual discretion.

I believe the perspective of social constructionism may be used to explain the sense of awareness that the identity and role of being an African American father on parole represents. For instance, Jeffrey described his understanding of parole's disregard for personal privacy by saying that parole will be "in your business." His sense of awareness as a parolee shaped his reality as an African American father on parole. While articulating his experience, Jeffrey gave examples of how he negotiated avoiding difficulties with the parole authorities. He reported that questioning about his activities as an involved father indicated that parole authorities did not care about parolee privacy.

The perspective of social constructionism is used to suggest that individuals' experience of everyday life is "organized by the 'here' of my body and the 'now' of my present" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985). The perspective of social constructionism is also used to suggest that individuals experience life in terms of zones (the "world within my reach") which dominates interest and focus toward either what is being done and needs to be done or what one plans to do (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Jeffrey's interpretation that parole authorities will be "in your business" presents a conflict related to the here and now. When Jeffrey visits his parole officer, the zone of parole dominates his interest and focus because he is an active parolee. His involvement as a father is consciously understood by him to be in a zone outside the zone of parole; therefore, any questioning in relation to the father zone while present in the world of parole is interpreted by him as a disregard for privacy.

Jeffrey's present sense of awareness about the meaning of being an African American father on parole is influenced by his status as an active participant in the supervised parole program governed by the Kansas department of corrections. This sense of awareness around relinquishing to a deliberate disregard for privacy is also part of a historical trend within the United States toward increased parole conditions and methods of accountability for parolees (Travis III & Stacey, 2010). Being subject to an unending imposed rule of constant monitor and scrutiny, Jeffrey satisfies conditions of his release by reluctantly surrendering the desire for personal privacy (i.e. "...you have to allow these people to be in your business..."), and reconciling such a surrender with his personal interest to avoid reincarceration due to violation.

Micah described the meaning of being an African American father on parole as an existence of constant mental strain. He expressed "a stressful situation" where "pressure sometimes gets to my nerves" in relation to regular encounters with the child support system. He presented a potential "burden" around the drafting of \$65 from his paycheck every two weeks. The drafts pose a risk in lacking the necessary funds to pay for other life expenses because of a shortage in the wages earned during a two-week period. Micah's interpretation of his identity and role is a testament to the threats formerly incarcerated African American fathers face in preserving a stable existence. His experience of mental strain is in keeping with what is already known about the elevation of stress and strain leading to crisis experienced by formerly incarcerated individuals returning to community (Gideon, 2009; Griswold & Pearson, 2007; Hanser, 2010; Roberts, 2001; Sachs, 2000). The mental strain or potential "burden" Micah described is

as a result of having to contend with two inter-related systems, criminal justice and child support, that hold coercive power in his everyday life. Social constructionists refer to the function of these two inter-related systems as habitualized institutionalism which is purposed to control the activity of its human product through various social means. The reality of Micah's potential "burden" is in prospect of the consequence, reincarceration, that arises for noncompliance with the institutionalized system of child support. Brito (2013) and Evans (2014) confirmed that failure to pay child support likely results in an arrest. A parolee arrested for failing to adhere to child support orders constitutes a parole violation by the institutionalized system of criminal justice, and consequently an indisputable return to prison.

The "stressful situation" of being an African American father on parole is real for Micah with respect to his 14-year-old daughter in part because her existence was not made known to him until sometime after her 13th birthday. Although Micah was oblivious to the existence of his daughter, as her identified father he is legally financially responsible and accountable for every year of her well-being per state child support statutes (Griswold & Pearson, 2005; Huang, Mincy, & Garfinkel, 2005; May, 2004; Roberts, 2001; Solomon-Fears, 2009). Child support enforcement is concerned with combating the issue of poverty on behalf of minors as opposed to bridging or building the parent-child relationship on their behalf. The "stressful situation" and potential "burden" as Micah expressed suggests an element of unfairness when it comes to his right to know he is a father versus his duty to pay for the everyday needs of the child he fathered. The habituated institutional force of the child support system does not cater to the possessive

intricacies of parental identity and role, and therefore presents an unnatural shift away from the father-child sense of belonging that typifies and inspires the actions performed by a father in everyday life. The meaning of being an African American father on parole is “a stressful situation” for Micah since meeting the expectations of child support is a legal obligation bearing almost no leniency for whether the father can pay this accrued debt, or the father-child relationship is active and healthy. Micah’s plainly expressed resolve, “I’ve learned to adjust and accept the fact that I gotta pay child support and pay it properly...”, aids him in coping with “a stressful situation” and potential “burden” that constitutes the reality of his identity and role as an African American father on parole.

According to Willie, being stereotyped and then subject to occurrences of discrimination and prejudice is the meaning of being an African American father on parole. Willie makes several declarations: “It’s a little bit more strict for us”, “the boots on our neck”, “we get a lot of negative backlash with everything”, “the community sees African American males as a threat to community safety”, “we’re constantly having to fight...”, “skin color plays a big role in whether or not you get hired...” Social constructionist thought posits that knowledge is the accumulation of various types of experiences, is socially distributed, and generationally communicated (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Willie’s articulation of meaning given to his identity and role as an African American father on parole is presented in summary of experience concerning self and others across a span of time and context. His understanding seems to be a collection of evidence that demoralize the African American male existence by society through stereotyping (i.e. a threat to the community), discrimination (i.e. more strict), and

prejudice (i.e. skin color). He infers the validation of this understanding by classifying brief examples using the pronoun plural, “we” and “us” which signifies his stock of knowledge regarding the meaning of being an African American father on parole goes beyond his own lived experience.

By using the phrase “boots on our neck” Willie referred to the practice of slavery where iron collars and Jim Crow laws were used as mechanisms to oppress African American people (Blake, 1857; Oxford University, 2007). The legacy of slavery in the United States has been shared generation to generation within the African American community and influences the way in which lived experience is mentally processed. Willie using the “boots on our neck” phrase placed the meaning given to his identity and role in a slavery-like context. He described parole and the community as present day oppressive forces making life “a little bit more strict”, continuing the practice of unfair treatment (i.e. negative backlash with everything) against African American fathers on parole.

The idea of being a community threat as expressed by Willie is not a new understanding. African American men have been historically seen as threatening to the safety of individuals and the community. The perceivable practice of unfair treatment toward people of color exacerbates the potentially lived experience of African American fathers on parole because of their status as criminal justice involved persons. A conviction in addition to the nature of offense worsens any conception of threat perceived by members of the community.

Like Willie, Darrin presented a similar understanding about the meaning of being an African American father on parole. He highlighted ill treatment, stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice as his evidence. Darrin resorts to avoidance and isolation as a way to minimize conflict with others in the community. His response supports the evidence in the present literature regarding African American males perceived need to “camouflage” themselves or change in order to satisfy the discomfort of tension that arises when around persons who perceive them as a threat. Darrin does not change but instead avoids and isolates himself which is not consistent with the literature.

