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Once A Felon ... Always A Felon? A Comparative Case Study Of The Experiences Of Convicted African-American Fathers

Douglas Bates
University of South Carolina

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ONCE A FELON....ALWAYS A FELON?
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF
CONVICTED AFRICAN-AMERICAN FATHERS

by

Douglas Bates

Bachelor of Arts
Benedict College, 2008

Master of Social Work
University of South Carolina, 2010

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Accepted by:

Ryan Carlson, Major Professor

Dodie Limberg, Committee Member

Moody Crews, Committee Member

Ashlee Lewis, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

To my wife, my queen Kristen. Your continued love and support is what got me through this process. Thank you for sacrificing your goals for my vision. This is OUR ACCOMPLISHMENT!! I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this process, I have been fortunate to have a strong support network to give me words of encouragement and love throughout this process. I would like to thank my dissertation committee of Dr. Carlson, Dr. Limberg, Dr. Crews and Dr. Lewis. Each of you have been a huge support. Dr. Lewis, thank you for helping me through this process of becoming a more comfortable and confident qualitative researcher. Your support and willingness to help me is greatly appreciated and I will never forget it. You showed me that qualitative research can be just as impactful and can paint the story for the participants to show their experiences and give them a voice.

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To my cohort, you all are the greatest. It amazes me how quickly three years have passed and I am so proud to say we have all gone through the process together. I want to

especially thank my cohort member Justin. We came into this program as two young black men trying to better ourselves, we leave as brothers and proof that educated young black men can make it if given a decent chance. We are forever connected and I appreciate your support as we helped each other through this process. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and my friends for your help and understanding. Especially my wife, Kristen. You are my reason for wanting to be great. Your unconditional love is what got me through this process and why I carry myself with so much confidence and humility. This is OUR accomplishment I love you forever!!! Thank you.

ABSTRACT

Currently, African-Americans account for 12.3% of the U.S. population but represent 38% of the prison population (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Of the many African-American males sent to prison each year, there is limited research that explores the impact a conviction has on African-American fathers. Within the literature, researchers (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012; Miller, et. al., 2013, Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Lee, Sansone, Swanson, & Tatum, 2012; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Miller, 2006; Lopez & Bhat, 2007; Aaron & Dallaire, 2009) only focus on the effect incarceration has on children and the experiences of fathers while incarcerated (Roy & Dyson, 2005; Turner & Peck, 2002; Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998; Tripp, 2001; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Lange, 2001). The goal of this study are to (a) explore the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since their reentry into society, (b) in sharing their experiences, examined how convicted African-Americans fathers described the relationship with their children, and (c) compared the overall experiences of the convicted African-American fathers for similarities or differences since their reentry into society. The study took place while the fathers were clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition located in Columbia, South Carolina. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977) as the framework, the study explored the barriers convicted African-American fathers face within the different systems they live in every day. Results showed the fathers experienced difficulty finding sustainable employment and reestablishing a parental role with their children due to their conviction and incarceration

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

America is currently the number one country in the world in terms of imprisonment; this is unlike any other developed country (Prison Policy, 2016). The arrest and conviction of an individual is a debilitating, life-changing event that leads to reduced employment opportunities and increase in the probability of longer sentences for future offenses (The Sentencing Project, 2016). From 1950 to 1972, the prison population in the United States increased by only 18%. This is in contrast to 1972-2009 when the prison population skyrocketed to 700% reaching a peak of 1.6 million incarcerated individuals (Austin, Eisen, Cullen & Frank, 2016). According to Mauer and Chesney-Lind (2002), more than 47 million Americans (or about 25% of the adult population) have a state or federal criminal record. Nearly 13 million Americans (or roughly 6% of the adult population) are currently serving a prison sentence or have served a prison sentence in the past (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008). Incarceration in America is becoming a national epidemic. But although incarceration is affecting many individuals, it disproportionately affects minorities when compared to white counterparts (Alexander, 2010).

Approximately 50% of all prisoners are African-American, 30% are White and 17% are Hispanic (The Sentencing Project, 2016). One in eight African-American men between the ages of 25 and 34 are in prison or jail (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004). Across media and numerous public platforms, low-income African-American males are increasingly becoming the face or representation of crime, violence, and drug use

(Alexander, 2010). Even though an estimated 14 million Whites and only 2.6 million African-Americans report using illicit drugs (National Association for Advancement of Colored People, 2017). An even more alarming statistic and cause for panic is the rate of convicted African-American males that are fathers. Hariston (1995) and Martin (2001) found that an estimated 94% of men in prison identify as being a father. Low-income African-American fathers are increasingly becoming a marginalized group (Alexander, 2010). However, there is existing lack of research within the counseling profession that explores the experiences of convicted African-American fathers and the impact incarceration has on the relationship with their children, and the barriers to success upon reentry into society.

LeConte' et al. (2015) examined the experiences of African-American fathers reentering home from prison. The qualitative study consisted of 16 African-American fathers participating in a fellowship program. The researchers gathered information through focus groups with the participants. The fellowship program the fathers attended was located at a community-based organization that focused on providing services for children with incarcerated parents. Four themes emerged as reasons fathers' successfully reentered society: (1) redemption, (2) employment, (3) health care, and (4) social support. Although the researchers explored the experiences of the African-American fathers upon reentry into society, they were only able to conduct the study through a focus group format. They did not explore the experiences of the fathers through multiple sources of data collection including interviews, observations and documents. Furthermore, the researchers only interviewed each participant once, which may have not been enough to gain vital information regarding their experiences.

Yocum and Nath (2011) conducted a qualitative inquiry to study the expected parent-child relationship after the father returns home from prison. The researchers did the study from the perspectives of the children and their mothers. The participant sample consisted of 17 children and 8 mothers. The researchers interviewed the mothers to obtain the information. Furthermore, they interviewed each participant using questions focusing on what the mothers and children expected once the fathers returned home. Results of the study showed participants had different degrees of confidence regarding whether the fathers would fulfill their expectations. Though the researchers were able to get the perspective of the mothers and children regarding the fathers' reentry, they did not gain the direct opinions and perspective from the fathers. Furthermore, they did not explore the barriers that exist for fathers upon the return home from prison, including the role of the environmental stressors in their lives.

Naser and Visher (2006) explored the impact incarceration and reentry has on families including relationships with family members, significant others, and children. The sample consisted of 247 family members of male prisoners. The data collection methods included in-depth interviews with the prisoners before and after their release, and interviews with family members three months after the prisoner's release.

Additionally, the researchers had the family members to complete the Spirituality Scale (1999) and the Religious Support Scale (1999) to measure spirituality and perceived religious support. Results of the study showed that family members were supportive of the formerly incarcerated individuals but experienced financial strain and increased anxiety upon reentry of the individuals into the home. Even though the researcher did gather data through interviews and surveys completed by the family members and

formerly incarcerated individuals, they did not focus specifically on fathers. Furthermore, they did not explore the societal barriers that existed for prisoners once they reentered society.

Brown and Bloom (2009) conducted a study examining the challenges mothers faced once they returned home from prison. The researchers used quantitative data obtained from the participants' case files with the Department of Probation and Parole along with in-depth interviews with the mothers. The sample consisted of 25 mothers who were on probation for periods ranging from a few months to several years. Results showed that of the 20.2% of the participants that returned home, 27.6% had lost their job and received government assistance. Furthermore, a majority of the mothers through interviews revealed a sense of fear and uncertainty in being home in their maternal role. Also, the mothers returning home from prison faced similar challenges as fathers such as finding housing, employment, satisfying conditions of their parole and returning to their parental roles. Likewise, many of the mothers felt they were encountering the same problems that caused their incarceration: lack of education, poverty, unstable housing, underemployment, addiction and lack of access to social services. Although they focused on incarcerated parents reentering society, the researchers did not focus on the experiences and challenges of incarcerated fathers returning home. Furthermore, the researchers did not explore the difficulties convicted fathers face in trying to reestablish the parental roles in the lives of their children. Therefore, the current study focused on the experiences of convicted African-American fathers along with the societal barriers that existed that made it difficult for fathers to be a part of their children's lives and become productive members in society.

Problem Statement

The absence of the father not only creates a burden financially on the residential parent, it also creates emotional and psychological impact on the child (Aaron & Dallaire, 2010; Laakso & Nygaard, 2012; Lopez & Bhat, 2007; Miller, 2006; Allard, 2012; Graham & Harris, 2012). Examples of the emotional and psychological impact include but are not limited to depression, high levels of psychological distress, and higher tendency to engage in antisocial behavior (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Children with an incarcerated father are likely to exhibit delinquent behavior, truancy, and problems academically compared to children with a father at home (Mulkey, Crain, & Harrington, 1992). Once imprisoned, the relationship between the father and child can become severed and unrepairable due to poor communication and lack of contact (Dill et. al., 2016).

Similar to children, there is an impact incarceration has on the convicted fathers as well (Travis, 2005). Upon reentry, convicted fathers face numerous challenges (Fulcher, 2012). Other than finding affordable housing and obtaining sustainable employment, individuals after release face more conspicuous barriers such as health concerns and substance abuse issues (Vishner, 2013). Many fathers have to try to re-establish relationships and communication with families, peers and children (Travis, 2005). Due to the difficulties in re-establishing bonds and relationships nearly half of the individuals released from prison end up back in prison within three years (Langan & Levin, 2002).

Incarcerated fathers have limited communication with their children (Vishner, 2013). Across America 62% and 84% of state and federal prisoners are incarcerated more than 100 miles away from their families and place of residence (Mumola, 2000).

However, a strong family connection and support in helping fathers transition from prison to home can play a pivotal role in reducing recidivism (Berg & Huebner, 2011; La Vigne, Vishner & Castro, 2004; Sullivan, Mino, Nelson & Pope, 2002). Naser and Vishner (2006) conducted a survey of 200 family members of prisoners located in Chicago prisons. The researchers found that distance and costs associated with travel ranked as the number one obstacle towards maintaining persistent contact with their children. Therefore, it becomes difficult for fathers to maintain a relationship with their children while incarcerated.

Social Significance

The rate at which African-American males are incarcerated not only affects the incarcerated men but also the families and communities left behind as well (Hairston, 2002; Rosen, 2002; Schindler & Ardittai, 2002). Currently, there are more African-American males enrolled in prison versus college. This is according Butterfield (2002), which estimated that nearly 791,000 African-American men are in prisons and jails compared to only 603,000 African-American males attending colleges and universities.

Due to their criminal conviction, there are few opportunities for individuals once they return home from prison (Cummings, 2012). The Bureau of Justice (2002) reported that each year on average federal and state prisons incarcerated 663,521 prisoners. This is in comparison to the nearly 600,000 inmates that come home each year. The majority of inmates located in state prisons (87.7%), will eventually return home (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2007). African-American and Hispanic males represent the largest percentage of individuals that are released (Marbley & Ferguson, 2005). This becomes a burden on society due to the number of individuals released with criminal records that are unable to

find sustainable jobs, vote, apply for housing or receive government assistance (Marbley & Ferguson, 2005) due to the lack of employment opportunities for convicted felons and the stigma that is attached (Visher, 2013).

In January 2004, former President George Bush during his State of Union address made a proposal for a 4-year, \$300 million federal program that would assist newly released prisoners to help combat prisoner reentry, recidivism, and help convicted individuals become rehabilitated (James, 2014). However, numerous studies (Austin, 2001; Marbley, Ferguson & Henderson, 2000; Petersilia, 2001; Travis, 2001) have shown that there are few policies or programs in place at a federal level to help individuals with criminal records become productive members in society. Thus, there is a need for more programs (at state and federal level) to help individuals become fully rehabilitated and given chances at gainful employment, adequate healthcare, educational opportunities, etc. (Visher, 2013). Likewise, there is also a need for more programs that help convicted fathers reestablish the roles in the lives of their children once they return home (Dyer, 2005).

Traditionally, the absence of the father in the home relates to high divorce rates and birth of children to young unwed mothers. However, incarcerated fathers are replacing this trend (Petersilia, 2003). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007) estimated that over 1.5 million minor children have a father in jail. A 2004 national survey reported that 52% of men in state prisons and 63% of men in federal prisons have one or more children under the age of 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Studies (Hughes, 1998; Patillo, Weiman, & Western, 2004) have shown the importance of the parent-child relationship for the overall development of children. Similarly, the parent-child relationship is also

vital in the rehabilitation efforts to keep incarcerated fathers from reoffending (Visher, 2013). As counselor and counselor educators, there is a need for research to understand this marginalized group. Additionally, there is a need for more curriculum focused counseling instruction that gives insight into the hardships and barriers that this specific population faces on a daily basis (Henriksen, 2006).

Professional Significance

The majority of individuals incarcerated return to prison three to five years after their release; making the highest chance of recidivism likely to occur within the first year (Marbley & Ferguson, 2005). Langan and Levin (2002) tracked two-thirds of the former inmates released in the United States for three years after their release in 1994. The researchers discovered that 29.9% of inmates are arrested within the first six months of their release, 59.2% within the first year, and 67.5% within three years. It is difficult and challenging for convicted individuals to stay out of prison once they are stigmatized as a criminal (Visher, 2013). However, it can be harder for convicted fathers to make that transition from prison to home (Marbley & Ferguson, 2005).

While incarcerated, fathers deal with a decline in the quality of their relationship with their children (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). They also report having fear that other men will replace them as father figures in their children's lives (Hairston, 1998). It is essential for fathers to be able to maintain the relationship with their children while incarcerated and be able to reestablish those bonds once released from prison (Tripp, 2001). For the counseling profession there needs to be more research to understand effective interventions and strategies to keep the lines of communication between the incarcerated father and their children open. Furthermore, more studies are needed to examine the

positive impact reentry into society has on the relationship between the father and children. Current studies (Visher, 2013) only seem to focus on the recidivism rates of convicted fathers.

A strong family connection and support play a very important role in a smooth transition for incarcerated fathers (Berg & Huebner, 2011; La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004; Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002). However, many fathers have a rough transition to “family life” once they experience the cruel and harsh reality of prison (Day, Acock, Bahr, & Arditti, 2005). Their identity as a father may take time to resurface and become a difficult transition for the newly released fathers and children alike (Tripp, 2001). A review of the literature has found little to no research that discusses the experiences and perceptions of convicted African-American fathers. Additionally, there is a lack of information regarding the barriers convicted African-American fathers face when they reenter society.

The crime rate in America has decreased significantly since the 1990’s (The Sentencing Project, 2016). However, while some may attribute this decrease in crime to sentencing policies related to non-violent drug offenses, researchers (Alexander, 2010; The Sentencing Project, 2016; Prison Policy, 2016) have shown otherwise. The high rates of arrest for individuals due to non-violent drug offenses has been proven ineffective due to the fact that when people get locked up for selling drugs, they are easily replaced on the streets by others seeking an income or struggling with addiction (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Likewise, people are likely to “age out” of crime as they reach their 30’s and 40’s seeking other avenues to gain money (The National Research Council, 2014). Because of these findings, there is a need for an overhaul and change in sentencing

policies to lead to criminal justice reform (Alexander, 2010). Few states (California and New York) have made policy changes at the state level, and at the federal level with the passing of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, there was a reduction in the inconsistency in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine possession (Prison Policy, 2016).

However, there needs to be an overhaul entirely of the criminal justice system and a shift in a focus to rehabilitation rather than punishment (Fulcher, 2012). From this study, the hope was to shed light on the need for a shift from incarceration to community-based prevention and resources for individuals returning home from prison (Tripp, 2001).

Likewise, programs and investments into development of more community agencies to strengthen and maintain the relationship between children and their fathers while incarcerated (Gilmore, 2000).

As society evolves and grows, it is the duty of counselors and the counseling profession to address the needs of diverse clients to improve their overall well-being (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). For counselor and counselor educators, it is important to gain an understanding of this population for the purpose of advocacy and social justice issues that this marginalized group endures on a daily basis (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). These values align with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), which discusses the importance of counselors advocating and addressing obstacles that may potentially hinder the growth of clients (A.7.b) and recognizing the community resources and support networks that can play a role in successful reintegration for convicted African-American fathers returning home (A.1.d). This allows for the opportunity for counseling professionals to uncover the multiple identities along with the intersecting privileged and marginalized statuses that

convicted African-American fathers' possess (Jun, 2010). An understanding of this specific population gives counselors-in-training insight into the barriers the fathers face at a systemic level (Adams et al., 2007; Hardiman & Jackson, 1982). Through supervision, counselors can assist counselors-in-training to become more engaging as they work in the areas of multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice advocacy (Dougherty, 2000). Furthermore, counselor educators through pedagogy and teaching activities can help counseling students become more culturally competent and more comfortable with viewing and understanding these fathers from their own contextual perspective (Vontress, 1985).