Darrin understands his identity and role by way of limitation, “I feel like we limited...we’re already looked down upon.” In this, Darrin acknowledges that his worth and value has been diminished by society and believes being an African American father on parole means he must rise to a level of exception to be accepted, worthy, and valuable to society. Willie acknowledged this same need to prove self to others to legitimize his identity and role. In other words, both Willie and Darrin have an understanding that being an African American father on parole means you are worthless and of no value, until you prove yourself otherwise. They seemingly interpret their identity and role as formerly incarcerated African American fathers on parole as a continuation of punishment in a society that is not forgiving to individuals meriting forgiveness. As they perceive it, society expects you to do more than just spend time in prison for the crime committed, but to also be held to an almost impossible standard in the community.

Jason and Corey presented similar meanings for being an African American father on parole. Jason’s meaning is attributed to being a statistic that reflects negatively on the

African American male, or perhaps validates the common stereotypes that are quite controversial. Scholarship pertaining to African American men report that they are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, and receive longer sentences than other ethnic groups for like crimes. Jason's understanding of what it means to be an African American father on parole is in line with the statistical trends that places African American males at a grave disadvantage. Jason admits that his reality makes his ability to live his identity and role harder, but he anticipates an ease to a challenging obligation with stable employment.

Being a statistic also means that as an African American father on parole one is not only subject to discrimination and prejudice but also is held back from participating in society as a "free" person. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers on parole are likely obstructed from freely accessing resources and opportunities. For Jason, to be an African American father on parole means to be a man barred or blocked from full social participation.

Corey understands the meaning of his identity and role as an African American father on parole is to be treated like an object. Objectification is part of the nature of habituated institutionalism as put forth in social constructionism. The criminal justice system is a capitalized habituated institution whose function and nature is to control. In thinking about habituated institutional objectification from a social constructionist perspective, the object exists but has no personal relational value or meaning worthy of time, effort or energy. Essentially, the object is a nuisance if for it there is no practical use. The system finds its use as free labor, a means for profit, the evidence to advance

and continue cultural conditioning which defines African American men according to historically socialized views within the United States. Corey refers to a “cycle” created by the “system” that dehumanizes African American males through mechanisms of control that ultimately disenfranchise, marginalize, and stigmatize them as a collective group.

The “cycle” according to Corey, is a trap that African Americans don’t recognize because they “set themselves up” or “is not paying attention enough.” In this respect, Corey understands that being an African American father on parole is to be a pawn, subject to being duped, bamboozled, suckered, or fooled by the system. This thinking presents another aspect of the objectification that becomes the reality for African American fathers on parole. The nature of control embedded in the “system” mimics the institution of slavery. Like slavery, incarceration hinders the personal and social progress of development for African American males (Binder, 2002; QCEA, 2011; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009). The grip of the “system” described by Corey acts as a camouflage that “some of them ain’t smart enough to catch on to...and take they self out...” to slow, curtail, obstruct, and confine one’s activity and movement. For Corey, to be an African American father on parole is to be an object of control.

Harold’s interpretation of what it means to be an African American father on parole was in stark contrast to the other fathers involved in this study. To be an African American father on parole, for Harold, means to be a beneficiary of the criminal justice system. As stated by Harold, “you’re in a situation where you need some help.” The understanding he has of his identity and role as an African American father on parole is

on a basis of a long history of substance abuse. Harold's battle with substance abuse led him to conclude the meaning of his identity and role as being the effect of his community sponsored status. Harold explained, "if I wasn't' under supervision there ain't no telling what I'd be doing...but I know I can't do nothing. That's helping me."

The positive position held by Harold is hopeful in view of research that claims relapse, drug overdose, and death for persons reintegrating into society battling substance abuse (Belenko, 2006; Binswanger et al., 2007). Harold recognizes his battle with substance abuse and accepts the access to resources offered by the criminal justice system as an active participant in the system. What makes his interpretation of being on parole different is his focus on and belief in needing help as a parolee. Unlike the other fathers involved who focused on and believed their need is freedom, privacy, and respect as a parolee.

Theme 2: Surviving on the Edge

The second central theme, Surviving on the Edge, brings into view the presence of fear in the lived experience of being an African American father on parole. For each of the fathers, the presence of fear was experienced in association with their parole status. Jeffrey, Timothy, Harold, and Jason expressed fear of reincarceration. The context of their concern regarding the potential for reincarceration was different. Timothy, for instance, acknowledged parole as a negative label and feared being fired from his job which would cause him to violate the conditions of parole. Harold acknowledged his battle with substance abuse and expressed fear of producing a dirty urinalysis which would result in a violation of his parole conditions.

On the other hand, Corey communicated his fear in the context of social stereotyping. He stated being bothered by the judgment of others based on his conviction which could strip away his capacity to overcome hardship. Another difference was presented about the context in which fear rises came from Richard. For him, fear arises when he senses the potential for retaliation by his adversaries. The expressed awareness of fear present in experience was described in more than one context for some of the fathers. Harold, for example, described concerns of fear in the same context as Richard, but in relation to himself and his daughter. Jeffrey described concerns of fear in the same context presented by Corey.

The presence of fear is not uncommon to the African American experience. Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000), and Unnever (2014) discussed fear as being embedded in the consciousness of African Americans due to a history of inequality and other social woes. The fathers in this study did not describe the presence of fear as an occasional experience, but one that is consistently present in each day. An excessive experience of fear is problematic and traumatic in many ways. Reincarceration is both a problematic and traumatic experience; which lends itself to be explained as “shock” in the perspective of social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The essence of survival is not in overcoming fear, staying on task with parole, or doing all necessary to prevent reincarceration. Surviving on the edge is all about guarding against anything and everything that can strip away the ability to be a father. It’s about strategizing, with having the presence of fear, to guarantee remaining an active father in the community. The African American fathers on parole involved in this study ultimately

feared being taken away from their children. Jeffrey stated, “they would take you away from your family for the least little thing you do.” Richard explained, “I’m worried about if they gone do something to me.” Harold said, “Locking me up, taking me away from my daughter, my family, my life for a drug issue...that’s my fear...”

The presence of fear in the lived experience is not an irrational suspicion or emotion. The feeling of anxiety or alarm the African American fathers in this study experience is significant because interpersonal connection and relationship are extremely important to the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of members in the African American community (DeGruy, 2005).

Theme 3: By the Way...I’ve Changed

The third central theme, By the Way...I’ve Changed, discussed the impact of incarceration on view of self as an African American father on parole. Each of the fathers communicated positive shifts in their thinking and feeling about being an African American father that translated into positive behaviors in the community. Darrin’s story provides an illustration. Before incarceration, Darrin believed being a father was about spending his money to buy whatever his children wanted. The more money he spent the better he was as a father. Once incarcerated his material possessions were confiscated having a mental and emotional effect that led him to consider the messages he was communicating to his children by his actions. By the time Darrin returned to the community he held the belief that money is not everything and held the relationship and connection with his children as most valuable above all other things.

Incarcerations impact on the thinking and feeling about self as a father produced shifts in beliefs that differed among each father. The social constructionist perspective suggests that what truly exists or happens is only meaningful in the context it is situated (Andrews, 2012; Patton, 2015). The accounts of mental and emotional change given by the African American fathers in this study hold meaning because they occurred in the context of incarceration and reintegration. Each account of change was a surrender to fatherhood. For example, Micah communicated that being a father “was a burden” because “I had my little cloudy ways of thinking.” Incarceration stimulated a change in thinking he expressed by saying to his daughter “get to know me. I wanna get to know you...tomorrow ain’t promised to nobody...” In this account, Micah described finding value in being a father as opposed to thinking and relating to it a burden.

Changing the view of self as a father to one that is useful, hopeful, and optimistic encourages an embrace of active fathering. Assuming the role of father is believed to increase a fathers’ chances of having lived experiences that are positive and values based (Martinez, 2010). This notion is debatable. What is important with respect to African American fathers on parole is their belief in and ability to articulate and demonstrate their mental and emotional changes to others.

Theme 4: It's Been Too Long Without You

The fourth central theme, It’s Been Too Long Without You, represents the thoughts and feelings expressed by the African American fathers in this study when seeing their children for the first time after release. The urgency to see children as described by the African American fathers involved confirms and supports research

reporting that fathers intently desire connection with children upon release (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Eden & Nelson, 2013; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Leap, 2015). The fathers in this study communicated a range of positive and negative emotions. For instance, Harold reported being “excited and relieved.” Corey explained, “I had a real warm...happy feeling inside...sad because I missed so much.”

The fathers also described their thoughts that were mostly in the form of questions concerned about interacting with their children. Willie questioned, “...am I gonna be able to carry a conversation with her or am I just gonna sit there and stare at her...” According to social constructions, the most important experience of others is face-to-face interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). When face-to-face, the person becomes fully real and close. Every expression of self is oriented to the person with whom one is interacting. What is clear is that each of the African American fathers moved to orient themselves toward their children to encourage a reciprocal social exchange. This can be recognized in Jason’s account, “she ran to me. I hugged her. Told her ‘I love you’...she told me she love me back...”

Though face-to-face interaction presents a person fully real and close, the position or role of that person is not so immediately real (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Social construction posits that the attitude toward position or role provokes self-reflection that may alter the pattern of interaction to mirror the attitude of the other. The pattern of interaction, attitudes, and acts, shift and changes according to the attitude and acts of the other. In other words, the importance and acceptance of a position or role of a person is made known by the attitude and acts of the other engaged in face-to-face interaction.

Harold, Jeffrey, Jason, Corey, Micah, Willie, and Richard described positive face-to-face interactions with their children when seeing them for the first time. The exchanges they described signified an acceptance of their position as their children's father. Instead of self-reflecting to make an adjustment to their pattern of interacting these fathers sought to influence a deeper and more close exchange with their children.

Alternatively, Darrin and Timothy described having negative face-to face interactions with one of their children. Darrin expressed, "my son didn't talk to me. He was kinda acting scared...I seen him start looking at me like 'who he?'...dud just wouldn't mess with me." Timothy stated, "I would see him playing and coming towards his grandma and his momma and auntie and it wasn't none of that for me." The exchanges experienced by the African American fathers in both cases signified a refusal to accept position or role and therefore conveyed an attitude of the father being of low importance. Darrin and Timothy negotiated their pattern of interaction with children. Timothy described his attempts to hug and kiss his son. Darrin explained that he made certain his son witnessed every interaction he had with his daughter. These fathers sought to influence a change in the attitude and acts of their children toward them that signified importance and acceptance.

Upon returning to the community, the first in-person exchange with children became the segue for establishing a lasting nurturing relationship. Ives, Draper, Pattison, and Williams (2008) studied the experiences of fathers and discovered that nurturing was valued more than biological relatedness. Because of incarceration, the African American fathers involved in this study spent a significant amount of time away from their children

which eliminated their ability to engage in a nurturing way. DeGruy (2005), in her discussion about time and culture, stated “time serves the relationships among people...” (pg. 35). The African American fathers in this study unfortunately lost a significant number of years to incarceration that ideally could have been spent nurturing a lasting relationship with their children.

The emotional and mental responses experienced by the fathers of seeing their children for the first time essentially represents the sentiment, I’ve been too long without you. The African American fathers recognized the impact of their absence and decided to present themselves as father and nurturer with hopes to counteract the damage of their absence. The acts and attempted acts of affection is meaningful because, for African Americans, the relationship is highly important in social exchanges, and the most effective motivator for African American children is love (DeGruy, 2005).

Theme 5: It Hurt Me but Helped Us

The fifth central theme, It Hurt Me but Helped Us, discussed the statements made by the African American fathers to restore the relationship with their children. The efforts to communicate openly with children is significant. Language, as believed by social constructionists, holds the highest meaning and worth in human society. Through the use of language, we share life, objective and subjective processes, with others in our social environment. Through language, we can express our attitudes in face-to-face interactions using a variety of gestures, body movements, and vocal expressions that go beyond our face-to-face interactions.

The described exchanges the African American fathers in this study had with their children are illustrations of the process of relationship building that is vital to the African American experience. In these exchanges, the fathers described a display of courage, strength, and a capacity to seek forgiveness. The accounts speak to the African American fathers' ability to adjust to life beyond the correctional facility to assume the duty of responsible fatherhood. The African American fathers displayed boldness and passion in their interactions which debunk demeaning characterizations of being weak-minded and a social nuisance (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Goff, Williams, Eberhardt, & Jackson, 2008; Unnever, 2014).

Incarceration is intended to have a significant effect on the personal and social existence (Alexander, 2012; Arat, 2006; Rodriguez, 2007) that is in no way to be interpreted as positive. However, the experience of incarceration for the African American fathers involved in this study functioned as a rite of passage or institution of socialization which is believed to be regarded as such within the African American community (Dailey Jr., 2001; Leap, 2015; Lee, Porter, & Comfort, 2014; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Maruna, 2011).

Prior to incarceration, the African American fathers in this study were not highly involved, if at all, in the lives of their children. At some point during their incarceration experience, a change occurred with the fathers that led them to prioritize a focus on relating and engaging with their children. The African American fathers made intentional effort to engage and build a healthy relationship with their children as opposed to avoiding them (Dyer, 2005; Pearson & Davis, 2003; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). This

is meaningful since community reintegration is believed worse for African American males (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Perry & Bright, 2012; Western & Wildeman, 2009; Wildeman & Western, 2010; Woldoff & Washington, 2008) and expected to have little to no success (Dyer, 2005; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 2011; Tripp, 2001; Woldoff & Washington, 2008).

The passionate display of emotion is also meaningful regarding the exchanges the African American fathers had with their children. This display of emotion in the exchanges with their children rejects the idea that African American fathers live with a diminished capacity to relate and care due to psychological distress produced by incarceration and a history of social bias (Smedley, 1998; Leap, 2015). Being able to feel the pain caused by their absence, see the hurt in the faces of their children, and hear the disappointment in the voices of their children was an experience each African American father seem to openly embrace. For these African American fathers, it was not about being hurt, but about healing and removing the hurt to build a strong bond in the relationship with their children.

Theme 6: I'm the Father

The sixth central theme, I'm the Father, represents the challenges the fathers faced when making efforts to connect with their children. The accounts articulated by the African American fathers confirms reports presented by scholars that mothers excessively guard and decline opportunities for fathers to interact with their children (McBride et al., 2005; Perry & Bright, 2012). The African American fathers accounts also confirm the gatekeeping of mothers is an effort to protect children from stigma and the discrimination

associated with incarceration (Turney, 2014). The idea that African American fathers are likely to have multiple children with multiple partners was also supported (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Leap, 2015). The struggle and frustration experienced by the African American fathers in this study were not principally due to the interference of mothers disallowing them to deepen their relationship with their children. What was most important for these fathers is that they associated their value and worth with the relationship they have with their children.