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation that supported this research design was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977). The Ecological Systems Theory (1977) focuses on the "person-in-environment" and the impact the environment plays on the everyday life of an individual. This theory is comprised of four nested levels (or systems) which are: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, and, (d) macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). When using this theory there must be an understanding of the interrelationships between the evolving person and the continuous changing environment that a person lives in (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Simply stated, this theory discusses the societal and environmental factors that play a role in an individual's daily life. Additionally, it examines the impact the different systems have in an individual's life and the interrelationship each system has with each other.

The Ecological Systems Theory (1977) consists of four systems with each expanding, similar to throwing a rock in a pond and the ripples that it produces. The

microsystem is the immediate environment of the individual such as the home, peer groups, children and significant others (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The mesosystem is the interconnected relationships between two or more microsystems. The individual parts of the microsystem cannot independently but rather are interconnected and influence one another. The results of these interactions have an indirect impact on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The third level is the exosystem, this level consist of the link and processes between two or more settings with at least one that does not involve the immediate person. The fourth level is the macrosystem. This level is the institutional and cultural patterns such as economic, legal, and political systems. At this level, ideological blueprint that influences other settings is exhibited throughout other systems (Arditti, 2005). This is the outer most level and includes consistency or change over the life course. These changes may include historical events, social conditions occurring within the environment, and changes that occur in relation to life transitions.

Over the years, the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) has undergone a few changes and is now exists in different versions. Additionally, the theory also exists in different phases, which coincide with the development of the theory over time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The first phase of this theory focused on the environmental changes and the implications of these changes on the individuals that live and grow in these environments. More specifically, this phase focused on the examination of the interrelations between the developing person and the changing in the micro and macro context (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The second phase highlighted human development and the role played by a person's characteristics in their development. In the third and current phase, which I used for this study, focuses on proximal processes. According to

Bronfenbrenner (1977), “human development is the process of reciprocal interaction between an active, developing biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols that are located within the immediate environment” (p. 25). To be effective, the vital interaction must occur on a consistent basis over a prolonged period (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These continued forms of interaction in the individual’s immediate environment are the proximal processes. Examples of proximal processes include (a) group or solitary play, (b) learning new skills, (c) reading, and (d) performing complex tasks (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Simply stated, the concept of proximal processes means that as humans, we learn through mimicking others. We learn by ourselves from those around us by assimilating from their skills, habits, and insights. Through this process, individuals not only learn how to develop motor skills but also learn behaviors of how to express pleasure, disappointment, and anger. When considering convicted African-American fathers, this concept is essential. While in prison, due to their environment, convicted fathers may develop habits and expressions that are necessary to survive the environment of prison (prisonization). However, upon release, these same habits may not be suitable for reestablishing a relationship with their children and family. Therefore, convicted African-American fathers need to learn new habits and behaviors once they come home to be able to readjust to their new environment. The Ecological Systems Theory (1977) is a theory that has been used and applied in a number of different settings.

Feinstein, Barrtman, Buboltz, Sonnichsen and Solomon (2008) conducted a qualitative study of 18 juvenile males in a low-income security correctional facility. Using the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) as the framework the researchers wanted to

establish existing positive factors in the lives of the juveniles to determine approaches that create resiliency. The researchers did the study in a low security correctional facility that housed juveniles from South Dakota and Minnesota. Four of the participants were African-American, two were Native American, one was Mong and eleven were Caucasian. The crimes the participants committed ranged from drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism and sex offenses. The results of the study concluded that in order for the juveniles to be successful, internal and external environmental factors must be positive in order for the student to prosper. Internal factors included building a positive identity and having future expectations. Likewise, external factors included structure support, consistency, and good relationships with the adults in their lives.

Dallaire, Ciccone, and Wilson (2010) conducted a study to examine the experiences of teachers' with children who have incarcerated parents. The researchers' explored the teacher's expectations of children with incarcerated parents. With the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) as the framework, they examined how a parent's incarceration can affect a child's academic development. The researchers suggested that when a child has a positive environment they tend to be more successful versus children living in a negative environment. The study consisted of 30 teachers with an average of 13 years teaching experience. Twenty-seven of the teachers were female and three males. Based off the teacher's responses from the interviews the researchers determined that teachers were more likely to stigmatize children who had an incarcerated parent versus children who did not.

The Ecological Systems Theory (1977) helps to create a clear complete picture of a person's environment and provide context to the interrelationships between each system

(Ashford, Lecroy, & Lortie, 2001). Furthermore, it was the best fit for this study, which explored the direct and indirect factors that played a role in the daily lives of convicted African-American fathers and the relationship with their children. This theory also helped to examine the experiences of convicted African-American fathers and solicited their thoughts on the impact a criminal record had on their lives.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was an exploration of the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since their reentry into society. While incarcerated, fathers deal with a decline in the relationship with their children due to distance and lack of communication (Visher, 2013). Once released, they face struggles in trying to reestablish those bonds with their children and fitting back into society (Tripp, 2001). For this study, the hope was to give counselors insight into ways they can help convicted African-American fathers reestablish relationships with their children once they return home (Fulcher, 2012). Additionally, this study wanted to give counselors an understanding of the relationship between the racial disparity in arrest and sentencing of African-Americans. Within counseling literature, there is a noted gap related to theories and interventions relevant to this population. Current research pertaining to convicted African-American fathers only focuses on the effect incarceration has on the children, and ignores its impact on fathers (Visher, 2013). As a counselor, our duty is to advocate and address obstacles that hinder the growth of our clients (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014). Likewise, to recognize and take advantage of the community resources and support networks available (A.1.d) to ensure convicted African-American fathers have a successful reintegration into their homes once released.

Research Questions

The intention of this study was within the context of their environment, an exploration of the experiences of convicted African-American fathers and the relationship with their children while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. The research questions for this study are listed below.

Research Question 1

How do convicted African-American fathers describe their experiences since their reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?

Research Question 2

In sharing their experiences, how do convicted African –American fathers describe the relationship with their children since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?

Research Question 3

Overall, comparatively, how are the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers similar or different since their reentry into society?

Methodology

Prior to beginning this study, I received approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Data was collected in accordance with IRB guidelines.

Research Design

The present study was a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a particular type of data collection that mainly uses in-depth interviews and observations to gain data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). A general understanding of qualitative research is,

“an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). This is in contrast to quantitative research, which typically uses statistical analysis to predict and interpret data. Qualitative research uses data collection that is rich in description of people, places, and conversations. Furthermore, it focuses on individual’s understanding and perceptions from their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Qualitative research was the best option for this particular study to gain an understanding of the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers since returning home from prison. This type of research design allowed the fathers to give their perceptions and thoughts on the impact incarceration had on their lives as well as the lives of their children.

The type of qualitative method that I employed for the proposed study was a case study design. A qualitative cases study, “is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Furthermore, case study research design is the intense study of a case (Glesne, 2011). An approach to studying a case (as the unit of analysis) where the case is a bounded system, a single entity, or a unit around which there are boundaries (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 1998).

The defining characteristic that separates a case study from other forms of qualitative research is delimiting or placing the case in a bounded system (Yin, 2014). A case is bounded when it is clarified by the researcher of what will (or will not be) analyzed (Merriam, 1998). A case is a single entity and can range from a student, a

teacher, a program, a community, or a specific policy (Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (2014), bounding a case, “will help determine the scope of your data collection and, in particular, how you will distinguish data about the subject of your case study from data external to the case” (p. 34). How a case is bounded or what the focus of the study will be is at the discretion of the researcher (Merriam, 1998). **Each system (or entity) of this study consisted of the convicted African-American fathers while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition.**

Additionally, as noted by Yin (2003), there are four instances when it is appropriate to use a case study approach, “(a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context” (p. 545). In reference to this study, I felt a case study method was the most appropriate option because, (a) the questions I wanted to explore were “how” questions and, (b) the fathers having a criminal record or their experiences as a result of their conviction cannot be manipulated. Furthermore, a case study was suitable for this study because the case was the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers, but this cannot be determined without the context of the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. It is in this setting where the fathers shared their experiences while seeking assistance. It would have been difficult for me as the researcher to explore their experiences without the context within which it occurred.

To help provide a framework and direction for this study (and help the case become more bounded) it is important to know that:

1. The current study only focused on convicted African-American fathers and *not just fathers of any other racial group or ethnicity.*
2. The participants for the study were clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition *and not clients at any other agency or location.*
3. The study focused on African-American fathers with a criminal record *and not African-American fathers in general.*

Additionally, this study did not only use a cases study approach, but more specifically a multiple case study approach. A multiple case study approach allows the researcher to explore differences within and between cases (Yin, 2003). Thus, the major difference is a multiple case study uses more than one case to analyze. Even though some researchers consider doing a single case study as a different methodological format (Eckstein, 1975; Lijphart, 1975), it is considered by Yin (2014) as a “design that is variant within the same methodological framework” (p. 56). More details regarding a multiple case study design are discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

The current study included convicted African-American fathers who were clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Midlands Fatherhood Coalition was a non-profit organization located in the Columbia, South Carolina that helps clients overcome barriers to being responsible and involved fathers (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition Facts and Figures, 2012). Additionally, the agency was a referral source for job seekers looking for potential employers. Midlands Fatherhood Coalition annually serves 375 fathers each year along with the collective Midlands Fatherhood Coalitions located in Aiken, Winnsboro, Lexington and Columbia, South Carolina. From the Columbia location, the agency served clients from Richland, Lexington, Fairfield and Aiken counties. However,

fathers from Kershaw, Saluda, Aiken, Orangeburg and Calhoun counties also received assistance (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition Facts and Figures, 2012).

The Midlands Fatherhood Coalition began in 1999 as a single entity. By 2006, all projects within Richland County merged to create the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition Facts and Figures, 2012). On average, the agency served 375 men annually with 59 percent of the clients participating voluntarily. Furthermore, 77% of the fathers who participated in the program are unemployed when they first join the program (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition Facts and Figures, 2012). Thirty-four percent of the fathers in the program did not have a High School Diploma or General Education Degree (GED). A large percentage of the clients were required to attend weekly sessions and have constant contact with their caseworker through court orders and mandates (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition Facts and Figures, 2012).

Participants

In order of be included in the study, participants had to be least 18 years of age or older and clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Participants had to be African-American fathers with one or more convictions (i.e. criminal record) and released from prison within the last three years. This aligns with a study completed by Langan and Levin (2002), which concluded that 29.9% of inmates arrested within the first six months of their release, 59.2% within the first year, and 67.5% within three years. The specific crime or conviction of fathers was not the focus of this study. Sample size in qualitative research varies according to what research design is used. As noted by Creswell (2002) the recommended number of participants for a case study design is three to five participants, which was the aim for this study. Three to five participants has been used in

other case study designs as well. For example, Houghton, Casey, Shaw and Murphy (2013) used five case study sites to explore the role of the Republic of Ireland's clinical skills laboratory in preparing nursing students for practice. Likewise, Holland, Grant, and Donthamsetty (2017) used three tutors in their case study research design to examine the effectiveness of a newly integrated framework for tutoring sessions.

Sampling in qualitative research is typically non-random, small and purposeful (Merriam, 1998). The sampling method used for this study was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is, "reviewing and studying all cases that meet predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). This sampling method involves stating and having specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for the specific population to be studied (Patton, 2002). After a review of the relevant sampling methods, this method appeared to be the most appropriate and best option for the present study.

Instruments

In contrast to quantitative research, which commonly uses scales, tests, surveys, questionnaires for data collection, the primary source of data collection for qualitative research is the researcher, interviews, observations and documents (Merriam, 1998). In regards to this study, the primary instruments that was used was in-depth interviews and observations (Yin, 2014). Interviews in case study research design are common and viewed as the primary source of data (Merriam, 1998). Specifically, face-to-face interviews with the purpose of gaining information in relation to the current study (i.e. perspectives from the convicted fathers and the staff at Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, etc.) (Yin, 2014). The interview process for the fathers consisted of three interviews. The first interview focused on questions related to the fathers' life and experiences before

incarceration. The second interview revolved around the fathers' experiences after coming home from prison. Finally, the third interview focused on the fathers' general thoughts and perceptions on how their lives have changed as well as their thoughts on counseling services and interventions they received while in jail and since returning home. I will explain further details regarding the instruments for this study in Chapter 3.

Data Analyses

Over the years, data analysis in qualitative research has been a process that has not had much guidelines or direction. However, a number of sources (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Dey, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) have provided a "blueprint" on suggested methods for analyzing qualitative data. There are different formats for doing case study approach. The technique that will be used in this study to analyze the data is the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Conducting thematic analysis in qualitative research is, "to identify, report, and analyze data for the meanings produced in and by people, situations, and events" (Aronson, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006; Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008). It involves identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

When doing a multiple or comparative case study there is a within-case analysis and secondly a cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). The within-case analysis treats each case as a detailed, in-depth case by itself. The data is gathered and collected so the researcher can absorb as much as possible in relation to the contextual variables that may be relevant to the case (Yin, 2014). Next, once the analysis of each case is completed, a cross section analysis will occur (Merriam, 1998). A cross-sectional analysis (or cross sectional synthesis) is recommended if a case study consists of at two or more cases. This

technique is relevant whether it is an independent study or a predesigned part of the same study (Yin, 2014). This technique treats each individual study as a separate study. Thus, the process for analyzing the data for this study was completed in two steps: (1) analyzing the collected data individually using a thematic analysis and (2) comparing the data using the cross-case analysis (or synthesis).

Coding is the process of sorting and defining collected data (transcripts, observation notes, documents, etc.) that is applicable to the research purpose (Glesne, 2011). The goal is to put together these pieces of data into clumps of data to create a thematic organizational framework (Glesne, 2011). From coding, the researcher wants to look for patterns, make comparisons, produce explanations, and build models (Gibbs, 2007). The coding and analytic process for this study began by first listening back through and transcribing each interview. Likewise, I looked over field notes and observation notes from my time in the research setting (Maxwell, 2013).

Initially, as I listened and transcribed the interviews I identified areas that required particular attention to context and journaling any patterns that emerged as I transcribed. After the transcription was completed, I compiled the data from all the interviews along with additional data I gathered around each case (Maxwell, 2013). Once the data is compiled and organized, I inductively identified patterns to develop a codebook (Glesne, 2011). A codebook is for storing, developing and working with a coding scheme. Furthermore, a codebook is a source for organizing and defining patterns that will emerge from transcribing (Glesne, 2011). Throughout the process of analysis, the codebook will serve as a guide to store new codes that may emerge and existing codes to transform as needed (Yin, 2014). I identified major codes and sub-codes with the major codes

representing the central concepts and themes that will arise from the data (Glesne, 2011). As the analytic process moves from coding to interpretation, the connections between the codes, the theoretical framework, and research questions led to the development of themes that emerged to provide focus to the study (Maxwell, 2013).

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is important to help ensure research is plausible and credible. To account for rigor in qualitative research Lincoln and Guba (1985) list four criteria to meet: (1) credibility, (2) dependability, (3) confirmability, and (4) transferability. Likewise, Creswell (1998) provides eight procedures that are often used in qualitative research to allow for trustworthiness: (1) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (2) triangulation, (3) peer review and debriefing, (4) negative case analysis, (5) clarification of research bias, (6) member checking, (7) rich, thick descriptions, and (8) external audit. For this study, I used three procedures to account for trustworthiness: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. I will discuss in further details specifically how I used these procedures in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

Following, I operationally defined terms or phrases for the purposes of the current study:

Convicted: For this study, this term is defined as an individual declared guilty of a criminal offense by a jury or judge in the court of law (Muth & Walker, 2013).

African-American fathers: This term will be operationally defined as noted by Gadsden and Smith (1995), as an individual of African descent born in America with at least one child 18 years of age or younger.

Children: For the purposes of this study children is defined as simply children under the age of 18 (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Reentry: There are numerous definitions for this term. Vishner (2013), defines it as the release of prisoner to their homes and communities. Likewise, Marbley and Ferguson (2005), define reentry as an individual being released back into society. For the purposes of this study, reentry is understood as the transitioning process of individuals who have been released into the community from some form of incarceration (Solomon, Waul, Van Ness, & Travis, 2004).