The perspective of social constructionism advise that social roles are a habituated institution representing the order, character, and organized standard of the institution. The family is coined as an institution consisting of a group of people related to one another. For each role assumed in the family, there is an order of concentrated specialty or standardized division of labor. The problem with this idea of socially constructed roles is that it does not coincide with the reality experienced by formerly incarcerated African American fathers in the community. DeGruy (2005) points out issues within the African American community naming incarceration, “fragmented” and “powerless” families as reasons for instability. The African American fathers in this study attested to a post incarceration reality of a broken family structure with significant strain and pressure to negotiate challenges of social bias. The African American fathers competed with their maternal counterpart or child’s guardian for a position of authority and partnership in the duty of raising their children.

The African American fathers in this study described an experience of emptiness and loss when away from their children. These feelings precipitate their efforts to

confront and plead with their maternal counterpart for unhindered access to their children. An array of conflict was described by the fathers. The clash with their maternal counterpart sometimes led them to take positions of passivity reluctantly. Despite the roadblocks to involvement, the African American fathers demonstrated the commitment they openly stated to their children upon their return to the community. This validates the perception of their children's worth in their lives and their intense desire to be a better father than they were before incarceration.

Theme 7: It's Father Time

The seventh central theme, It's Father Time, presented what the African American fathers reported doing while spending time with their children. The time spent with children was described as quality time. This time was perceived highly important by the fathers which support the evidence of scholarly research (Doyle, Pecukonis, & Lindsey, 2013). More significantly, quality time was considered an attempt to reverse the effect of the fathers' absence. Time spent with children was also important to the African American fathers because it allowed the chance for bonding based on who they are in the present as opposed to who they were prior to incarceration. This connects with the idea of the "here and now" in the social constructionist perspective. Social construction also suggests that we experience life based on the "world within my reach" bringing conscious attention to what the fathers did during their time with children.

The activity of quality time as described by the African American fathers in this study catered to what was both convenient and affordable for them. The fathers also spent quality time engaging in activities they enjoyed doing with their children. Timothy, for

instance, enjoyed cooking for his children, but Richard enjoyed buying all his children's favorite foods and snacks. Jeffrey enjoyed taking his son to the barbershop, but Micah enjoyed taking his daughter to basketball games. The activities of quality time provided the opportunity for the African American fathers to communicate and give their time to connect, share, and bond with their children. Quality time was in this sense particularly meaningful because the fathers regarded it as an investment.

The allotted time the fathers shared with their children was also spent performing activities related to discipline. It is an activity particularly believed to be associated with fathering (Brownson & Gilbert, 2002; Carlson, 2006; Hamer, 1997; Hawkins, Bradford, Palkovitz, Christiansen, Day, & Call, 2002; Ives, Draper, Pattison, & Williams, 2008; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Corey, Darrin, and Jason stated that discipline was part of quality time. Each of them identified discipline as the most difficult activity to carry out with their children. The evidence of scholarly research professes that fathers assume the responsibility of discipline because they disagree with the manner it is carried out by significant others (Hammer, 1997; Hauari & Hollingworth, 2009). This idea is confirmed in the account of experience described by Darrin. Aside from Corey, Jason, and Darrin, the remaining African American fathers articulated an activity most difficult for them that either was in the context of being at a distance from their children, subjecting children to potential harm (i.e. taking them to the doctor), or one that initiates or confronts conflict (i.e. taking iPad away).

As determined by the social constructionist perspective, the most important experience is face-to-face interaction. Every episode of quality time the African

American fathers had with their children added to the knowledge and understanding they acquired about their father. This accumulated database of experience is established as what social construction calls a social stock of knowledge. For the African American fathers in this study, quality time with children was not essentially meaningful because of a need to redeem time or invest time for the sole purpose of bonding with their children as their present self. The social stock of knowledge as presented in the social constructionist framework is distributed generationally and communicates the true existence of happenings by degrees of familiarity. Therefore, the essence of quality time for the African American fathers is to create a legacy that casts them not just as a father, but as a “good” father.

Theme 8: No Family No Life

The eighth central theme, No Family No Life, presented the thoughts and feelings the African American fathers in this study expressed about their unique experience, motivations, and biggest accomplishment. The African American fathers identified their children as being the primary motivator while on parole. This connects and supports the scholarly research that was put forth (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Martinez 2010) emphasizing the strength of assuming pro-social roles in the community to increase the probability of success. Proclaiming their children as the primary motivator validates the father’s claims of commitment given to secure parental involvement. More importantly, the African American fathers perceived involuntary separation from their children as detrimental and traumatic.

The context surrounding motivation was different for Darrin than the other fathers. He described an unfortunate case regarding his nephew that shaped a need to guard the life and well-being of his son more closely compared to his daughter. The context surrounding motivation for Jeffrey was based on the social misconceptions of African American men. Jeffrey made it clear that his motivation to do his best was because of his children and not parole. It is significant that the children are the motivation for the African American fathers involved in this study. The point of meaning is that the children are substantially and essentially the fathers' declaration of purpose. Being motivated by family fits into the culture of the African American community.

The fathers differed in describing the uniqueness of their lived experience. Jeffrey, for instance, emphasized his ability to weather the storm of challenges following his release. Micah expressed his need to "sell" himself to prove he is acceptable is unique. In their descriptions of uniqueness, the African American fathers gave reference to challenges specific to being under parole supervision that was documented and validated by scholars (Geddes, 2008; Gordon, Nichter, & Henricksen, 2012; Turney, Lee, & Comfort, 2013). The ability to articulate uniqueness means that these African American fathers are aware of their reality; that it is unequal to persons not connected to the criminal justice system. The fathers have learned to be resilient in their lived reality. A trait recognized as a culturally based characteristic of members of the African American community (DeGruy, 2005; Rodriguez, 2007; Thomas et al., 2013).

The biggest accomplishment since returning to the community as described by the fathers was connecting with their children. Each father explained why their children were

identified as their biggest accomplishment. Willie told his story about being rejected by his son when he initially returned to the community. After weeks of failed attempts to connect with his son, Willie experienced a surprise visit from him during a scheduled social outing with his daughter. Timothy also had difficulty connecting with his son. Soon after his initial visit with his son, Timothy was referred and related to as “Dad” by his son. These two accounts highlight a change in attitude the children had toward their father. Jeffrey’s biggest accomplishment, on the other hand, highlights a change in attitude toward his children. Micah’s biggest accomplishment, stepping up to be a father, also highlights a change in attitude toward his children.

The accomplishments articulated by the fathers are more than just events that are marked by time. The biggest accomplishments described by the African American fathers represent movement toward progress which scholars say require the active involvement of family (CCJ, 2006; Kenemore & Roldan, 2006; LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005; Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2004; Naser & LaVigne, 2006; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 2011; Petersilia, 2005).