Ecological Systems Theory: This model was originally created by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) and will be referenced numerous times throughout this study. However, for the purposes of the study this term is operationally defined as: “a systemic approach that gives understanding to the environment an individual lives in and the complex, multiple effects it has on them and their families. The model has four systems that represent the environment- the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and macrosystem” (Arditti, 2005, p. 252).

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the impact my presence may have on the outcomes of the interviews (Glesne, 2011). As an African-American, male interviewing another African-American male my presence may play a part in the way the participants answered the questions or felt comfortable enough to genuinely express their thoughts and feelings. Another limitation of this study was utilizing a case study research design. As with all qualitative research, a case study design does not have an exact blueprint for how it is to be implemented (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This may lead to moments of

ambiguity when conducting the research process. There may be times when I was not sure if I am implementing this research design correctly or effectively. I referred to the literature often and used it as much as possible to guide me. However, as a novice researcher I could not be sure without hesitation that I effectively performed this task.

Summary

In conclusion, the goal of this study was to give insight into the difficulties convicted African-American fathers face in trying to live a productive life, but more importantly the impact incarceration and having a criminal record had on the relationship with their children. Through the in-depth interviews and observations, I hoped to give counselor and counselor educators' insight into some of the pitfalls and frustrations that this marginalized group faced on a daily basis. Furthermore, through this study I wanted to give the participants (African-American fathers) the opportunity to share their experiences. My hope and goal is for the research and information gained here to be the start of my academic and career pursuit of educating future counselors and counselor educators on the oppression and discrimination that many African-American fathers face every day. Additionally, to help counseling students understand the hardships and misunderstandings this marginalized group faced on a continued basis. Through this study, the hope was to eliminate the myth that African-American fathers are not in the lives of their children. That African-American fathers are not irresponsible and without compassion. They are just simply fighting a battle against a system that is bigger, stronger, and has been dehumanizing them for centuries. Subsequent chapters review the history of the history of the prison and criminal justice system in America along with the relationship and history with African-Americans (Chapter 2), discuss the methodology of

the current study (Chapter 3), provide results from the current study (Chapter 4) and discuss conclusions and suggestions for future research on the proposed topic (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

*“Even years after its origin, the criminal justice system continued to be used as a means of social control to maintain social hierarchy of White **superiority** and Black **inferiority**. This supports the assertion that the system was never broken, it was designed to marginalize African-Americans and in doing that, it was very successful” (Sutherland, p. 3, 1947).*

Incarceration in America

After a review of articles related to the specific topic, I utilized EBSCO Host and Google Scholar search engine provided by The Thomas Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina. The terms I used in the multiple databases were: *“incarcerated fathers,” “absentee fathers,” “convicted fathers,” “non-resident fathers,” “reentry from incarceration,” “absentee fathers effect on children,” “barriers to reentry for convicted fathers,” and “Criminal Justice System in America.”* After a research of the terms, some of the journals that were mostly used included: *Journal of Negro Education, Journal of Adolescence, Criminal Justice Policy Review, Journal of Black Studies, Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, Fathering, and Journal of Criminal Justice Education* just to name a few. Additionally, I also used the references listed in the previous research to locate more possible articles for the current study.

In the United States, there are 2.2 million people incarcerated, this is a 500% increase that has occurred over the past 40 years (The Sentencing Project, 2016). The

U.S. prison system is the largest in the world even though America only accounts for only 5% of the world's population (Travis, Western, & Redburn, 2014). The current incarceration rate is 1 out of 100 adults in prison or jail, which is 5 to 10 times higher than the rates of Western Europe and similar democracies (Prison Policy, 2016). Fiscally, the cost of prisons continues to rise and become a burden for local and federal governments. The United States spends more than 80 billion dollars annually on corrections (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Furthermore, the continuous cost to operate prison and jails account for the growing portion of the nearly \$200 billion that is spent annually on public safety (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2016).

Even though incarceration in America is high when compared to other developed countries, incarceration in America affects African-Americans at a disproportionate rate when compared to other groups in America (Travis, Western and Redburn, 2014). For example, African-Americans account for only 37% of the U.S. population but account for 67% of the prison population. Furthermore, statistics show that African-American men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men (The Sentencing Project, 2016). The lifetime likelihood of imprisonment for U.S. born residents born in 2001 is one in 17 Caucasian men, one in six Latino men and ***one in three African-American men*** (Prison Policy, 2016). African-American men born in the late 1960's are more likely to serve time in prison when compared to minority men with a 4 year college degree (Pettit and Western, 2004; Pettit, 202). How is it that the American prison system has evolved from a method of rehabilitation to punishment at a drastically high rate? Why does the U.S. prison system incarcerate so many individuals when compared to other developed

countries? In order to understand this trend further, I will next provide an overview of the prison system in America.

History of the Prison System in America

For the purpose of this literature review and study, an in-depth overview of the United States prison system is necessary to show how it has evolved over time and its impact on African-American men. Prior to the concept of incarceration in America (pre-American Revolution) punishment came in the form of public shaming through whippings, castrations, and pillory (Bloomberg & Lucken, 2010). Crime was as a sin and did not require further punishment once the public display was completed (Bloomberg & Lucken, 2010). The origin of incarceration in America begins in the eighteenth century. It was during this time that incarceration made the shift from corporal punishment to imprisonment (Bloomberg & Lucken, 2010). Individuals in America during the colonial period are imprisoned for political and religious offenses rather than actual crimes (Barnes, 1921). Furthermore, during this time, jails and workhouses would later become the framework for modern day prisons in America; jails and workhouses (Barnes, 1921).

The jails consisted of places for those accused of crime requiring trials and for the detention of debtors and political offenders. In contrast, workhouses are created for the confinement of vagrants and would not allow the housing of felons (Jones, 2013). It was not until the contribution of the West Jersey and Pennsylvania Quakers during the eighteenth century that the two concepts of prisons and workhouses were combined to create what is known as the modern day prison (Jones, 2013). Nearly a century later, Quakers contributed the idea of adding hard labor and cellular separation to the concept of imprisonment (Barnes, 1921). As time passed and the onset of the Industrial

Revolution came, there were further changes to the American prison system with the freeing of slaves and increase in immigrants on American soil (James, 2014).

New prison designs encompassed separation of prisoners with the guard placed at a central location with the ability to view everyone (Gilmore, 2000). This new strategy to separate and isolate prisoners laid the foundation for current prison structures known back then as “Panopticon” (James, 2014). In conjunction with this model states such as Pennsylvania begin to introduce the concept of solitary confinement as a method of punishment to encourage rehabilitation (National Academy of Sciences, 2017). In order for inmates to get a chance to earn their freedom a new method was introduced (Gilmore, 2000). This method was the beginning concept for parole and officially became a part of the criminal justice system with the passing of the American Prison Congress of 1870 (McKelvey, 1977).

During the 1920’s, psychologists and therapists begin studying and working within the prison system to further understand and potentially help this growing population (Thompson, 1992). Because of this change in incarceration, by 1926 most prisons had a psychiatrist or psychologist on staff (McKelvey, 1977). Through this new era of imprisonment came the idea of viewing criminals as sick and in need of healing to a more holistic approach involving treatments and assessments. However, the onset of the Great Depression saw a huge increase in the prison population at a rate of over 200% (Allen & Simonsen, 1995). Due to the struggling economy, attempts to focus on mental health became too much of a financial burden for prisons to endure and the shift of the overall criminal justice system went from rehabilitation to punishment (Allen &

Simonsen, 1995). As a result, prisons became more hardened and the laws and polices became tougher (Rotman, 1990).

Prisons in the South

While states in the north saw prisons as a form of rehabilitation, states in the south viewed jails as a new method of slavery (Bloomberg & Lucken, 2010). However, before there is an overview of the prison system in the south, a focus on the importance of the passing of the 13th amendment must be considered. At the time the 13th amendment was created, the Civil War was ending. The North won and now the South could no longer enslave African-Americans (Alexander, 2010). However, studies (Gilmore, 2000; Alexander, 2010) suggest that with passing of the 13th Amendment slavery took on a new face through the prison system. This was particularly in the south where a number of white planters, famers, and politicians became focused on creating laws that prohibited African-Americans from gaining complete independence (Gilmore, 2000). Also notable during the time was the number of slave owners that were now losing their work force and in need of cheap labor to farm their land (Alexander, 2010).

As stated in the 13th amendment, “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as punishment for crime* whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist with the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (Gilmore, 2000, p. 3). Thus, with the passing of this amendment African-Americans went from free labor in the form of slavery to convict labor in the form of laborers through the prison system (Jones, 2013). Within the same policy, the slavery of one marginalized group was ending, while the oppression and discrimination of another group was beginning (Alexander, 2010). Furthermore, the amendment allowed for the legalization of slavery and granted

each state the legal mechanisms to use prison labor for work (Gilmore, 2000). Therefore, through the implementation of the 13th amendment in parallel with the need for a new form of slavery to oppress African-Americans, the beginning of the modern day prison in America is introduced (Justice, 2014).

As previously stated, with the passing of the 13th Amendment came new tactics and policies to keep African-Americans enslaved (Alexander, 2010). One example is the early forms of the prison system that existed in the south during the early 1900's (Cummings, 2012). During this time, prisons located in the south were mainly comprised of poor Blacks that were arrested for ambiguous and unfair crimes related to unjust laws (Alexander, 2010). One such law that existed as a form of oppression and discrimination were slave codes (Thompson, 1993). These laws were created by the individual states as a way to keep blacks from uprising, communicating, and were unfairly enforced on African-Americans (Thompson, 1993). These laws were in effect in many southern states, including Florida. Some of the laws stated that: (1) African-Americans were not allowed to be in possession of any reading or writing material to prevent any educating or uprising, and (2) African-Americans could not legally carry any weapons or gather in groups of eight or more without the presence of any white individuals (Thompson, 1993). As a result, African-Americans were incarcerated at high rates for trivial crimes (Thompson, 1993).

Another way in which African-Americans were oppressed was the creation of Jim Crow Laws (Alexander, 2010). These laws were created to further incarcerate freed African-Americans in the form of legal statutes that instilled segregation and unjust treatment (Jones, 2013). Because of these laws African-Americans were not allowed to

attend or be present at certain schools, parks, restaurants, buses, trains, etc. Violation of these state mandated laws carried severe penalties which further contributed to the incarceration of African-Americans in the prison system (Fulcher, 2012). African-Americans were arrested, convicted and committed to prisons at rates that were three times higher than Whites (Alexander, 2010). The Jim Crow policies continued throughout the 1940's and 1950's until the birth of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's which ended segregation (Alexander, 2010).

African-Americans and the Prison System

Studies show (Higgin-Bothman, 1978; Kennedy, 1997; Russell, 1998; Silberman, 1978; Websdale, 2001) that slavery is arguably the most disgraceful and shameful institution in American history (Alexander, 2010). However, throughout American history as the prison system has developed and evolved, African-Americans have endured a number of hardships that coincide and are a direct result of the growth of the American prison system. (Alexander, 2010). Also worth mentioning is not only the hardships that African-Americans have endured as a result of the prison system but the racial disparity that makes up the prison system as well (Prison Policy, 2016). African-Americans go to jail at the same rate as Caucasians even though evidence suggests that they commit more crimes (Alexander, 2010). For example, African-Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate of 5.1 times the rate of whites. In five states (New Jersey, Minnesota, Iowa, Vermont, and Wisconsin) this disparity increases to 10 times the rate of whites (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Additionally, in twelve states (Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland) more than half of the prison population is

African-American (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Therefore, evidence suggests that African-Americans are not only disproportionately arrested when compared to other racial groups, but are incarcerated at rates that are unparalleled (Alexander, 2010). A primary contributor to the unmatched rates at which African-Americans are arrested and incarcerated can be attributed to the phenomena known as mass incarceration (Fulcher, 2012).

War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration

Mass Incarceration is a term used to describe the high rates of incarceration of minorities that has occurred in the United States because of stiff drug policies, penalties, and mandatory sentencing (Justice, 2014). From 1925 to 1975, the average incarceration rate in American prisons was at a rate of 110 inmates in prison per 100,000 of the national population (Alexander, 2010). This number skyrocketed by the 1980's where the number of individuals incarcerated for drug offenses rose from 41,000 to nearly half a million by 2014 (Cummings, 2012). Contrary to popular belief, this increase in incarceration was not attributed to higher rates of crime but to changes in American drug and sentencing laws (Fulcher, 2012).

The beginning of the mass incarceration phenomena can be traced to the passing of the Rockefeller Drug Laws of 1973 which took place in New York (Cummings, 2012). This state mandated law was created to provide mandatory prison sentences for non-violent drug offenses. The impact of the Rockefeller Drug Laws led to the beginning of the "War on Drugs" in America which was the framework for the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (Alexander, 2010). Similar to the Rockefeller Drug Laws, this policy created mandatory minimum federal sentencing laws for drug arrests. As a result of this federal

policy, the number of incarcerations for drug related offenses increased from 41,100 in 1980 to 493,800 by 2003 (Fulcher, 2012). Furthermore, drug arrests increased from 1 in 14 to 1 in 8 between 1987 and 2005 (Cummings, 2012).

With the passing of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 at the federal level the disproportionate rates at which minorities were incarcerated increased (Fulcher, 2012). This policy, which was enacted during the administration of President Ronald Reagan, was created to combat the growing rate of drug related violence and deaths during the late 1980's as a result of the crack cocaine epidemic (Cummings, 2012). The creation of this law led to the high rates of arrest and profiling of inner-city minorities at rates that up to that point had never been seen before (Fulcher, 2012). Because of these policies and mandatory sentencing guidelines, by 2002, African-Americans represented 80% of individuals sentenced for federal crack cocaine laws and served significant more time in prison for drug offenses *even though two-thirds of crack cocaine users in the United States were identified as white or Hispanic* (National Association for Advancement of Colored People, 2016). Likewise, as a result of the mandatory sentencing for drug offenses, the minimum sentencing increased to an average of 62 months in prison. This was in contrast to drug sentencing before the adoption of these policies which was 22 months (Cummings, 2012).

As part of the implementation of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, Congress also created a sentencing disparity when convicting for possession of crack and powder cocaine (Alexander, 2010). As part of this federal law, someone convicted of possession of **five grams of crack cocaine** received the same five-year mandatory sentencing as someone in possession of **500 grams of powder cocaine** (American Civil Liberties

Union, 2014). This may seem trivial but studies (Fulcher, 2012; Alexander, 2010) show that the majority of individuals arrested for possession of crack cocaine are African-American. Due to this unjust policy, low-income minority communities became the primary target for crack cocaine arrests resulting in the incarceration of hundreds of thousands of young, poor African-American males (Fulcher, 2012). Since the inception of this policy, the arrests of African-Americans when compared to other populations is incomparable (Fulcher, 2012). By 2004, under this crack versus crack cocaine sentencing, African-Americans were serving as much time in prison for **non-violent** drug offenses (58.7 months) as whites were for **violent offenses** (61.7 months) (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014). Additionally, by 2010 85% of the 30,000 individuals sentenced for crack cocaine offenses were African-American (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014).

Racial Disparity in Sentencing

The rates at which African-Americans are arrested continues to be unmatched by any other racial group (Justice, 2014). There is also a significant disparity in sentencing (Starr & Rehavi, 2014). Sentences given to African-American males in the federal system is 20% longer than those imposed on white males for the same crime (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014). In federal courts, the average sentence during 2008 and 2009 was 55 months for whites and 90 months for African-Americans (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2010). As of 2009, African-Americans represent 28.3% of all individuals sentenced to life in prison, 56.4% of those serving life without the possibility of parole, and 56.1% of individuals that received life without the possibility of parole for crimes committed as a juvenile (Starr & Rehavi, 2014).

Furthermore, according to a 2012 report by the American Civil Liberties Union, 65.4% of all prisoners serving life without the possibility of parole for nonviolent drug offenses are African-American. This disparity in sentencing can also be seen in death penalties cases (U.S. Sentencing Commission, 2010). Currently, 42% of defendants sentenced to the death penalty are African-American. Studies (Starr & Rehavi; Carson & Sabol, 2012) have shown that the murder of whites by African-Americans results in capital prosecution at higher rates than the murder of African-Americans by other African-Americans (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014). With these statistics and findings in mind, it becomes apparent that once a convicted African-American father is sentenced for a crime, they are going to be sentenced and punished at rates disproportionate to other groups.