Theme 9: A Work in Progress

The ninth central theme, A Work in Progress, presented the descriptions African American fathers gave regarding knowledge about self and their success since returning to the community. While interacting with their children, the fathers became more aware of self that influenced change in their thinking as a father. Corey described his struggle with anxiety and worry while in public with his children. Corey explained that he changed his thinking to accept that he “can’t really worry about the what if’s all the

time.” Jason learned that he is “too nice” and his daughter uses that to her advantage. Jason reconciled his being “too nice” with a sincere desire to be different than his father. The changes in thinking upon an increased awareness of self represents strength and the ability to apply parental wisdom. Becoming more aware of self allowed the fathers to deepen the connection with their children and realize a greater level of maturity.

Success, as described by the fathers in this study, was presented as an incomplete endeavor limited by time, resources, confidence, and willfulness. For example, Richard said parole prevents him from being a better father. Willie expressed feeling inadequate when he initially returned to the community but felt he was “getting the hang of it” during his second interview. The evidence of achievement, based on the detailed descriptions of experience given by the fathers, is easily recognized in the steady continuation of involvement with their children. Success, for these African American fathers, is not on the occasion of a positive father-child interaction, or in the ability to apply parental wisdom. It is in achieving a strong lasting bond with children despite their recognition of his flaws. These African American fathers remain a work in progress which simply means there is hope. Hope keeps the African American fathers in this study engaged to realize a stronger, deeper, and more active relationship with their children.

Limitations of the Study

In this study I used qualitative phenomenological research to capture the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers parenting minor children while obligated to community supervision. Qualitative research was best suited to achieve the purposes of this research; however, the procedures of the investigation was

time-consuming and required the careful review of findings to discover meaningful results. I conducted this study with nine formerly incarcerated African American fathers on parole supervision with minor children living outside the home. No other ethnic group was represented in this study. The individuals involved identified themselves as male with a natural ability to reproduce. The African American fathers involved in this study experienced an incarceration lasting 3 to 15 years, was not granted early release, and reported convictions non-sexual in nature. I described the accounts of lived experience according to the fathers' retrospective understanding of their own parenting experience. Therefore, the research and its findings are not generalizable.

There was a small number of fathers involved in this study compared to the studies designed in the quantitative tradition. I used the strategy of criterion-based purposeful sampling to petition individuals to voluntarily participate in research and to maintain a small participant sample. The sampling strategy and sample size I used was intentional, necessary, and acceptable for qualitative research to generate information-rich data capable of informing the research question.

Research with formerly incarcerated individuals is challenging because they are deemed a vulnerable population. During the phase of recruitment, 37 individuals expressed an interest to voluntarily participate. A total of nine individuals was found to meet the defined criteria. It was tough securing participants for this study. Several of the 37 individuals who expressed interest in participating verbally rejected the opportunity due to concerns of parole interference. Despite my attempt to assure interested

individuals of no connection to their parole officer or community corrections authorities, their rejection was maintained.

I asked the fathers involved in this study to meet me at a public library within their community at a time they determined most convenient. Overall, the public library as a contact location was appropriate and successful. For two of the involved fathers, the public library meeting could not take place due to parole imposed restrictions. An alternative meeting location was decided and each of the fathers completed the interviewing process. A member checking process was conducted with all the fathers. More than one option for receipt and return of the interview transcript was necessary to successfully complete the member checking process.

Finally, the data I generated as a result of the interview encounters was collected, organized, managed, and stored using Microsoft Word and NVivo 11. Use of the NVivo software program required training and practice for me to become familiar enough with the features of the software. I spent a significant amount of time learning the proper use of the software program. On more than one occasion, challenges with learning the effective use of the software led me to duplicate data organization and analysis using Microsoft Word. There are many benefits to using a computer software program for qualitative research. When making the decision to conduct computer assisted research, and the program of choice is unfamiliar, it is wise to factor into the research plan dedicated time to become proficient as a user of the chosen software program.

Recommendations

The findings generated in this study do not represent an exhaustive overview regarding the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision. There are social and systemic barriers that shape the experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers in the community that was not particularly a focus in this study. Over the years, scholars and practitioners have reported on the extensive range of challenges confronting the individuals connected to the criminal justice system. The circumstances and consciousness of human existence specifically pertaining to African American men seem to be overshadowed by broad generalizations and the need to cater to a wide range of ethnic groups. Based on the findings generated by this study, my recommendations for future research is necessary. First, there is a need to continue the work of understanding the lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers on parole. The fathers in this study described a dichotomy of experience that involved the presence of fear, sense of failure, and worthlessness. Research should be continued in the qualitative tradition using Afrocentric theoretical and conceptual frameworks which cater to the distinct culture of the African American community.

Second, research should focus on the mental, emotional, and behavioral connections of lived experience in the activities of parenting. Scholars have revealed that African American men shift their behaviors to alleviate tension that potentially arises because of their presence (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 200; Slatton & Spates, 2014).

Understanding how this is lived through for African American fathers interacting with their children in the community can add to our knowledge of their fathering experience.

Further research should explore the practice of teaching racial discipline to children. Johnson and Stanford (2002) discussed this practice as being unique to the parenting behaviors of African Americans due to the presence of racism, discrimination, and prejudice within the United States. It seems fitting to explore this area by asking, how do African American fathers teach racial discipline in their activities of parenting? What are the messages and lessons children are receiving by their fathers in regards to racial discipline? When are these messages and lessons given to children, and how much time is spent communicating these messages and lessons?

Another area suitable for research is spirituality. The socialization of African Americans in the United States involved cultivation in spiritual consciousness that is believed to be a foundational element within the African American community (DeGruy, 2005; DeSouza, 2014; Rodriguez, 2007). It is reasonable to consider the role of spirituality in the activity of fathering for formerly incarcerated African American fathers. The influence of spirituality or religion was not a major theme in the accounts shared by the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study. This area can be explored by simply asking, how does spirituality or religion influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of parenting for formerly incarcerated African American fathers?

This study seems to have attracted fathers who desperately need and want to be part of their children's lives. It may be necessary to consider whether the lived experience of fathering differs with formerly incarcerated African American fathers who do not have

a deep-seated desire to be part of the everyday lives of their children. Are there such fathers that exist? If they do exist, what are their intentions toward their children? Why is there an absence of desire for an everyday active relationship?

Finally, this study was conducted with formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole supervision in the community. Each of the fathers acknowledged having one minor biological child that was not presently residing in their home. Research with formerly incarcerated African American fathers should be expanded to specifically explore lived experience with formerly incarcerated African American fathers whose minor children live in the home, whose minor children are interracial, and whose minor children suffer because of a disability. Further research with formerly incarcerated African American fathers should be conducted with members of the LGBTQ community and should expand beyond the borders of the Kansas City metropolitan area to involve persons living in other regions of the country.

Implications

The criminal justice system is known to have a distressing impact on African American men, and their experience is considered more traumatizing compared to men in other ethnic groups (Dyer, 2005; Dees, & Allen, 2011; Wakefield & Uggen, 2014; Western & Wildeman, 2009). What is known presently is arguably not enough to answer the call of aiding formerly incarcerated African American fathers in efforts of parental involvement. The knowledge gained because of this study offers practitioners an opportunity to develop culturally specific and relevant programs to assist formerly incarcerated African American fathers in parenting. The ordinary, basic parenting

training program will not be sufficient in the case of formerly incarcerated African American fathers. Although parenting training may be beneficial, there are other factors to be considered and advocated when working with this population.

A topic of concern expressed by the African American fathers in this study was the need to assure the cooperation of their maternal counterpart. Understanding this issue from the African American fathers' perspective raises an opportunity for practitioners to adapt their parenting program approaches to facilitate efforts toward conflict resolution for fathers and their maternal counterpart. The relationship between fathers and mothers may be strained due to communication problems, long standing disputes, differences in parenting philosophy and style as put forward by this study, which are unrelated to the fathers' criminal justice involvement. The insights gained because of this study gives practitioners cause to move away from practices that work with formerly incarcerated African American fathers in parenting programs absent their maternal counterpart. A solo approach to promoting the involvement of formerly incarcerated African American fathers in the lives of their children is counterproductive to the aim of building a quality relationship with children when there is a history of excessive maternal gatekeeping. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers would experience less mental and emotional distress having a cooperative rapport with the mother of their children that in turn would improve the quality of the father-child relationship.

The formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study discussed having a range of emotions in relation to their children, having concerns about explaining the reasons for their absence, nurturing positive and healthy development daily, balancing

quality time for multiple children, with multiple mothers, in multiple locations, in addition to dealing with child support, parole and other social woes. Although not exhaustive, this study confirms, supports, and gives evidence to an existence of multilevel, multigenerational trauma in the reality of formerly incarcerated African American fathers (DeGruy, 2005; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). The insights put forward by this study offers an opportunity to enact social change at the individual and community level. The practitioners in the various professional disciplines that work with formerly incarcerated African American fathers can work to connect these fathers with positive men and women in the community that will act as mentor and coach to help navigate and negotiate the challenges of active parenting. The persons acting as coach and mentor can help to constructively resolve the experience of mental and emotional upset. This would enrich community-based approaches that foster healthy functioning for formerly incarcerated African American fathers committed to building lasting relationships with their children. An increase in valuable input by the community to nurture the positive development of formerly incarcerated African American fathers would inspire them to become civically engaged members of the community. Thus, the sense of feeling isolated within the community would decrease for formerly incarcerated African American fathers, and the duty of practitioners working with this population would be shared with an interplay of a multiple of actors including members of the family.

The purpose of conducting this study was to describe the lived experience and the meaning of lived experiences for formerly incarcerated African American fathers

obligated to mandatory community supervision. The findings of this study now add to the knowledge advocates have about the plight of formerly incarcerated African American fathers. It is fitting to believe that the persons advocating for this population recognize that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are not just for some Americans, but for all Americans; even those who have made mistakes. Gustafson (2016) ascertained that “when we defend the vulnerable and the marginalized, we give them a chance to realize their full potential” (“Who Are You Defending,” para. 3). With a heightened level of understanding, advocates can plead for and defend the cause to reduce this groups experience of being isolated, marginalized, and demonized within the community. Advocates can lobby on behalf of formerly incarcerated African American fathers for policy incentives and reforms, and a program of exemptions related to parole conditions that pose unwarranted strain at the onset of the reintegration process. With the success of these efforts, the threat of reincarceration for a parole violation is lessened. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers can find a reason to willingly cooperate confidently in the program of community supervision as policy incentives and reforms remain and prove favorable outcomes for this population.

The mission to effect change in society for formerly incarcerated African American fathers can be further developed as advocates increase their awareness with the results of this study. Advocates in conjunction with practitioners and community members can raise awareness about the effects of system imposed barriers and encourage schools, businesses, housing authorities, and merchants to abandon the practices that support their existence. In favor of fathers dedicated to maintaining active parental

involvement, advocates can also lobby to impose reasonable consequences against the maternal counterpart for excessive acts that intentionally delay and obstruct the development of the father-child relationship. The perceived gender bias would be replaced by a perceived evenhanded approach to family matters in the justice system. Formerly incarcerated African American fathers would perceive that their parental rights are valued, defended, and supported.

The serious attempt to realize an amendment to Kansas Statute 38-2269, legislation governing the ability to terminate parental rights, may be strengthened by the findings held in this study. It has been made clear by the fathers in this study that the biggest impact on their lives is the quality of relationship with their children. Their quality of life is associated with the quality of relationship they have with their children. The impact of this reality could humanize the socialized opinion held about formerly incarcerated African American fathers influencing the appeal made by advocates working to improve their well-being. Thus, an amendment to Kansas statute 38-2269 could be approved, sending a message that implies public support of formerly incarcerated African American fathers that could extend across the nation. Such a change may inspire other states still holding involuntary parental rights termination laws to move toward amendment.

Reflections and Conclusion

The investigation of lived experiences with formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to mandatory supervision offers an opportunity to gain a more meaningful understanding that stretches beyond the issues of access and opportunity.

Formerly incarcerated African American fathers are part of a culture that is gravely misunderstood, immersed in a legacy of struggle and pain, but altogether brilliant in having the tenacity, capability, and will to survive. It was a privilege to have the nine formerly incarcerated African American fathers willingly engaged in the process of in-depth interviewing. I was both humbled and enlightened by the experience. These nine formerly incarcerated African American fathers openly shared their experiences in a way that signaled an unhindered ease and comfort. The fathers received me as someone having genuine concern and expressed appreciation for me being the voice to tell their life story. As a licensed social worker and scholar-practitioner, I was strengthened by the confidence in my unending drive to serve and empower persons disaffected, marginalized, and demonized because of criminal justice system involvement. My ambition was justified through the work of this study. It is my hope that the public concern for fathering transforms into public action specifically on behalf of formerly incarcerated African American fathers.

African American fathers leaving Kansas state institutions transition back to the community with a conscious awareness of their incarceration experience. They each have unique life stories and seem to view fathering as a battle. The battle is for relationship and not from or because of relationship. Their strategy to combat this battle is also uniquely different. Clearly, the African American fathering experience of the formerly incarcerated persons participating in this study do not fit traditional conceptions of fathering. Traditional prescriptions of fathering are not suitable because of their distinctively different position and status in society, and the richness of their African

American heritage. In many cases, the formerly incarcerated African American fathers of this study formulated new or specially customized conceptions as well as patterns of behavior for fathering. This illustrates a kind of resiliency that needs to be explored further.

The thoughts and feelings toward parenting held by the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study are related to the children themselves and was constructed through the experiences of incarceration, reintegration, and fathering. Each father was confronted by numerous obstacles in the process of their transition from the institution to the community, and into the role of father. They questioned their mental, emotional, and physical ability to conquer the challenges faced in life daily. Scholars investigating the obstacles related to the criminal justice system provided evidence about the distressing struggle. Without a doubt, when an obstacle presents itself in the life experience of a person and the expectations for overcoming the obstacle conflict with conscious awareness and resource access of the individual, the capacity to overcome is weakened.

The formerly incarcerated African American fathers fight for survival was confronted carrying a saving grace. An intense desire to have a lasting healthy relationship with their children. These formerly incarcerated African American fathers immediately performed the work of distinguishing themselves as “father” to their children. Amid their community transition, they sought to gain respect, love, and care from their children while meeting the obligations of parole supervision.