Prison Industrial Complex

A benefit of the mass incarceration phenomena is the legalized business of private prisons utilizing prison labor which is referred to as the prison industrial complex (Fulcher, 2012). The term *prison industrial complex* is used to describe the multi-billion dollar business that has evolved from the privatization of prisons (Cummings, 2012). While many feel the drug epidemic should be regarded as a public health issue rather than a criminal enterprise, private prison corporations have used it as a way to capitalize making billions in revenue (Cummings, 2012). As a consequence of this “booming business,” private prisons have become a major industry and lobbying “power house” in local and federal government providing economic incentives to rural communities (Fulcher, 2012).

The way the prison industrial complex works is private prisons obtain lucrative contracts from companies. Once these private prisons gain the contracts they use the

inmates in their prisons as a form of cheap labor (Cummings, 2012). Companies such as IBM, Compaq, Boeing, J.C. Penny and Victoria Secret use the prison labor to make their products while paying wages to prisoners that most amount to \$1.50 per hour (Cummings, 2012). The revenue created from the privatization of prisons gives both parties (private prisons and companies) the incentive to make sure these institutions remain full (Cummings, 2012).

Private prisons have benefited and created revenue based off of keeping their facilities at full capacity (Fulcher, 2012). As this pattern has grown, so has the number of prisoners housed in these institutions. For example, in 1995 36,567 inmates were housed in private prisons; by 2009 this number rose to 129,336 inmates (Fulcher, 2012). The relationship between mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex has led to a huge increase of inmates in the American prison system. Likewise, it has accounted for the high number of arrests of African-American men for non-violent drug offenses (Alexander, 2010). In 2007, two-thirds of crack users in the United States were identified as White or Latino. However, 82% of defendants arrested and convicted for crack cocaine were African-American (Cummings, 2012).

These alarming statistics in conjunction with lack of opportunities available for African-American men once they are released from prison creates a difficult task of avoiding crime and getting rearrested (Alexander, 2010). The criminal justice system is now a system focused on crime and punishment, rather than rehabilitation. It is a system designed to capture and penalize poor low-income minorities (Alexander, 2010). As stated by Cummings (2012) when discussing the current criminal justice system in America, “our current prison regime in the United States therefore maintains political and

economic control by keeping black and brown men powerless while simultaneously allowing prison corporations to maintain a steady client base and consequently to increase profit margins” (p. 442). Further studies within counseling should explore the relationship between the incarceration of African-American males, the prison system, and the overall effect it has on the African-American community. This is important for counselors to gain insight into effective ways of working with this marginalized group. Furthermore, to help counselors understand ways they can advocate and assist convicted African-American fathers.

African-American Fathers Reentry into Society

One of the toughest tasks for convicted African-American fathers upon reentry into society is finding gainful employment (Fulcher, 2012). With most current employers conducting background checks this creates a hindrance in finding employment that provides reasonable pay (Prison Policy, 2016). More than 60% of formerly incarcerated individuals are unemployed one year after their release. Of those who do find jobs on average take home 40% less pay annually when compared to individuals without criminal records (The Sentencing Project, 2016). These debilitating barriers make it tough for convicted fathers to play a pivotal role in the lives of their children. They are likely to become frustrated with the lack of employment opportunities which statistically leads to a return to prison and a higher recidivism rate (Prison Policy, 2016).

Barriers for Convicted Felons

Each year, nearly 700,000 individuals are released from state or federal prison (Visher, 2013). For a number of individuals the stigma of having a criminal record can make the challenge of becoming a productive citizen a daunting task (Prison Policy,

2015). In some states there are noted laws and statues that make it difficult for employers to hire convicted felons (Cummings, 2012). In Pennsylvania, for example, convicted felons are disqualified from working in the health care industry (Visher, 2013). Additionally, convicted felons in certain states are prohibited from obtaining occupational licenses which is a requirement for professions such as: barbers, septic tank cleaners, real estate professionals, and contractors (Cummings, 2012). Once an individual is convicted he is permanently banned from receiving public assistance in the form of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, Food Stamps, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (Travis, 2002). Individuals that are convicted for a non-violent drug offense are permanently excluded from receiving financial aid to obtain an education (Justice, 2014). They are also denied basic rights such as receiving or re-applying for a driver's license due to suspension. Applying for a driver's license may seem minor but is extremely important when considering that a driver's license is necessary in order to apply for most jobs, receive government assistance, and to operate a vehicle (Prison Policy, 2015).

Convicted African-American Fathers and Counseling

A review of current literature reveals a gap in research focusing on the experiences of convicted African-American fathers and their experiences once they return home. Specifically, there is a noticeable gap in the literature that explores the impact incarceration has on the relationship with their children and the societal barriers that exist that make it difficult for convicted African-American fathers to become productive members in society.

Visher (2013) conducted a longitudinal study on fathers returning home from prison and the relationship with their children. The researcher aimed to explore the relationship the fathers had with their children during incarceration and after their release. The data from the survey was gathered from a multistate, longitudinal study done through the *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*. The focus of this survey was to understand the process of prisoner reentry, the challenges returning prisoners and their families face, and the support systems needed for successful reintegration. Furthermore, the researcher collected data through multiple ways such as interviews with prisoners, interviews with family members, community focus groups, and community stakeholder interviews.

The sample for the study consisted of 324 male prisoners from prisons in Ohio and Texas. In order to participate, each male prisoner had to have at least one minor child. The majority of the participants were African-American (70%), Caucasian (16%), 12% that were from other racial groups that were not identified and 2% that identified as bi-racial. Additionally, more than 80% of the participants had been convicted of a crime and 36% reported serving time in prison as a juvenile. Lastly, 58% of the fathers reported having at least one minor child and 41% of the fathers reported looking forward to going home and spending time with their children. The results of the study showed that fathers who had regular contact with their children while incarcerated and had a good family support system were more likely to have a good relationship with their children once released. Furthermore, results show fathers who are strongly connected to their child tend to work more hours, have better mental health, and are less likely to return to jail. However, the study did not fully explore the societal barriers that existed for convicted

fathers once they returned home. Moreover, the study also used a participant pool of fathers representing different racial backgrounds and did not focus primarily on African-Americans.

Tripp (2001) conducted a study of 16 incarcerated fathers participating in a six week Life Skills seminar focusing on the parent child relationship. The overall purpose of the seminar was to help the inmates improve their communication and interaction with their children. Of the 16 fathers participating in the study, 12 were African-American and the remaining were Caucasian. In order to participate in the study participants had to be non-violent drug offenders. The data was collected through entrance and exit interviews along with weekly focus groups. To add more structure to the focus groups, each meeting had a specific purpose. Some of the topics discussed during the focus groups were letter writing, visitation, and creating Thanksgiving cards.

The researchers found that many of the fathers had similar thoughts and experiences. For example, some of the fathers mentioned the financial aspects of being a father along with conflict with their significant others. Similarly, all of the fathers described having difficulty in defining their roles and identity as a father due to their incarceration. Overall, the study presented relevant information. However, they did not focus specifically on African-Americans. Likewise, the researchers only focused on the incarcerated fathers while they were in prison and once they were released. They did not give in-depth information on the societal barriers that exist for convicted African-American fathers once they returned home. Finally, the only participants allowed to take part in the study were non-violent drug offenders and not fathers convicted of other crimes. This limitation of the study was crucial because there were potential experiences

and insights the researchers could have obtained from a different perspective when considering the fathers convicted of other crimes.

Landreth and Lobaugh (1998) explored the effectiveness of using Filial Therapy with incarcerated fathers. The quantitative study lasted for 10 weeks and involved a parent training group for the incarcerated fathers. After the screening process, 32 men were chosen for the study with 16 being placed in the control group and the other 16 men placed in the experimental group. The experimental group consisted of men whose age range was from 22 to 46 years. In comparison, the age range of the men in the control group ranged from 24 to 43 years old. The population make-up of the entire group consisted of 52% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, and 18% African-American.

Before the 10 week parent training group began and after the training was complete, as a pre-test and post-test measurement the fathers completed a number of scales such as the Porter Parental Acceptance Scale (PPAS; Porter, 1954), the Parenting Stress Index (PSI; Abidin, 1983) and the Filial Problem Checklist (FPC; Horner, 1974). Likewise, the children involved in the study took the Joseph Preschool and Primary Self Concept Scale (JSCS; Joseph, 1979). The results of the study showed fathers participating in the filial therapy experimental group scored lower on the Parenting Stress Index, indicating they felt less stressed in relation to the parent-child relationship. Overall, fathers that participated in the filial therapy group scored higher than the control group which suggests filial therapy was beneficial in helping incarcerated fathers become more accepting and empathetic towards their children. However, the researchers did not examine the rate of acceptance and empathy the incarcerated fathers displayed towards their children once they were no longer incarcerated. Furthermore, the participants for the

study consisted of fathers from different racial groups and did not focus on African-American fathers.

Artditti and Few (2006) conducted a study examining mothers reentering their homes after a period of incarceration. The study, which was published in a criminal justice peer reviewed journal, the researchers were interested in understanding how incarceration and reentry influenced the relationships the mothers had with family members along with primary risk and protective factors. The study consisted of 28 women with at least one child. A majority of the mothers were Caucasian (81.5%) with the remaining being African-American. Each participant had been incarcerated for at least two months in order to participate in the study. The mothers for the study were incarcerated for a variety of reasons ranging from second-degree murder to check fraud.

The researchers conducted an 80-minute interview with each mother. The interview questions revolved around getting insight into: (1) background characteristics of the mothers, (2) the family relationships during incarceration and after their release, (3) risk factors related to stress, substance abuse, parenting, (4) and protective factors such as family and community support. The results of the study showed the incarceration, even for a short period, resulted in change in family configuration. Two-thirds of the mothers reported a problem in the relationship with their children due to their incarceration. Furthermore, the study suggests that social support is essential in helping mothers successfully rehabilitate. Another theme that emerged from the study was the difficulty for the mothers to find gainful employment once they reentered society. A review of this study revealed noted strengths such as: (1) getting an understanding of the experiences of the mothers once the reentered society, (2) examining the impact

incarceration had on the relationship with their children and, (3) exploring the societal barriers that existed for the mothers once they returned home. However, the study did not gain the perspective of the experiences of convicted fathers. This dissertation will attempt to fill that gap in the literature by exploring these factors from the perspective of convicted African-American fathers.

Lange (2001) conducted a solution focused psychotherapy group for incarcerated parents. The purpose of the group was to help the fathers through parenting classes. However, before the group was formed and initiated, the researchers conducted two needs assessment with the inmates at the prison to see if a parenting group intervention was appropriate. The needs assessment was done in two parts: a survey to estimate how many of the inmates were fathers and a survey to determine if individual counseling versus group counseling was preferred. The results of the surveys suggested group counseling that focused on parenting was necessary. The researchers also determined that a solution focused brief group therapy would be the most appropriate form because it helped the inmates solve their own problems and develop goals which are already in the inmate's repertoire of skills.

The parenting group lasted for 12 weeks and consisted of 12 members. The group's focus was on helping the fathers maintain relationships with their children while incarcerated and preparing for reunification after release. Of the 12 members, six were incarcerated for selling drugs, five for robbery, and one for arson. The group members ranged in age from 19-26 and three of the group members were not fathers but expecting to become fathers. At the completion of the 12 week parenting group it was determined that each member made progress in wanting to play a role in their children's lives. In fact,

after completing an anonymous survey during the final session, the researchers learned that four of the eight members reported starting or resuming calls or visits with their children. Three members reporting increasing calls, letters and visits and two members had a first visit or phone call with their own fathers. The racial make-up of the participants was not given in the article so it cannot be determined if the inmates were all African-American. Furthermore, even though the purpose of the group was to focus on parenting, there were no topics or information provided that discussed barriers that might exist for the fathers once they were released. Discussing the societal and environmental barriers that exist for the fathers once they return home is important. Fathers are provided insight into what they can expect and have the opportunity to share any concerns.

Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005) conducted a study investigating the experiences of incarcerated fathers along with the nature of the involvement with their children. Specifically, the study focused on exploring how incarceration influenced fatherhood, the men's identity as fathers and their level of involvement. Participants for the study had to have a release date within one month to be part of the study. The study consisted of 51 fathers who had at least one minor child. Of the 51 participants, 19.6% were African-American, 62.7% were Caucasian, 9.8 % were Latino, 6% were Native American and 1% identified as other. Moreover, 73% of the fathers reported having at least one prior felony conviction. The most common reported crime was drug related (28%), robbery (14%) and assault (8%).

Data for the study was collected through 60-minute semi-structured individual interviews with each participant during their last month in prison. The findings of the study showed the fathers felt helpless due to their incarceration. Returning home

symbolized a chance to start over and become a part of their children's lives. However, many of the fathers reported that their involvement with their children while incarcerated was constrained due to the mothers and primary caregivers. Overall, the study explored in-depth experiences of the fathers and the relationship with their children. However, the researchers were released and returned home. The participants for the study came from a variety of different racial backgrounds and did not focus solely on African-American fathers. Lastly, they did not explore the societal barriers that may exist for the fathers once they are released.

After a review of the literature there is a gap in regards to exploring the experiences of convicted African-American fathers, the impact of incarceration on the relationship with their children and the societal/environmental factors that play a role in their chance of reintegrating. A number of the studies within the counseling field focus on the effect incarceration has on children but fails to describe the experiences of the fathers once they return home. Therefore, this aim of this study will be to explore the experiences of convicted African-American fathers, the relationship with their children and the barriers that exist once the fathers are released back into society.

Role of Fathers in Children's Lives

The involvement of fathers in the lives of their children has received limited research (Carbrera, Tamis-LeManda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000) within the counseling profession. However, current and prior research seems to indicate that a high level of parental involvement and closeness of the father-child relationship has a positive outcome for the development of children (Dornbusch, 1989; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg and Silverberg, 1986). The direct involvement of

fathers in the lives of their children shows improvement in mental health capacity (Lamb, 1997). According to DeKlyen, Speltz, & Greenberg (1998) the relationships between fathers and their children differs from the mother-children relationship because fathers have a tendency to encourage children to be competitive, independent, and spend more time in playful and physically stimulating interactions. Also, closeness between adult daughters and sons in relation to their fathers was positively related to educational and occupational mobility, psychological adjustment and their overall well-being (Amato, 1994).

Roy and Dyson (2005) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study to examine the process of negotiation between mothers and fathers to define the roles of fathers who are incarcerated and the impact it has on their children's lives. Through this study, the researchers engaged in observations, interviews and focus groups. The study took place as part of a work release program over the span of 18 months. Participants were involved in a weekly workshop facilitated by the researchers. The study consisted of 40 participants, all men consisting of 28 white fathers, 10 Black fathers, one Asian father, and one Native American father. The age range of the participants ranged from 17-40 with each father on average having two children.

The findings of the study revealed a variation of results. First, it was determined that partnering relationships between mother and father were viewed as confusing and conflicting because of the father's incarceration. Furthermore, there was less commitment by the mothers and stresses related to finances. However, in contrast to those findings, nearly 75% of the participants responded that the mothers made an effort to ensure the presence of the father's in their child's life despite their incarceration.

Absence of Fathers on Children's Lives

More than 2.7 million children in the United States have an incarcerated parent. This equates to roughly one in 28 children (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated (2012). Approximately 10 million children have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated, 2012). Nationally, there are roughly 120,000 incarcerated mothers and 1.1 million incarcerated fathers who are parents of minor children between the ages of 0-17 (Glaze and Maruschak, 2011). A father's absence has consistently been linked to children that exhibit lower well-being and academic difficulties (Mulkey, Crain and Harrington, 1992). Furthermore, when controlling for economic factors, the absence of the father does continue to be associated with the increase in child problems such as stress, anger, and depression (Amato, 1994).

Dallaire (2007) examined the differences between inmate mothers and father's rates of incarceration and the effect it had on family members, adult children, predictors for adult children's incarceration, and the living situation of the minors. The participants for this quantitative comparative analysis included 6,146 inmates that completed a survey through the United States Department of Justice State and Federal Correctional Facilities. Participants of the study were inmates in state or federal correctional facilities that self-identified as a parent with at least one child. Of the total amount, 1,104 (16%) of female and 5,132 (84%) males were represented. Furthermore, of the female inmates, 690 (70%) identified as mothers of minor children and 324 were mothers of adult children. In comparison, 4,029 (78%) of the males were fathers of minor children while 1,103 were fathers of adult children. Furthermore, the study consisted of a racial make-up of 40%

Caucasian, 55% African-American and 5% that identified as other. Additionally, the inmates reported being incarcerated for a number of crimes ranging from property damage, assault, and drug offenses.

The data for the study was collected via survey through the 1997 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities and administered by the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The data was compiled by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Census Bureau. The results of the study showed: (1) mothers were 2.5 times more likely to report that their adult children had been incarcerated, (2) regular drug abuse by the mother's was a stronger indicator of incarceration of the adult children when compared to fathers, (3) mothers reported more interaction with their families and children and, (4) the minor children of the incarcerated mothers showed a better chance of being in foster care or with other family members when compared to fathers.

Financial Effect

Having an incarcerated parent has a financial effect on children. The absence of a parent can place more financial pressure on the remaining caregiver (Miller, 2006). In many low-income minority homes the mother is usually the primary care giver.

Therefore, when the mother is imprisoned the child is likely placed in the home of a family caregiver that is already financially strained and creating more of a burden (Miller, 2006).

DeFina and Hannon (2009) examined state-level data for the United States and found that incarceration does have an effect on the overall poverty rate for low-income minority communities. In the study, they determined that the children and the local

communities are collateral damage because of the parent being incarcerated.

Additionally, the researchers concluded that the incarceration of the parent has five effects on the family: (1) engendering losses of family purchasing power; (2) shifting community norms concerning mainstream activities (i.e. work); (3) decreasing the likelihood of marriage; (4) reducing the political power of imprisoned communities and, (5) has community multiplier effects. The study concluded that children with incarcerated parents are financially at a huge disadvantage.

Emotional Affect

The loss of a parent due to incarceration has shown to have an emotional effect on children. Children dealing with parental incarceration have difficulty forming attachments, developing trust, autonomy, productivity, initiative, and achieving identity (Miller, 2006). Furthermore, they may suffer from depression, anxiety and other serious emotional problems (Breen, 1995). Other emotional consequences because of parental incarceration are: emotional withdrawal, anti-social behaviors, low self-esteem, shame, and guilt as a result of their parent being incarcerated (Lopez, 2007).

Allard (2012) compares the loss a child experiences because of their parent being incarcerated to the loss of a parent due to death or divorce. The child may experience embarrassment and shame from the stigma attached to incarceration (Allard, 2012). A child may cope with this problem by acting out and exhibiting delinquent behavior. In a study conducted by Aaron and Dellaire (2010), the gender and age of parent incarcerated also plays a role in the emotional effect. For example, a teenager with an incarcerated parent may react emotionally different from a younger child. However, the same study

also concluded that children emotionally react differently when the mother versus father is incarcerated.

Academic Effect

Academically, a child can exhibit negative behavior as a result of having an incarcerated parent. According to Allard (2012) the imprisonment of a parent affects a child's daily life and ability to focus while attending school. The child may experience poor school performance, increased delinquency and delinquent behavior in the classroom (Shillingfor & Edwards, 2008). Additionally, children who are unable to improve after the incarceration of a parent may exhibit aggressive behavior as well as attention and concentration problems (Lopez & Bhatt, 2007).

Incarceration Effect on African-American Fathers

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (2000) suggest that incarcerated fathers differ from the general population of fathers and are more likely to be African-American, violent, less-educated, prone to drug and alcohol abuse and have poor relationship skills (Carolson & McLanahan, 2002). Likewise, incarcerated fathers are more likely to come from low-income backgrounds represented by intergenerational patterns of violence and involvement with the criminal justice system (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Carlson & McLanahan, 2002). A number of studies (Bilchik, Seymour, & Kreisher, 2001; Johnston & Gabel, 1995; Moses, 1997) have explored the effect incarcerated fathers have on children. However, there is little known in regards to how the fathers are impacted.

Arditti, Smock, and Parkman (2005) determined through their study that many incarcerated fathers define themselves by what they can or cannot do for their children

and their children's caregiver. Due to their circumstances, fathers are likely to become "prisonized" while incarcerated and take on the role of their prison environment (Roy, 2003). Through this process which is referred to as prisonization, in order to survive "prison life" fathers become socialized within the prison system cutting off ties with the "outside world" and immersing themselves into the prison culture (Brodsky, 1975). In order to survive and maintain while incarcerated, many fathers become hardened and less emotional changing their identity as a father (Roy, 2003). Furthermore, the fathers begin to take on the personality and practices of the prison system, which is isolated, controlled, and contained (Terry, 2003). These contributing factors along with the stigma the children non-incarcerated parent face because of the father's incarceration create a situation where convicted fathers constantly feel they are fighting an uphill battle to be part of their children's lives.

Theoretical Foundation

Ecological Systems Theory

The theory that is used in this study is the Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. The Ecological Systems Theory (1979), was created by Urie Bronfenbrenner (April 29, 1917- September 25, 2005). Over the past few years it has been referred to as the Bioecological Systems Theory. Dr. Bronfenbrenner was a developmental psychologist who is known for his work with children. He believed that a person's development is affected by everything in their environment (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried and Larsen, 2006). The Ecological Systems Theory (1977) was first introduced during the 1970's when the focus of developmental psychology was on the "person-in-environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). "Person-in-environment" is an

emphasis on the influence the environment plays in human functioning (Hepworth, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried and Larsen, 2006). Bronfenbrenner is also regarded as one of the founders of the Head Start program which is a federal initiative that specializes in teaching toddlers in preparation for elementary school (Joensuu, 2007).

The Ecological Systems Theory (1977), is based off of two main assumptions. First, human development occurs through the, “processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between active, evolving biopsychological human beings and the individuals, objects, and symbols in the environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 620). Secondly, the value of proximal processes is, “determined by the biopsychological characteristics of the individual, the immediate and distant environments in which the proximal processes occur and the developmental outcome being examined” (Eamon, 2001, p. 257). These assumptions are at the framework of this theory.

Before considering the actual constructs of this theory there are three key concepts to mention which are *habitat*, *niche* and *proximal processes* (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). According to Hepworth, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried and Larsen (2006), the habitat is, “the places where organisms live, in the case of humans, consists of the physical and social settings within particular cultural contexts” (p. 17). The habitat is vital in understanding the environment of a specific individual. When the habitat an individual lives in is rich in resources needed for growth and development, it is more likely that the individual will succeed and thrive. In contrast, if the environment an individual lives in is lacking the vital resources to grow and mature, they will not be able to survive (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

When applying this same theory to convicted African-American fathers the same concept applies. Current research (Muth and Walker, 2013; Miller, Perryman, Markovitz, Franzen, Cochran and Brown, 2013; Vishner, 2013; Day, Acock, Bahr, and Arditti, 2005) has proven that in order for a convicted African-American father to be successful and have a mutually beneficial relationship with their child, he must be in an environment that is supportive and provides opportunities. In contrast, when those resources and supports are not provided, there is a higher chance for the convicted African-American fathers to reoffend.

The *niche* refers to the roles or positions that are held by individuals in a community. The primary task in human development and maturation is for an individual to find their niche in society. This is essential in order for a person to achieve a sense of self-identity and self-respect (Hepworth, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2006). However, in order for an individual to gain self-respect and a sense of identity their environment (or habitat) must be conducive to opportunities to grow and develop. The core belief of this theory is that individuals are in a constant interaction with other humans along with other systems in the environment to engage in a reciprocal relationship with each other (Hepworth, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried and Larsen, 2006).

Lastly, is the concept of *proximal processes*. Over the years, the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) has undergone a few changes and is now exists in different versions. Additionally, the theory also exists in different phases, which coincide with the development of the theory over time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The first phase of this theory focused on the environmental changes and the implications of these changes on the individuals that live and grow in these environments. More specifically, this phase

focused on the examination of the interrelations between the developing person and the changing in the micro and macro context (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The second phase highlighted human development and the role played by a person's characteristics in their development. Additionally, he focused on the passage of time and the impact it has on the development of a person within their environment. In the third and current phase, which I used for this study, focuses on proximal processes. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), "human development is the process of reciprocal interaction between an active, developing biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols that are located within the immediate environment" (p. 25). In order to be effective, the vital interaction must occur on a consistent basis over a prolonged period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These continued forms of interaction in the individual's immediate environment are the proximal processes. Examples of proximal processes include: (1) group or solitary play, (2) learning new skills, (3) reading, and (4) performing complex tasks (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Simply stated, the concept of proximal processes means that as humans, we learn through mimicking others. We learn by ourselves from those around us by assimilating from their skills, habits, and insights. Through this process, individuals not only learn how to develop motor skills, but also learn behaviors of how to express pleasure, disappointment and anger. When considering convicted African-American fathers, this concept is important. While in prison, due to their environment, convicted fathers may develop habits and expressions that are necessary to survive the environment of prison (prisonization). However, upon release these same habits may not be suitable for reestablishing a relationship with their children and family. Therefore, convicted African-American fathers need to learn new habits and

behaviors once they come home to be able to readjust to their new environment. The Ecological Systems Theory (1977), is described as, “a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls moving from the innermost level to the outside (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39). At the framework of this theory are four levels that revolve around an individual. These four levels are: (1) microsystem, (2) mesosystem, (3) exosystem, and (4) macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Levels within the Ecological Systems Theory

The Microsystem is the inner most level of this theory; the immediate setting containing the individual. At this level there is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relationships that the individual encounters on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Most of the interaction that occurs at this level is face-to-face pertaining to social, physical, and symbolic features that allows for engagement (or lack of) with the immediate environment. Examples of interactions at this level include family, school, workplace and peer group (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The second level is the Mesosystem. This level is composed of linkages and processes that take place between and within two or more settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Furthermore, this level consists of the interactions between parts of a person’s microsystem. The individual parts of the microsystem do not work independently but rather are interconnected and influence one another. The results of these interactions have an indirect impact on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). As a comparison to the current study, the Mesosystem would be the relationship between their family and peers. Obviously, the relationship between a father and his children is different from the

relationship between the father and his peers. However, both groups are important in the function of the father and indirectly affect him (whether positive or negative).

The next level in the theory is the Exosystem. This level encompasses the link and processes between two or more settings with at least one of which does not involve the immediate person but contains events that will occur which indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting where the individual resides (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For convicted African-American fathers this would be the neighborhood where they live. Additionally, the Exosystem includes structures such as mass media, agencies of government (local, state and national), communication and transportation facilities and informal social networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The Exosystem for convicted African-American fathers would be the prison/jail conditions while the father is incarcerated. It also includes the community response or opportunities for the fathers once they reenter society (Arditti, 2005).

The fourth level is the Macrosystem. This level is comprised of institutional and cultural patterns such as economic, legal, and political systems. At this level ideological blueprints that influence other settings are exhibited throughout other systemic levels (Arditti, 2005). Also at this level are the micro-, meso-, and exosystem attributes of a particular culture or subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The cultures or subcultures are comprised of belief systems, material resources, bodies of knowledge, customs, opportunity structures, and life course options that are immersed in each of the broader systems. When analyzing the current study, constructs to consider at the Macrosystem level are current laws, policies, and opportunities for criminal justice reform (i.e. current drug reform laws and penalties) (Arditti, 2005).

In conclusion, the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) is beneficial for the theoretical framework for this current study for numerous reasons. First, it takes into consideration the environmental and societal factors that play a role in the lives of convicted African-American fathers. Whether it is the environmental factors for the father while they are imprisoned or once they have reentered society this specific model is applicable. However, I want to make it clear that the focus of this study is the impact of the environmental factors for the **fathers once they have reentered into society**. Additionally, it is the goal of this study to use this theory to guide the focus and questioning of the research process. It is my belief that the environment an individual lives in should be considered when trying to understand their perspective. This theory helps give insight into not only the environmental factors that affect individuals but also shed light into the ways in which these different settings interact with each other.

Summary

While previous studies have analyzed and examined the relationship and understanding of convicted African-American fathers and the effect on children, there are obvious gaps in the literature and research. The most noticeable gap is the lack studies attempting to gain an understanding and perspective from the father's point of view. Furthermore, there is a dearth in research which seeks to qualitatively understand and gain insight into the opinions and experiences of convicted African-American fathers. Subsequent chapters will discuss the methodology of the current study (Chapter 3), provide results from the current study (Chapter 4), and discuss conclusions and suggestions for research on the proposed topic (Chapter 5).

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Currently, there are 2.2 million people incarcerated in America, a 500% increase over the last 40 years (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Despite America being one of the wealthiest countries in the world, America ranks number one in rates of incarceration (Prison Policy, 2016). Incarceration in the United States is becoming a growing epidemic, which affects minorities at a greater rate when compared to other racial groups. For example, African-Americans account for 37% of the U.S. population but represent 67% of the prison population (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Furthermore, since 2001 one in six African-American males go to jail. If this current trend continues, one in three African-American males born today will spend time in prison during their lifetime (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2017). Within this population of incarcerated African-American males are fathers who are becoming a marginalized group facing difficulties in re-integrating and rebuilding a connection with their children once they return home (Yocum & Nath, 2011). When released convicted African-American fathers endure a number of struggles due to their conviction and face difficulties in readjusting to society due to lack of opportunities (Marbley & Ferguson, 2005).

Research of relevant literature finds that most studies (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012; Miller, et. al., 2013; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Lee, Sansone, Swanson, & Tatum, 2012; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Miller, 2006; Lopez & Bhat, 2007; Aaron & Dallaire, 2009) only focus on the effect incarceration has on children. Moreover, studies that do focus on convicted African-American fathers only explore their experiences while incarcerated (Roy & Dyson, 2005; Turner & Peck, 2002, Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998, Tripp, 2001; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Lange, 2001). Thus, the current dissertation will (a) explore the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since their reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, (b in sharing their experiences, how do the convicted African-American fathers describe their relationship with their children since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, and (c) .overall comparatively, how are the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers similar or different since their reentry into society?

Research Questions

The following research questions are explored:

1. How do convicted African-American fathers describe their experiences since their reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?
2. In sharing their experiences, how do convicted African –American fathers describe the relationship with their children since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?
3. Overall, comparatively how are the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers similar or different since their reentry into society?

Research Design

Prior to beginning the study, I will seek approval from the University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This study is a qualitative, comparative case study research design exploring the experiences of convicted African-American fathers. Furthermore, the study will examine the expectations of the caseworkers at the Fatherhood Coalition regarding the involvement of the convicted African-American fathers in the lives of their children. Once I receive IRB approval, I will begin data collection. This study will utilize data collection from individuals who are clients at the Fatherhood Coalition. After providing consent to participate in the study, each participant will complete a researcher developed demographic questionnaire. Next, as part of the data collection process the researcher will interview and observe each participant of the study as well as examine files for each participant to strengthen the study.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It is comprised of a set of interpretations and practices that make the world visible (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The researcher studies things in their natural setting in the attempt to make sense of or interpret a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative research is influenced by a constructivist-interpretivist meaning that reality can be viewed and experienced in a variety of different ways (Glesne, 2011). Moreover, qualitative researchers are dedicated to understanding specifics of particular cases and implementing their findings in the ever-changing world (Glesne, 2011).

Qualitative research values rich description of the phenomena under analysis and attempts to represent individual lived experiences through writings and interpretations

(Heppner & Heppner, 2004). A key philosophical function in which all types of qualitative research is based on is that reality is comprised of individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed, how they make sense of their world, and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 1998). Five characteristics are common to all forms of qualitative research:

1. The goal is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of interest from the participant's perspective and not the researchers.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.
4. Qualitative research employs an inductive research strategy. Meaning, this type of research builds concepts, abstractions, hypotheses and theories.
5. The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures are a way to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon rather than numbers (Merriam, 1998).

In order to conduct a qualitative study, researchers must be flexible and able to respond to changing conditions of the study in progress (Glesne, 2011). A number of hours are required in the research setting as an observer (Glesne, 2011). Finally, when utilizing a qualitative research format the sample selection process is usually non-random, purposeful, and small in contrast to quantitative research, which is larger, and more random (Maxwell, 2013).

Qualitative research involves the use and collection of a variety of empirical materials such as interviews, artifacts, cultural texts, observations, and visual texts

(Heppner & Heppner, 2004). A qualitative research design is appropriate for this study because the goal is to gain an understanding of the experiences of convicted African-American fathers. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations, the goal is to understand the impact incarceration and a conviction has on the lives of African-American fathers from their perspective. Likewise, the goal is to gain an understanding of the societal and environmental factors that have a direct and indirect influence on their lives. This ties directly into the use of the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) which gives a complete picture of the impact a criminal record plays in the everyday lives of the convicted fathers and the influence it has in regards to the relationship with their children.