Timing was considered quite crucial to their effort to win over the hearts of their children. Generally, the time of bonding with children begins at birth and carries through the years of a person's life. For the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study, time was of the essence and a time of years was understood to be no longer available. In their estimation, they had only days or weeks to break the ice by making an effective plea to their children.

The formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study communicated an undying need to be part of the everyday lives of their children. They expressed a desire to mold and shape the very existence, present and future, of their children. Each father struggled to have significant existence in their children's lives. What makes the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study unique is that they contrast with formerly incarcerated African American fathers who live with an absence of such an intense desire and willingness for fathering.

Each of the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study identified characteristics about themselves they do not like and need to change. With each day, they continue to evolve. The process of their evolution is not forced but intentional. They made effort to determine the traits and qualities within that are not serving themselves best nor is serving their children best. For the sake of illustration, Darrin discussed having a habit of using "filthy" language. When he speaks, the statements tend to be loaded with profanity. As stated by Darrin, the habit of using "filthy" language is part of who he used to be. He recognized that his "old self" comes back every now and then which compels him to address his use of language. Willie discussed having a fear of

failure. This fear of failure influenced the decisions he made about his identity and role and interactions with his children. Each of the African American fathers in this study recognized the need to change, want to change, and began a journey toward change. They also accepted that change is not immediate, but occurs over a course of undetermined time because of consistent effort.

The maternal counterpart to the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study to some degree played a role in their struggle. Each of them carefully devised a method for dealing with their maternal counterpart in a way that does not sabotage their ability to engage with or be actively involved in the lives of their children. They each seem to believe they have something to prove. Extended and fictive kinship is not the primary focus of their proving; those individuals are secondary. No need to prove anything to their friends; those individuals have the potential to be unfriended. Society is also not the primary focus of their proving; those individuals seemingly don't care. The formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study hold their children as the center of attention and primary focus of their proving. Being able to present themselves with evidence of being a changed person was plainly expressed by each of the fathers. Incarceration was credited for being a conduit of change. The fathers claimed that incarceration opened their eyes, and in conjunction with parole supervision, has in some way helped them to be a better father.

The men in this study are looking to make a deposit and that deposit is to be made in the lives of their children. They hope to make a deposit that will bloom and evolve to greatly impact the community and the broader world. It is their hope that this deposit will

represent a productive, contributing, valuable, significant individual who lived to be an example of what is a “good” person. In their descriptions of experience, the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study acknowledged having a marginalized existence in society, and are in a position to live vicariously through the life of their children. The new vision they have for their own lives may not be possible to fully attain, but through their children, they hope what is imparted will manifest advancing their position and status in society.

Simply, the meaning of parenting for the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study is about life, purpose, and legacy. Life gives them a sense of being alive and not just existing by breathing day to day. Their active involvement as fathers gives them purpose and meaning for life. The fathers are working to reinvent themselves as men, to transform and rebuild themselves as fathers. They are seeking to establish a legacy for their children that is not in any way akin to their own life history. These fathers come from a position of criminal consciousness and socialization arriving at an awareness that provokes positive change extending beyond their community.

For these formerly incarcerated African American fathers, their lived experience after incarceration was not about trying to establish themselves as a “baller”, “gang-banger”, or “kingpin”, but as responsible men and significant fathers. They have come to understand that their children are an extension of themselves. It is their desire to play an instrumental role in helping their children become better persons, living better lives, before their time of passing.

The lived experience of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole is an essential matter to understand, and the pursuit of understanding was not an endeavor easy to achieve. There is so much more knowledge to be gained. Despite any complexity of the work necessary to advance greater awareness, the work of learning the parenting experiences for formerly incarcerated African American fathers is necessary to promote their proper inclusion and freedom in society. As put forward by the findings, the formerly incarcerated African American fathers in this study endured internal and external struggles, yet the biggest impact on their life was the quality of relationship had with their children. A deep sense of purpose, value, and worth held their motivation to remain active and committed as fathers.

The knowledge generated by this study now adds to the scope of understanding presently available about the parenting experiences of formerly incarcerated African American fathers obligated to parole supervision. I encourage practitioners in the field serving this population to refrain from working consistent with generic opinions about attitude, needs, and overall capacity for fathering. It is therefore critical that practitioners pursue advances in scholarship to realize pertinent tools, resources, and decisions that reinforce the formerly incarcerated African American fathers' devotion to hold a favorable position within the family unit and in society.

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**FORMERLY INCARCERATED
AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS
INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**
Study focused on learning the meaning formerly incarcerated African American fathers give to the experience of parenting.

Who can participate?

African American fathers 28 thru 50 years of age who meet the following:

- Released within the last 6-12 months; incarceration lasting at least 3 years
- Currently under community supervision as a result of mandatory release
- Day reporting requirements as a condition of community supervision
- Father to a child above 3 years and less than 17 years living outside your home
- Lives within the Kansas City metropolitan area or no more than 25 miles outside

How you can participate?

- Complete in-person interviews with researcher lasting 60-90 minutes
- Assist researcher in verifying the accuracy of the information you share

What are the risks?

By participating you will be asked to share personal information such as stories talking about your thoughts and feelings that may make you uncomfortable.

Why participate?

This is an opportunity to let your voice be heard. Your experience and views can be used to influence the work of social service organizations, and create new ways to support African American fathers seeking to reunite with their children after an incarceration.

To learn more or request to participate contact the researcher
Sherece Shavel at [redacted] OR [redacted]

This research is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Andrew S. Garland-Forshee, School of Social Work and Human Services, and has been reviewed and approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board.

Appendix B: Participant Eligibility Form

ELIGIBILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The purpose of this form is to identify and confirm your ability to be invited to participate in a research study that will examine the experience of parenting for fathers under post release supervision following an incarceration. Please answer the following questions below.

Date _____ Race/Ethnicity _____ Gender: Male Female

Name _____ State of Residence _____

Did you experience incarceration during the past 6 to 12 months? Yes No

Were you incarcerated for a period totaling at least 3 years? Yes No

Nature of conviction: _____

Are you currently serving under mandatory community supervision? Yes No

If yes, are you required to meet day reporting requirements as a condition of post release community supervision? Yes No

Do you currently live in an urban community within 25 miles of the Kansas City Metropolitan area? Yes No

Do you currently have at least 1 minor child over 3 years and less than 17 years of age with whom you do not live? Yes No

If yes, are you a legal custodian of the minor child? Yes No

Are you between 28 and 50 years of age? Yes No

I certify that the information contained within this document is true and correct.

Signature / Date

Researcher Initials _____

Eligible

Not Eligible

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

Please answer the following questions.

-
1. Date of birth. _____
 2. County/State of residence. _____
 3. What is the highest grade level completed. _____

-
4. How many children do you have? _____
 - a. How many of them are female? _____
 - b. How many of them are male? _____
 5. What is your custodial status for each child described above?

-
6. How often do you see your child/children described above? (please be specific for each child)

-
7. Describe the relationship you have with the mother of your child/children. (please be specific if more than one mother is involved)

-
8. Do you take responsibility for any child that is not biologically your child?

 - a. If yes, please provide details regarding this situation.

-
9. Are you currently employed? _____
 - a. Briefly describe your job title/work assignment.