Qualitative research consists of a variety of approaches that are used from narrative, phenomenology, and ethnography for example (Glesne, 2011). The approach that used for this dissertation is a case study. There are different definitions that used to explain what a case study is. For the purposes of this study, I used two definitions. The first definition as noted by Creswell (2006), describes a case study as, “research that involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting or context) (p. 73). Likewise, Merriam (2002) interprets a case study as, “a qualitative approach to studying a case (as the unit of analysis) where the case is a bounded system, a single entity, or a unit around which there are boundaries (p. 27). In summary, a case study is a form of qualitative research that focuses on a single system and explores issues or a phenomenon related to it.

Historically and presently, researchers use case study approach in a variety of different fields from psychology, medicine, law, political science and education

(Merriam, 1998). The origins of case studies date back to the research of anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's research of the Trobriand Island in the early 1900's. Additionally, case studies were utilized by the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology from the 1920's through the 1950's (Creswell, 2006). Case study research, when compared to other forms of qualitative research, has its differences. For example, a case study focuses on a system in relation to a specific phenomenon while an ethnography focuses on an entire culture with the aim of describing the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language (Creswell, 2006). Likewise, a case study analyzes differences among the participants. This is different from a phenomenological study, which focuses on describing what all participants have in common, as they experience a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Another factor that separates a case study from other types of qualitative research is how the case is bounded (Yin, 2014).

Bounding a case is the most defining characteristic that separates case studies from other forms of qualitative research (Creswell, 2006). Bounding a case distinguishes it from what is included in the case or what is outside of the case (Yin, 2014). This helps to shape the case as a single entity or unit (Merriam, 1998). A case can vary from an individual, a group, or even a community. However, to determine what is studied (or bounded) for each case is at discretion of the researcher (Creswell, 2006). It is essential to know the difference between the distinction of what a case is and what is not. As noted by Merriam (1998), "the case is one among others...an innovative program may be a case. All the schools in Sweden can be a case. But a relationship among schools, the reasons for innovative teaching, or the policies of school reform are less commonly

considered a case. These topics are generalities rather than specifics. The case is a specific, complex, functioning thing” (p.28). For the purposes of this study, the convicted African-American father and their assigned caseworker at the Fatherhood Coalition are the case. To further clarity to this study, it should be mentioned what will not be the focus. This includes:

1. The current study will only focus on convicted African-American fathers and ***not just fathers of any other racial group or ethnicity.***
2. The participants for the study will be clients at the Fatherhood Coalition ***and not clients at any other agency or location.***
3. The study will focus on African-American fathers with a criminal record ***and not African-American fathers in general.***

When embarking into conducting a case study research design, the researcher can examine more than one case. Having more than one case can produce a stronger effect and enhance the external validity or generalizability of the findings (Merriam, 1998). Presenting multiple cases around the phenomenon of interest can help a study be strengthened (Stake, 2005). When using more than one case for a study there are a number of terms used to describe it from collective case studies to cross case studies (Merriam, 1998). For the purposes of this study, I will employ a multiple-comparative case study methodology. In addition to focusing on the specifics and context of each case, utilizing the comparative case study method allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2005). Furthermore, examining multiple cases can potentially create a better understanding and better theorizing about a larger collection of cases (Stake, 2005).

Additionally, as noted by Yin (2003), there are four instances when it is appropriate to use a case study approach, “(a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context” (p. 545). In reference to this study, I feel a case study method would be the most appropriate option because, (a) the questions I seek to explore are “how” questions and, (b) the fathers having a criminal record or their experiences as a result of their conviction cannot be manipulated. Furthermore, a case study is suitable for this study because the case is the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers, but this cannot be determined without the context of the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. It is in this setting where the fathers share their experiences while seeking assistance. It would be difficult for me as the researcher to explore their experiences without the context within which it occurred.

A review of previous studies related to convicted fathers and reentry uncovered very few studies using a multiple-comparative case study methodology. Arditti and Few (2008) utilized a multiple case study methodology interviewing 10 convicted mothers in regards to their maternal distress when dealing with their families and environment. Of the 10 mothers interviewed, three were still incarcerated at the time of the study and the remaining had been released and on probation. The data collection for the study consisted of semi-structured interviews lasting 90 to 120 minutes. The interview questions focused on demographics, family membership, criminal justice involvement, mother-child relationships, health support and resources, and intimate relationships. Before the

interview, each participant also completed the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (1977) to measure the presence of any depression because of maternal stress related to the mother's incarceration or reentry. In analyzing the data the researchers' transcribed and coded each interview independently and then compared it with themes that emerged from the other individual cases for analysis. The results of the CES-D scale showed that eight of the 10 women scored in the clinically depressed range. Furthermore, the researchers determined that maternal distress relates to health challenges, loss related trauma, dysfunctional intimate relationships, guilt and worry over children and economic challenges. Unlike this study, my study focused on convicted African-American fathers once they returned home from prison. In addition, unlike this study, my study did not use any scales or questionnaires but specifically focused on the interviews as the primary source of data.

Kegler, Steckler, Malek, and McLeroy (1998) conducted a multiple case study analyzing the factors that facilitate or disrupted effectiveness in the beginning stage of development of 10 local community based tobacco control coalitions. The coalitions were located in North Carolina as part of the American Stop Smoking Intervention Study (Project ASSIST). The coalitions formed through a collaboration between the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society. Each of the 10 individual coalitions represented a case; once each individual case was analyzed a cross case analysis was completed to examine the difference and similarities. They focused on the planning phase and first year of intervention for each coalition to determine what factors contributed or impeded the process of development.

The researchers collected data through interviews, observations, documents, and surveys. Fifty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of each coalition. The researchers observed all 10 of the coalitions while they were in the planning phase and beginning intervention phase of the program. The documents used for data collection consisted of the grant application for each coalition, membership rosters, bylaws, meeting agendas, minutes, site analysis report and the year 1 action plans. Additionally, each member of the coalitions completed the Member Survey (1998) to determine what represented a successful team and individual members. The results of the individual case analysis and cross case analysis revealed a number of factors contributing to successful implementation of the coalition: (1) the ability of the coalition to provide its own vision, (2) paid staff with the skills and time to work with the coalition, (3) frequent communication, and (4) a sense of belonging. However, the researchers did uncover barriers that can impede the success of a coalition such as: (1) staff turnover, (2) staff lacking community organization skills, and (3) lack of member input. Similar to this study, my study utilized interviews as the primary source of data but did not use any scales or questionnaires. Furthermore, the cases for this study consisted of the coalitions which differs from this study which consisted of the convicted African-American fathers.

Green, Johansson, Rosser, Tengnah, and Segrott (2008) conducted a multiple case study examining the experiences of nursing students participating in international placement during their pre-registration education. A school in the United Kingdom and a school in Sweden organized the international study programs. As part of their nursing program, students at these schools were sent to countries such as Norway, Denmark, Spain, Holland, South Africa, Hon Kong and the United States. For this specific study,

the researchers identified the cases as the two nursing schools located in the United Kingdom and Sweden. The sample for the study consisted of 32 participants who had undertaken an international placement during the preregistration of their nursing program. Of these 32 participants, 18 were from the United Kingdom and 14 were from Sweden.

Data collection for this study consisted of semi-structured and group interviews with all the participants. The researchers also used documents from both schools to gain further information (i.e. preparation material for the students, minutes of meetings, strategic plans, and student placement evaluations). Data analysis for this study used a thematic analysis as the researchers identified emergent themes from the data. Core constructs was from the data through the process of reduction and analysis. To create a basis for the analytical framework, the researchers used three of the interview transcripts to identify emerging categories to examine the remaining transcripts. A review of the documents also produced a variety of themes and categories from the interviews. Overall, five themes emerged from the study: (1) aspirations and values, (2) personal development, (3) professional development, (4) enablers and disablers, and (5) culture. The results of the study showed that participation in international placement was beneficial to the nursing students. This was specifically in regards to their increase in confidence, self-reliance and professional development. After a comparison of the two schools, there were marginal differences. Overall, nursing students from both programs benefited from the international experience. However, the researchers noted a need for more support and monitoring of students, preparation, greater engagement with partner institutions, and mentoring from staff. Similar to this study, my study used a thematic

analysis to uncover similar themes that emerged from the fathers' experiences.

Furthermore, my study also used interviews as the primary source of data but did not use group interviews to gather information.

Sinha and Hanuscin (2017) conducted a multiple case study to investigate the processes and pathways of leadership development of teachers in different stages as they participated in a professional development program. The researchers identified the cases as three teachers participating in a professional development program geared towards helping science and math teachers become better leaders and strengthen their leadership ability. Three teachers were the participants for this study. The first participant had one year of experience, the second teacher had 13 years of experience and the third teacher had 17 years of experience.

The data collection for this study consisted of a number of sources: semi-structured interviews, midyear and final year progress reports, life stories, discussion forums, blogs and actions plan. Each source was important because it assisted the researchers with gaining an understanding of each participant's leadership development. The data analysis was a two-step process. First, the researchers did a deductive analysis through an analytical format to examine the leadership activities of the participants. Coding was done through all data sources for each participant to analyze changes in leadership activities over time. Secondly, thematic analysis was done to accomplish coding. Only the segments of data related to "leadership practices" were pulled and analyzed. This resulted in 82 categories of codes that were grouped into five different domains, which resulted into five overall themes: (1) teacher's views of leadership, (2) teacher's leadership practices, (3) the benefits of professional development program

influencing their leadership identities, (4) teacher's identities as leaders, and (5) critical shifts in teacher's views, identities and actions. In the final step of the data analysis process all the data for each participant was combined into individual profiles. With the profiles a cross case analysis was completed to examine any similarities or differences among the participants. Results of the study showed similarities with the three participants regarding their leadership views, leadership practices, and identity. However, there were differences among the teachers related to their personal priorities, school context and life experiences. Unlike this study, my study did not use life stories, discussion forums, or blogs to collect data. However, similar to this study, my study did use interviews as a primary source of data.

As with all research, there are some limitations when conducting a case study design. One challenge inherent to conducting a case study is identifying the case (Creswell, 2006). This can be a difficult challenge but a key component in developing a bounded system to analyze. However, through in-depth review of relevant literature related to the topic, identifying the case can be accomplished (Merriam, 1998). Another limitation is deciding whether to do a single case or multiple cases. Choosing to study more than one case can dilute the overall analysis. However, examining more than one case can strengthen the external validity of your study (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, choosing to consider more than one case can help with the generalizability of the study even though this is typically not the goal of qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Participants

Participants in this study included convicted African-American fathers that are clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition (MFC). The Fatherhood Coalition is a non-profit organization that focuses on helping fathers overcome barriers to being a responsible and involved father (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, 2012). The agency is part of a network of fatherhood programs located throughout South Carolina that is coordinated and supported by the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, 2012). The Midlands Fatherhood Coalition is located in Columbia, South Carolina and serves primarily fathers living in Richland, Lexington, Fairfield, and Aiken counties. In addition, they serve fathers living in Kershaw, Newberry, Saluda, Aiken, Orangeburg and Calhoun counties. Midlands Fatherhood Coalition along with the other peer fatherhood programs serves more than 1200 fathers annually (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, 2012).

The age range of the fathers that come to MFC is late 20's to early 30's. On average, 77% of the fathers are unemployed when they first become clients and 34% do not have a GED or High School Diploma (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, 2012). Currently, 42% of the fathers report having a hostile relationship with the child's mother. However, 76% of the fathers that are court ordered to complete the program satisfy their sentence (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, 2012). Based on their 2016 impact report, 60% of the fathers have reported having an improved relationship with their children. Likewise, 62% of the fathers unemployed at the time of entering the program reported finding a job (Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, 2012). Since 2002, MFC has helped 3,184 fathers and 2,156 children have been positively impacted by the fatherhood program

(Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, 2012). To gain access to the clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition I contacted the director of their Midlands office. Upon meeting him, I explained to him the purpose and focus of my study and he agreed to allow me to interview the clients and their assigned caseworker. To ensure I received the right participants for this study I met with the Director of MFC along with the caseworkers and gave them an overview of the criteria I am looking for in potential candidates.

In order to be included in the study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age or older. They also had to be African-American fathers with at least one child and were current clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Participants must also have had a criminal conviction and released from prison within the last three years. There was no exclusion for this study based on a particular conviction; the only requirement was an actual criminal conviction.

What was unique about the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition is their overall mission and goal is to assist fathers. This is unlike other agencies which usually only focus on mothers and children. A number of the fathers that were clients at this agency were court ordered due to issues with child support. However, there were fathers that do not have to attend the program. These fathers typically became clients because of the agency's ability to assist low-income fathers in finding employment and offering opportunities to network with potential employers. Additionally, a number of the clients were fathers who had criminal records and were unable to find sustainable employment. As a client with the agency, there are a number of ways in which the caseworkers communicate with the clients. For example, there were weekly group sessions where the fathers meet to give updates, voiced their opinions, and network. Additionally, each client

was required to meet monthly one-on-one with their caseworker to work on obtaining resources to become more sustainable. These resources included resume writing, job interview etiquette, and financial management just to name a few. Through this constant communication, the goal of the program was to help fathers strengthen the relationship with their children and find gainful employment. Through partnership with other community agencies, the caseworkers assisted the fathers in creating a resume, practicing interviews, and strengthening their support networks at home in their communities.

In deciding the best participant selection process for this study, I referred to Patton's (2002) purposeful sampling. Through this type of sampling, the strength lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are, "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research typically focuses on small samples, which is in contrast to quantitative sampling which usually depends on larger samples selected randomly (Patton, 2002).

However, before determining which form of purposeful sampling to implement I had to decide what the exact sample size should be. As noted by Creswell (2006), "when a researcher chooses more than one case the issue becomes, how many cases? There is not a set number of cases. Typically, however, the researcher chooses no more than four or five cases" (p. 76). Therefore, this study will aim to recruit a maximum of five cases to examine. The sample size of four to five participants has been used with other multiple case study designs as well. For example, Houghton, Casey, Shaw and Murphy (2013), used five case study sites to explore the role of the Republic of Ireland's clinical skills

laboratory in preparing nursing students for practice. Likewise, Holland, Grant, and Donthamsetty (2017), used three tutors in their case study research design to examine the effectiveness of a newly integrated framework for tutoring sessions.

The sampling method used for this study was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is, “reviewing and studying all cases that meet predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). This sampling method involves stating and having specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for the specific population to be studied (Suri, 2011). In regards to this study criterion sampling was appropriate due to the specific criteria there is for the participants. This form of sampling varies when considering other types such as a snowball or chain sampling, which rely on information from key informants that are typically the participants themselves (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, typically when employing criterion sampling the researcher reviews and studies all cases that meet the predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002). With the assistance of the staff at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, I had access to the client files for review before the selection process began which strengthened the inclusion of my study. Moreover, this type of sampling coincided with the case study methodology of delimiting and bounding my cases (Merriam, 1998).

Participants were recruited based off the referral of the staff at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. I met with the staff and gave them the specific requirements I was looking for in potential participants. After they were identified I made contact with them through either phone call or face-to-face interaction. If they were interested, I coordinated a time for an informal meeting to discuss any questions or concerns they had about the study. Once the initial meeting was complete, I set up a time to conduct the interviews.

To encourage recruitment, as an incentive each father received a \$25.00 gift card for each interview.

Data Sources

The overall purpose of interviews in qualitative research is to, “contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviews” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). Moreover, interviewing is important when the researcher cannot observe behavior, feelings or how people make meaning of the world around them (Glesne, 2011). In qualitative research, the most common form of interviewing is through person-to-person interaction where one person seeks to obtain information from another (Merriam, 1998). For this study, interviews served as the primary source of data collection for each of the case studies.

Interviews in qualitative research can come in different forms and implemented in a variety of ways. For example, researchers can conduct unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To gain insight and information I conducted a series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant to give them the opportunity to share their experiences regarding their incarceration, reentering society, societal factors that play a role in their lives and the relationship with their children. To give clearer picture to how the interview questions with the fathers were formatted for this study, it is listed below:

1. First Interview- gaining information on the participant's life before their incarceration which included their environment, relationship with their children, and outlook on life, etc.
2. Second Interview-acquiring information on the participant's life after incarceration and returning home with a criminal record, the relationship with their children, societal factors, and new outlook on life.
3. Final Interview-allowing the participant to reflect on the impact having a criminal record has played in their life, the relationship with their children, and the use of counseling services while imprisoned and since returning home.

When conducting the series of three interviews with the fathers I used the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) as the framework to guide the questions. As stated earlier, the first two interviews with the fathers focuses on their (1) lives before incarceration and, (2) their lives after returning home. Most importantly, the questions aligned with each system within the Ecological Systems Theory (1977). For example, there were a series of questions related to the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Questions for the microsystem will revolved around the fathers' individual self (outlook on life, mental health, career goals). While questions dealing with the mesosystem pertained to their family, peers, employment, etc. This pattern of questioning continued for all four systems in the model. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. Details on the specific questions are listed in Appendix A.

Following these interview structures for each interview provided in-depth rich description on the experiences the convicted fathers have encountered. Furthermore, this

type of interview structure coincided with the overall research questions that are guiding this study, which was to get insight into the father's experiences. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews as the main source of data collection provided richly descriptive information on the experiences of the fathers. Furthermore, the use of interviews allowed the participants the opportunity to make meaning of their experiences in a safe, mediated space (Maxwell, 2013).

Additionally, other collection strategies were used which include viewing documents in the form of the participant's files and prolonged observations by observing the weekly group sessions held at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Within qualitative research, documents can be described as, "a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand – for example, novels, newspapers, love songs, diaries, psychiatric interviews, and the like" (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). In addition, documents can serve as a ready-made source of data for researchers to utilize (Maxwell, 2013). The participants' files were used as a form of document and will help in gaining information about the history of the participants, demographic information, and other relevant information about their past and current circumstances. Furthermore, historical documents give context to your study and provide insight into different questions to strengthen the overall focus of the study (Glesne, 2011). These files were obtained and viewed after receiving permission from the staff at the Midland's Fatherhood Coalition.

Prolonged observations in qualitative research is viewed as essentially as important as interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Likewise, observations are considered as an interwoven part done in conjunction with interviews (Merriam, 1998). The term fieldwork is often associated with observations and, if done correctly, serve four

functions: (1) serves as a formulated research purpose, (2) is planned intentionally, (3) is recorded systematically, and (4) is subjected to checks and controls for validity and reliability (Merriam, 1998). The goal for this study was to observe the fathers in their natural setting at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition and/or their home. This allowed me to see them in a relaxed setting and to strengthen my questioning and interpretation of the data during the analysis phase. However, one of the biggest pitfalls in conducting observations is becoming selective or getting too engaged with the participants (Glesne, 2011). Through the process of triangulation and allowing colleagues to view my field notes I was able to gain objective insight into whether I was being too selective or overly engaged in my observations. As described by Glesne (2011), through observations, “you seek to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (p. 67). Simply stated, through continuous observations of the fathers I gained further understanding into their lives and experiences.

For this study, I employed three methods to ensure the validity of this study, which were triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Triangulation is a procedure used to establish validity and trustworthiness for qualitative research. Through triangulation, the researcher makes inferences from the data, claiming that a particular set of data supports a particular theme, hypothesis, or claim (Schwandt, 2007). Triangulation helps to establish the integrity of the inferences and involves using multiple sources of data from more than one vantage point (Schwandt, 2007). For this study, I used three sources as part of the triangulation process. First, the interviews I conducted with the participants served as the primary source of data. Secondly, I used the participants case files to provide supporting background information on the clients (education, place of

birth, etc.) to provide further context. Third, I attended and observed two of the required weekly group sessions that the fathers must attend to provide further context into understanding their experiences. With the combination of these three data sources, I was able to gather data to form my codes and themes that aligned with the research questions of this study.

Peer debriefing is the process where the researcher confides in trusted and knowledgeable colleagues and uses them as a sounding board for one or more purposes. The researcher may use a colleague to share their evolving attempts at describing and analyzing qualitative data in order to achieve some kind of consensual validation (Schwandt, 2007). For this study, I used two colleagues to help in the peer debriefing process. The first colleague was a research assistant professor at the University of South Carolina. She worked for the Office of Program Evaluation at part of the College of Education and has a background in conducting qualitative research. Throughout my data collection process, we met multiple times and I discussed with her my process of coding and interpreting the data. She provided me feedback and recommended ways to improve or adjust research design. The second colleague I used was a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at the University of South Carolina. Once I gathered my data and was complete with the coding process, I sent him my list of themes to receive feedback on my interpretation of the findings. He provided feedback and recommendations on thoughts he had as he looked through my findings.

Member checking is the process of the researcher soliciting feedback from respondents on the findings. Many qualitative researchers view it as an important procedure for corroborating or verifying the findings to assure they are valid and meet the

criterion of confirmability. After I transcribed and coded the interviews, I met with the participants of this study and had them review my findings to see if they were accurate in interpreting their experiences. Through this process, I was able to ensure that my interpretation of the data did not take over and was a true reflection of the words and experiences of the participants.

Procedures

Coding is the process of sorting and defining collected data (transcripts, observation notes, documents, etc.) that is applicable to the research purpose (Glesne, 2011). The goal is to put together these pieces of data into clumps of data to create a thematic organizational framework (Glesne, 2011). From coding, the researcher examines patterns, makes comparisons, produces explanations, and builds models (Gibbs, 2007). The coding and analytic process for this study began by first listening back through and transcribing each interview. This process also involved looking over field notes and observation notes from my time in the research setting (Maxwell, 2013). To make sense of interviews, the process of coding must be done. However, there is no universal set of coding procedures that can be used or replicated (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Throughout the process of analysis, the codebook served as a guide to store new codes that emerged and existing codes to transform as needed (Glesne, 2011). A codebook is, “a set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyze interview data. Codebooks are essential in order to analyze qualitative research because they provide a formalized operationalization of the codes” (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011, p. 138). Coding, similar to the data analysis process, is a circular process that the researcher may revisit and use as a source as they are immersed in the

data. Additionally, through the process of coding, researchers are able to make the connection between ideas and concepts (Decrui-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011). Codes can be developed from either existing concepts (theory-driven), they can come from the raw data (data-driven), or they can come from the particular research goals and questions of a project. For the purposes of this study, the codes will derive strictly from the data.

The codebook was created using Microsoft Excel. There are numerous ways a codebook can be structurally created. For example, Macqueen et al. (1998) suggest structuring the codebook with six components: (a) code name/label, (b) brief definition, (c) full definition, (d) inclusion criteria, (e) exclusion criteria, and (f) examples. Like codes, codebooks form through a repeated process revising codes to gain clearer insights about the interview data. For the purposes of this study and to ensure all data sources (interviews, observations, client files) the sections of the codebook were: (a) source, (b) participant, (c) text or data chunk, (d) initial codes, (e) theme and, (f) research questions. I felt this was more suitable. The **source** section represented where the data is coming from (interview, field notes, client file). **Participant** section was the actual participant that the data source related to, **text or data chunk** were the actual data from the source. **Initial codes** were the preliminary code that emerged and the **theme** section were the overall theme the data source aligned with. Last, was the **research question** section, which is the section the theme aligns with. My goal was for my organization of the code book sections to allow for a logical progression from the beginning source to the final theme. The names of these sections aligned with the process of doing thematic data

analysis to give guidance to the overall themes that emerged from analyzing the data. An example of the construction of the codebook format is listed below.

Source	Participant	Text or Data Chunk	Initial Codes	Theme	Research Questions

Figure 3.1 Codebook Headings

My goal is for my organization of the codebook sections was to allow for a logical progression from the beginning source to the final theme.

Source --> Participant --> Text/Data Chunk --> Initial Codes --> Theme --> RQ

Data Analyses

Over the years, data analysis in qualitative research has been a process that has not had much guidelines or direction. However, there are a number of sources (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Dey, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) that have provided a “blueprint” on suggested methods for analyzing qualitative data. Data analyses within a case study approach is done in multiple formats. The technique was used in this study to analyze the data is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative research, “to identify, report, and analyze data for the meanings produced in and by people, situations, and events” (Aronson, 1994; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006; Patton, 2002; Riessman, 2008). It involves identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Additionally, as noted by Boyatzis (1998), if done correctly, thematic analysis can serve five functions: (1) a way of making sense of seemingly unrelated material, (2) a way of seeing, (3) a way of analyzing qualitative information, (4) a way of systematically

observing a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organization, or a culture, and (5) a way of converting qualitative information into quantitative data. However, when conducting a thematic analysis the researcher must be aware of the significance of a theme. Moreover, the importance of a theme is determined not by how often it appears, but by its *substantive significance* (Longhofer, Kranke, & Townsend, 2010). Substantive significance is, “the consistency of themes across and within study participants. It is also significant when findings deepen understanding of extant knowledge about the objects of inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 467). A thematic analysis is appropriate for conducting a multiple case study because it allows the researcher to examine themes within and across multiple studies for similarities and differences. The goal for this study was to extract themes from each individual case and compare them across the cases to get a further understanding of the convicted African-Americans experiences.

One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. This flexibility provides the potential for rich and detailed account of the data. However, due to its flexibility, coding must be done in a defined format that is theoretically and methodically sound (Braun & Clarke, 2008). A theme is understood as, “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 82). A theme is simply determined by its prevalence, this applies to each data set item and across the entire data set. When utilizing the thematic analysis, the themes can be identified in either two ways: (a) inductive or deductive. This study will use thematic analysis to code using an inductive approach which is data driven and will not try to fit into a preexisting coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, thematic analysis looks to discover patterns and themes within the data. This process was not only done by the interviews with the fathers but with other forms of data collection as well. Using the client files, I reviewed them looking for themes that emerged that were relevant to the study. For example, case notes from the caseworkers that discussed the clients' process or finding sustainable employment or the amount of communication the client had with their children (i.e. number of times the fathers communicate with their children). The information within the files helped to illustrate the barriers (or lack thereof) that exist for the fathers once they returned home. Additionally, through prolonged observation and through my field notes I observed the fathers while attending group meetings or one-on-one meetings with their caseworker to gain more insight into their mannerisms, body language, and appearance. These helped to further my questioning during the actual interview process for things to build on to uncover new information. Also, through the process of engagement, the fathers were more comfortable with me being present which helped with rapport building.

When doing a multiple or comparative case study there is a within-case analysis and secondly a cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). The within-case analysis treats each case as a detailed, in-depth case by itself. The data is gathered and collected so the researcher can absorb as much as possible in relation to the contextual variables that may be relevant to the case (Yin, 2014). Next, once the analysis of each case is completed, a cross section analysis will occur (Merriam, 1998). A cross-sectional analysis (or cross sectional synthesis) is recommended if a case study consists of two or more cases. This technique is relevant whether it is with an independent study or a predesigned part of the

same study (Yin, 2014). Thus, overall the process for analyzing the data for this study was completed in two steps (1) analyzing the collected data individually using a thematic analysis and (2) comparing the data using the cross-case analysis (or synthesis) for similarities and differences. More specifically, when conducting the cross-case analysis, I employed a systematic process as suggested by Yin (2014). Before I conducted the cross-case analysis, I reviewed the primary themes and concepts that emerged from each case. Next, I re-read each transcript and used inductive, thematic coding to identify patterns and made comparisons between the cases. From these comparisons, I highlighted the similarities and differences that emerged from the cases.

Specifically, the process of data analysis followed the process of thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is a six-phase process: (a) familiarizing yourself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and renaming themes and (f) producing the report. Unlike quantitative data analysis, the process of analysis in qualitative research is not linear. It is a constant process of movement back and forth between the phases as needed to ensure rigor and strength of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Phase One: Familiarizing myself with the Data

During this phase, immersion in the data is important. I repeatedly read the interviews and took notes of any themes that I think emerged from the data. I read each interview at least once in its entirety before I began coding. It is during this phase that I transcribed the interviews, which also helped to familiarize me with the data. This was done by listening back through the interviews and transcribing word for word.

Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes

After I read and familiarize myself with the data, I began to create an initial list of ideas of what was in the data and what was interesting about it. This was done systematically throughout the entire data set to give full attention to data items that may form repeated patterns (or themes). I began the process of creating initial codes. I coded manually highlighting potential patterns as I read through the interviews. Since this is the initial list I was creating, I coded as many potential themes as possible while also coding data that I felt was relevant.

Phase Three: Searching for Themes

This phase began after all the data had gone through the initial coding process and collected leaving a long list of different codes that was identified. At this phase, I began to sort through the different codes into potential themes. In this process, I began to analyze the codes and see what codes could be combined and placed under various themes. Furthermore, during this phase the codebook became essential to place the codes into a structured document that was easily viewed and sorted for clarity. In addition, through coding the themes and sub-themes emerged. The themes are the primary phrases or descriptions that emerged during the coding process. This varies from the sub-themes which are phrases or descriptions that appear not as frequent as the themes, but are still worth keeping as the analysis process continues. By the end of this phase, all relevant codes were categorized under either the primary themes or sub-themes that emerged.

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes

At this phase, there were a clear set of primary themes that emerged. With the use of the codebook, the primary themes became evident and sub-themes either collapsed

into the others or needed to be broken down into separate themes. Essentially, by the end of this phase, the idea was to have a handful of clear concise themes that represented the study and painted a clear picture of what information had emerged.

Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes

By this phase, the themes that represented my analysis were presented and needed to be defined. The process of defining the themes is, “the process of identifying the essence of what each theme is about and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 92). For each individual theme, I wrote a detailed analysis while considering how it fitted into the overall broader story to ensure there was not too much overlap between the themes. By the end of this phase, each theme was clearly defined in regards to what it is and what it is not.

Phase Six: Producing the Report

In this final phase of analysis, I had a set of fully worked out themes and as the final step needed to write up the report. The goal of this phase was to, “to provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story that data tells, within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 93). The report must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data and enough evidence to demonstrate the reason for reporting the themes. The examples I chose for each theme (data chunks from the interviews) were a clear representation of the theme without being too complex and or being repetitive. The overall goal in this final phase was to go beyond description of the data, and make an argument in relation to my research questions.

Ke (2008) conducted a multiple case study to examine the use of educational computer games in a summer math program to increase fourth and fifth graders cognitive

math achievement, metacognitive awareness, and positive attitudes toward math learning. The researchers collected data in the form of interviews, in-field observations, document analysis, and think aloud verbal protocol. However, the researchers did also use a pretest-posttest comparison to uncover if the students did show an increase in math performance, attitudes, and metacognitive awareness. The participants for the study consisted of 15 fourth and fifth graders enrolled in a summer math program.

Following Yin's (1984) protocol for multiple case study analysis, the researchers conducted a within case analysis to pinpoint unique patterns in the data and then a cross-case thematic analysis to group the similarities and differences across the participant's responses and activities. The researchers' goal was to find the recurring themes of significance and organize them into systematic categories of analysis. Next, the statements that emerged as possible commonalities are listed as initial themes (Creswell, 1998). Finally, the researchers refined the themes and removed overlapping ones to capture the primary significance of each theme's meaning. The result of this coding process captured general themes and patterns that were synthesized (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The results of the study revealed that students developed more when there is positive attitudes toward learning math in a "gaming atmosphere." However, there was no significant effect on the participant's cognitive test performance or metacognitive awareness development.

In another multiple case study conducted by Vonderwell (2002) the researcher looked to explore the asynchronous communication perspective and experiences of undergraduate students in an online course. The data collection consisted of interviews with 22 teachers, student-to-instructor e-mail transcripts, asynchronous discussion

transcripts, and two independent reviewers' reviews of the asynchronous discussions. Of the 22 teachers that volunteered as participants for the study, 17 were female and five were male. Additionally, two students had taken an online course prior to this course and the instructor of the course was the researcher for this study. Since the class was conducted in an online format, the instructor used techniques of scaffolding and motivated students through e-mail interactions along with social and interpersonal outreach activities. The primary source of communication with the students consisted of e-mails and discussion forums via Blackboard.

Similar to the previous study, the researcher employed Yin's (1984), protocol for multiple case study analysis. Likewise, using thematic analysis as coding the researcher used inductive coding to create initial themes, which resulted in overall significant themes to explain the results of the study. The results showed that students experienced both positive and negative attributes because of online the courses. For example, students expressed enjoying the anonymity of an online course and feeling more comfortable asking questions and giving feedback. Likewise, students liked the flexibility of participating in an online course. However, students also reported the lack of one-on-one feedback with the instructor and lack of immediate feedback from classmates as a negative consequence of participating in an online course.