10. What was the length of your most recent incarceration? _____
 - b. Briefly state the nature of your conviction.

 - c. Briefly describe the conditions of your supervision.
-

Appendix D: Safety Protocol

The following protocol outlines action steps to be considered and practiced by the researcher during points of participant contact in effort to minimize risks to personal well-being.

Ahead of Participant Contact

- Know and learn where you are going. Have a working understanding of the research site and its surrounding area (i.e. highways, major roads, gas station, hospital, police station, etc.). Outline alternative routes to and from the research site.
- All activity will be conducted in a public location.
- Prepare to carry a charged cell phone programmed to call for assistance in the event of an emergency (i.e. 911).
- All activity will be conducted in a public location.
- Identify someone to inform of interview schedule (i.e. dates, start and end times, location, etc.) including dissertation chairperson.

Participant Contact – Recruitment & Interview

- Dress appropriately for the setting to prevent being a distraction or prompting negative responses.
- Arrive at least 15 minutes early to the research site.
- Use caution when parking. Seek to park in a well-lighted highly visible space that is as close to the research site entrance as possible.
- Keep all private and personal valuables away from the research site (i.e. trunk of car, etc.) to avoid loss, damage, or theft.
- Identify self to research site staff each time you arrive to verify meeting space and provide an anticipated end time for use of space.
- Be aware of surroundings including safety threats or risks both present and possible.
- Know where and how to access safety aids and exits.
- Attend to all needs prior to the start of the interview (i.e. bathroom, smoking, etc.). Encourage participants to do the same.
- Maintain direct unrestricted access to identified exits in case of emergency. Check to make sure exit doors do not lock automatically when closed.
- Be aware of and maintain appropriate boundaries to support the researcher-participant exchange.
- Pay attention to the verbal and non-verbal cues of participants that may signify distress, irritation, or a heightened sense of anxiety.
- The researcher will not prolong contact, maintain contact, or exit with research participants following the conclusion of a meeting.
- Remain in meeting space until interview has ended and the participant has departed.

- Notify research site staff of your departure and that the meeting space has been vacated.

Participant Contact – Interview

- Interviews will not exceed 2 hours.
- Discuss limits with participant including confidentiality, termination, and interview schedule.
- Remain calm and reiterate boundaries of the relationship when necessary.

Subsequent to Participant Contact

- Notify appointed individual including dissertation chairperson of the completion of interview, upon safe departure from the research site, and return home.
- Debriefing of interviews will be completed with dissertation chairperson.
- Know the signs of burnout and when recognized extend efforts to rid or manage.
- Rest breaks to avoid physical, mental, and emotional strain will be scheduled as needed.
- Counseling will be sought if any information from interview proves harmful.
- In the event of a personal attack or emergency notify the local police authority and the dissertation chairperson.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

- Arrange meeting space for a safe and productive interview.
- Check digital recorder for any technical concerns.

Opening & Pre-brief

Thank you for accepting the opportunity to participate in my research study that involves in-person interviewing. The reason for this study is to learn the real meaning of the parenting experience for African American fathers following an incarceration. I will ask you a series of questions I think will take 60-90 minutes to complete. The information I collect during this interview will be made available to you for review, correction, or explanation. A copy of the transcript for this interview will be given to you using your preferred method of receipt.

Before we can begin, it is important that we review the details of consent so that you are clear about what you are being asked to do. [Review informed consent with participant] Before you leave I will provide you with a list of community resources you may use as necessary after the interview. Do you have any questions for me at this time?

Part of my research is to collect basic demographic information from each participant. Before beginning the actual interview, please take a few minutes to answer the questions listed on the Participant Information Sheet. [Provide copy of the Participant Information Sheet] Do you have any questions for me at this time?

Thank you for taking the time to complete the Participant Information Sheet. At this time, I would like to start the interviewing process. The interview is expected to take the next 60-90 minutes to complete. Our meeting will be recorded and tracked using an audio recording device to note all information shared during this time. In the event you become uncomfortable, prefer not to answer a question, or desire to terminate the interview please let me know. I want to be sure that the questions asked are clearly communicated so if you do not understand a question, please let me know and I will do my best to re-ask the question. Remember, your identity will be kept confidential in the reporting of this interview. Are you ready to begin?

Main I: Identity and Role

We are meeting here today so that I may learn from your experiences as an African American father under mandatory supervision. I would like to start our discussion by learning more about who you are and how you see yourself. Usually that is based on an image or picture we have about ourselves in our mind. And this may be different from how others see you.

1. Please describe how you view yourself as an African American man.

2. Please describe what it means to be an African American father under community supervision?
 - a. How did incarceration affect your thinking and feeling about being a father?
 - b. How did returning to the community affect your thinking and feeling about being a father?
 - c. To what extent do you discuss being a father with others?
 - d. With whom do you have these conversations?
 - e. How do these conversations come up?
 - f. How do the conversations make you feel?

3. Please describe some of the thoughts and feelings you learned people have about you as an African American father under community supervision.
 - a. Describe how you think and feel about these thoughts.
 - b. Describe what you say and do when you believe people are having these thoughts and feelings.

Main II: Reintegration

Now I would like to learn more about what you do as a father. The questions I will ask are about your return to the community and interactions with your child since your return.

1. Please tell me about your recent experience of being released back to the community.
 - a. What were your immediate thoughts and feelings?
 - b. What were your immediate concerns?
 - c. How did you prepare for your return into the community?
 - d. What did you think and feel about your ability to return successfully?

2. Please tell me about your experience seeing your child(ren) for the first time after your release.
 - a. What did you say and do during this time?
 - b. What thoughts and feelings did you have during this time?
 - c. How does your relationship with your child(ren) mother effect your relationship with your child?

3. Please describe how you manage your responsibilities of community supervision and being a father every day.
 - a. Describe what is a “typical” day for you.
 - b. Describe what it means to spend quality time with your child(ren).
 - c. What has been your biggest obstacle since returning home?
 - d. How comfortable are you in discussing the obstacles faced with other people?

The decisions that a father makes are mostly about what he can do, want to do, and need to do for his child(ren).

4. Please describe how you think and feel about your ability to raise your child(ren) since returning to the community?
 - a. How does community supervision effect your ability to raise your child(ren)?
 - b. How much time do you spend each week carrying out your responsibilities as a father?

5. Please describe what motivates you as an African American father while under community supervision.
 - a. What causes that motivation to change?

6. Please describe what you believe is unique about your experience as an African American father under community supervision.

7. Since returning to the community, please describe any life lessons that support your ability to be a father.
 - a. Describe any lessons learned about yourself from your child(ren) during your interactions?
 - b. What advice would you give to an African American father just being released?

Debrief & Closing

We are coming to the end of our interview meeting.

1. Please describe what has been your biggest accomplishment as a father since your return.

2. Please describe any thoughts you have about the interview experience.
 - a. How comfortable did you feel in answering the questions asked?
 - b. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you for taking out the time to complete this interview. You may contact me directly by phone at [redacted] or by email using the address [redacted] with your questions or concerns.

- Remind participant of the limits of confidentiality.
- Review and provide an outline of community resources.
- Discuss next steps and researcher contact.
- Bid participant farewell.
- Check digital recorder to assure full interview interaction was documented.
- Complete post-interview note-taking activities.