Positionality

When embarking into qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (Merriam, 1998). This is in contrast to quantitative research, which primarily utilizes surveys, assessments, etc. as the primary instrument of acquiring data (Creswell, 1998). However, the researcher serving as the

primary instrument in obtaining data can become burdensome and tainted if the researcher does not account for their biases and presence in the research setting. As noted by Merriam (1998), “the investigator as human instrument is limited by being human – that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere” (p. 20). With this in mind, it is important to consider my positionality and its impact on the research process. Positionality is, “a researcher’s social, locational, and ideological placement relative to the research project or to other participants in it. Positionality is influenced by embodied factors such as race, gender along with positions such as class and formative experiences” (Glesnee, 2011, p. 157). As the researcher, I had little control of the embodied factors and limited control over their positions. However, as the researcher I acknowledged it, I was aware of it during the research process, and made certain choices to ensure it did not impede the outcome of this study.

My positionality as an African-American, middle class, college educated male can potentially influenced the participant’s overall comfort level when expressing their thoughts concerning being a convicted father and the impact it has on the relationship with their children. As a father, I could relate to their feelings and experiences. Furthermore, as an individual that grew up in extreme poverty and having had my son at an early age, I could also relate to some of the participants. As an African-American male with a college education, I occupied many positions when compared to the participants. However, I challenged myself to remain aware of it and made the participants feel comfortable in expressing themselves. This was done by walking that fine line of not overwhelming them with “intellectual language” while also not “talking down to them” which can potentially offend them.

As the researcher, another bias I was aware of was my thoughts on the criminal justice system and how it treats African-American males. I truly believed that the American criminal justice system was created to keep African-American males uneducated, jobless, and angry. At least that is how I feel African-American males are portrayed through media. As the researcher, I may have felt sympathy for the participants due to my allegiance and being able to relate to their past experiences. Therefore, I recognized my assumptions about the prison system and how that may have played a role in the way I interviewed the fathers and made my observations. It is through triangulation and allowing my research colleagues to review my notes that I was mindful of these biases and the impact they had on this study.

As stated earlier, to help the participants become more open during the interview process I shared with them my background as a young African-American male that grew up in extreme poverty. Likewise, I let them know that I had my son at an early age. By doing this I hoped to relate to the fathers and shift the dynamics in power from me as the researcher and help the participants to view me as someone not in an authority position. Our shared status as fathers and African-American men helped the participants feel more comfortable throughout the data collection process and potentially balanced the traditional power that is normally presented between the researcher and participant.

Another dynamic that I was mindful of is the participant's criminal conviction. Even though I had friends and family members that had criminal records, I have never been arrested or placed in jail. Therefore, a criminal conviction is something I was not able to relate with them. This was potentially seen as a barrier because the participants may have felt they could not talk to me about their experience with prison and feel I was in an

authoritative position. However, through rapport building and having an open mind during the data collection process, hopefully the fathers were open and comfortable talking about their criminal conviction and the impact it had on their lives. I do not expect the participants to be comfortable talking to me about their lives because I am a stranger. However, through prolonged engagement and observation within the research setting (Fatherhood Coalition) they were hopefully more comfortable with talking to me and expressing their feelings.

Summary

The current dissertation intended to (a) explore the experiences of convicted African-American fathers while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, (b) in examining their experiences, how did convicted African-American fathers describe the relationship with their children while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, and (c) overall, comparatively, how were the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers similar or different. Data for this study were collected through a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews, with the participant's files providing additional supporting and background information to provide further context. This study employed a multiple case study research design. Each case were examined individually for central themes and concepts emerged. The themes that emerged from each individual case were compared across the multiple cases for similarities and differences. Results for the current study are located in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The current study explored the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Likewise, in sharing their experiences, examined how the convicted African-Americans fathers described the relationship with their children since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Currently, researchers (Laakso & Nygaard, 2012; Miller, et. al., 2013; Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Lee, Sansone, Swanson, & Tatum, 2012; Johnson & Easterling, 2015; Miller, 2006; Lopez & Bhat, 2007; Aaron & Dallaire, 2009) primarily only focus on the effect incarceration has on children. Moreover, researchers that do focus on convicted African-American fathers just explore their experiences while incarcerated (Roy & Dyson, 2005; Turner & Peck, 2002, Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998, Tripp, 2001; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Lange, 2001). By investigating and gaining an understanding of the experiences of convicted African-American fathers, counselors and counselor educators gain more understanding and exposure to factors and potential barriers that exist for convicted African-American fathers once they return home from prison. Likewise, this study gave more insight into the impact parental incarceration has on the relationship between African-American fathers and their children.

Sampling and Data Collection Procedures

The population for this study included convicted African-American fathers that were clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. More specifically, to participate in this study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age or older with at least one minor child. Additionally, participants had to have a criminal conviction and be home from prison within the last three years. This study inclusion criterion aligned with a study completed by Langan and Levin (2002), who concluded that 29.9% of inmates return to prison within the first six months of their release, 59.2% within the first year, and 67.5% within three years. There was no exclusion for this study based on the participant's particular conviction; the only requirement for participation was an actual conviction. I used criterion sampling for this study due to the specific criteria there was for the participants. By using criterion sampling, I ensured that each study participant had met the predetermined qualifications. In addition, I recruited participants with the assistance of the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition.

As aforementioned, to obtain participants, I contacted the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition and received permission to contact fathers receiving services. Once I made contact with the agency, I met with the director of the organization and explained to him the purpose of my study, and he agreed to allow me to recruit participants. Next, I met with the caseworkers at the organization, presented my study, and asked for their assistance in finding participants who would qualify. After the staff reviewed their client case files for participants that met the requirements for this study, they sent the names to the Director. The Director e-mailed the names of the clients to me, and I contacted the clients to see if they would be willing to participate in the study.

I received eight potential participants from the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition that met the specific inclusion criteria for this study. Of the eight participants, three agreed to participate. The remaining five potential participants were not comfortable discussing their situation and did not want to join. I contacted the three potential participants by phone and text messages for recruitment, explained to them the purpose of the study, and asked for their participation. Additionally, I informed them that for each interview they completed, they would receive a \$25.00 visa gift card.

After the interviews were scheduled and the participants signed the consent form, I met with each participant three times, with the majority of the interviews taking place at the local library. I interviewed one participant at his place of employment because of his limited availability. Altogether, I did nine interviews ranging in time from 25-35 minutes. Additionally, I attended two of the weekly group sessions held at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition to observe as well as take notes on the conversations between the fathers attending these groups to assist in providing further context on their experiences. Attending the weekly group sessions as an observer was beneficial for my study. Hearing the thoughts and concerns from the other fathers not included in this study, confirmed the experiences the participants expressed during our interviews such as frustration with lack of job opportunities, problems with the mothers of their children, and issues with child support. Lastly, I arranged a time with the assigned caseworkers of each participant to come to the agency and view the participant's files for background information and further analysis.

Participant One: Ryan

Ryan was 31 years old and a current client at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. He was a client with the organization for nearly six months. He was an African-American male with five children (3 girls and 2 boys) that are all under the age of ten. He had a high school education and attended a technical school to become a barber but never finished all the requirements to gain his barber license. He had one significant conviction on his record for receiving stolen goods. Because of this conviction, he went to jail for one month. However, since then he had been to prison multiple times for owing back child support and currently owed arrears in back child support. According to his case file, he had been to jail eight times in the last three years for child support. He currently worked at a car wash in the southeastern United States.

Participant Two: Brandon

Brandon was a 43-year-old African-American male who was currently a client at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. He had been a client with the organization for almost one year. He had three children, but only had contact with two of them due to signing away his parental rights for his first child. His children were 17 and 15 years old (one girl and one boy). Due to his conviction for assault and battery, he went to prison for two years and four months. According to his case file, he had been home for fourteen months. When he was younger, he served six years in the Marines. However, because of his issues with alcohol, he was no longer serving. He was currently on probation and worked for a local construction company in the southeastern United States.

Participant Three: Henry

Henry was a 31-year-old African-American male who had been a client at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition for nearly eight months. He served close to nine years in prison for armed robbery and had been home for almost three years. According to his case file, he had a high school diploma. Before going to jail, he did have a son but lost contact with him and the mother while in prison. Since coming home, he had a son with his wife that was two years old. He had no issues related to child support. He was currently working as a meat cutter at a grocery store in the southeastern United States .

Data Analysis

The following section reviewed the results from the interviews with the participants, which served as the primary mode of data collection for this study. I also used the participant's case files and group observations to provide supporting information about the participants (age, education level, etc.) to gain context into further understanding their backgrounds and current situations. The analysis was presented in two sections to account for the within-case analysis and cross-case analysis that occurs when conducting a multiple or comparative case study (Yin, 2014).

In the first section, I listed the responses from the participants individually based on the interview questions (Appendix A), which align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977). Excerpts from the interviews with the participants were displayed to give insight into their thoughts and experiences since returning home from prison and the relationship with their children. Furthermore, I listed the participant's responses to coincide with each system of the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) which was the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem.

Next, to account for the cross-case analysis, I listed the research questions of this study along with the themes that coincide with them. The research questions are:

1. How do convicted African-American fathers describe their experience since their reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?
2. In sharing their experiences, how do convicted African-American fathers describe the relationship with their children since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?
3. Overall, comparatively, how are the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers similar or different since their reentry into society?

Individual Case Analysis

Ryan's Experience Before and After Incarceration

Microsystem:

Ryan's experience before and after incarceration had been different. Throughout the interviews, he mentioned continued frustration over his issues with the inability to find sustainable employment due to his criminal conviction, which financially, had been a hindrance. According to his case file, he had been on numerous job interviews within the past few months but was not able to find stable employment that pays a decent wage.

When I asked Ryan about his outlook on life before incarceration, he reported he was doing fine until he lost his job.

Basically...I was just trying to find a way to feed my kids because by then I done had my twins and they were one, so I was focusing on them. And everything was straight. But when I got arrested they took my license, and I wasn't driving. It's like everything was good before my license got taken...lost my job at the city. I wasn't able to provide like I used to.

Since Ryan had been home from prison, he reported his outlook on life and career goals had changed drastically.

I mean....it's looking more difficult because with the record it's harder to do what you wanna do. It stops a lot of things I want to try and accomplish. Like it stops me from getting jobs and I have to settle for whatever I can get. Like the Fatherhood Coalition was able to connect me with a few jobs. Got me a few interviews. But I kept getting call backs saying they couldn't hire me because I got that one receiving stolen goods charge and I don't really know nobody that gonna hire someone...not with a charge like that. Even though I only received something stolen they still see it as like...ok...he receiving stolen goods. Like I got three papers from Amazon, a paper from Wal-Mart and a paper form Lowes all telling me because of my background they can't hire me.

As mentioned earlier, Ryan worked at a local car wash. He was unable to find any other sustainable employment due to his criminal conviction. At the car wash, he worked an average of 30 hours per week at \$7.50 per hour.

Like at the most, I get like 32 hours...at the most. But that ain't nothing when you only getting paid like \$7.50 an hour and your check be like two hundred and something each week. That ain't nothing to survive off of. Nobody need to be working for that.

When I discussed with Ryan whether he had any mental health or substance abuse issues before or after his incarceration he simply stated:

I mean I was smoking marijuana and that's about it.

Since returning home, he had not done any drugs and did not feel that he had any mental health issues. Furthermore, a review of his case files showed that he passed each of his random drug screenings as part of his requirement to be in the program with the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition.

Mesosystem:

Ryan's relationship with his children, family, and friends was consistent before and after his incarceration. When we discussed the relationship with his children before and after his imprisonment, he stated:

I mean my relationship with my kids was always good. I mean....if me or any of my baby mama's have issues we try not to let it out around the kids. You know...but my kids...they love me.

However, he mentioned that at times it was frustrating when one of the mothers of his children did not allow him to see his children because of the arrears in child support that he owed. According to Ryan's case file, he went on child support shortly after losing his full-time employment working as a sanitation worker. Additionally, a review of his case file showed he lost his job as a sanitation worker due to his incarceration for receiving stolen goods.

But it's like at certain times when my baby mama's can't get what they want they like "well you not gonna see them this time or that time".... You know....they know my situation and what's going on. But sometimes they don't care they just want you to go out there and get it even if that means doing something illegal.

When discussing the relationship with his family and friends before and after his incarceration he stated:

Yea my relationship was good (with family and friends). I wasn't really trying to stick to friends I really just stayed around my family a lot.... Yea I probably hang around my family the most and see my friends every once in a while. You know most of my friends still involved in negative things and I'm trying to stay away from that as much as possible. I got friends that sell drugs...and mostly in the streets and everything they doing...is either gonna lead them to the grave or jail. And I got kids....I can't be out there hanging with that.

Exosystem:

According to Ryan, before his incarceration for receiving stolen goods, he had minimum contact with the criminal justice system. Likewise, before and after

incarceration he had no hobbies or activities he liked to do in his spare time. Ryan did not participate in any counseling before his imprisonment or while in prison. When I asked him about counseling in prison, he stated:

No. Only thing they offer you is a library pass and church on Sundays. Or a GED class, they got GED classes in there.

Ryan reported he had never been on government assistance (SNAP benefits, Medicaid, etc.) before or after his incarceration, a review of his case file confirmed this. However, when I asked him if he currently had any health insurance and what exactly does he do whenever he gets sick or needs to go to the doctor he reported:

I just go to the ER...if I feel like it's a cold or something I just tough it out. Say like last week I had a little bit of a head cold but I just toughed it out and let it run its course.

Macrosystem:

Before his incarceration, Ryan reported he did not have any thoughts regarding how the media portrayed or represented individuals with criminal records. However, after being in and out of prison, his views regarding how the media portrayed convicted felons had changed.

Like...like all we are is failure. All we do is wrong. Like they don't believe in us...period. It's like....I mean it don't matter how little or serious what they did....it just seem like the media make it seem like it's the biggest thing in the world.

Additionally, when we discussed if he knew of any laws or policies that made it difficult for felons he stated he did not know any before his incarceration. However, after returning home he learned many things about laws and policies that affected felons from people in his neighborhood.

Like in the hood you have a couple of people that know about the law that been to jail so much and been in prison reading. You know what I mean...when you

around the way you hear people talking about it and telling you stuff to look out for and you ask them questions. Like a lot of stuff I learned in the hood. I mean as far as like...you can't go up to a police officer and ask, "what's this law or that"? You might talk yourself into some trouble.

Overall, Ryan indicated that due to his incarceration and criminal conviction, he had missed a many opportunities. Additionally, he indicated that because of his conviction and lack of sustainable job opportunities, he was unable to provide for his children as he wanted to.

I mean...it be killing me. It feel like no matter what I do or how hard I work it's the same results every time. It's like even when they see a difference, they won't look pass your past. I mean...it just make me feel like I ain't never gonna be like the father I want to be.

Overall Thoughts and Reflections:

Due to his work schedule and availability, our last interview took place during his lunch break at his place of employment. Similar to the previous interviews, he reported feeling unsure about his future and not optimistic regarding finding a better paying job. He reported that he regularly had doubts and uncertainty about his future.

Like "what imma do?" "what's next?" "is this cycle every gonna end?"

When we talked about counseling and if he thought it would be beneficial, he was unsure. He did not participate in counseling while in prison, and since returning home, it was not a priority.

Maybe.... (considering counseling) but I didn't honestly think about it.

As a final thought, I asked Ryan what message he would give individuals on what it is like as an African-American father with a criminal record, his responded:

I would tell people it's hard....very hard. You feel like no matter what you do or how hard you try you never gonna come out this hole. Not only with jobs but with everything. You know...people see only the mistakes you've made and not the person you are now or the person you're trying to become. Basically...letting

people know it's hard. And that we all deserve a second chance...a legitimate second chance.

Overall, through our conversations, Ryan described his frustration regarding not finding gainful employment. Likewise, due to his criminal conviction, he reported he missed many opportunities for better jobs. Even though he reported throughout our conversations his great relationship with his children, he was unsure about his future and whether he could overcome the obstacles he faced.

Brandon's Experience Before and After Incarceration

Microsystem:

Brandon's outlooks on life and career goals were heading in a positive direction before he went to prison. He had a well-paying job working at a local industrial plant and was able to take care of his family. However, due to his military past and a history of alcoholism, his life changed.

Well....wow....before prison I was working at a feed meal here in South Carolina. And I was working third shift making like \$38,000 a year. And work was going fine...but me and my wife at the time had problems so I would just live with the guys at the feed meal....and all you do is drink and get in trouble. I was drinking a lot...damn near a 12 pack of beer each night. I went to stay at my dad's house one night...got drunk...me and his girlfriend got into it and that's how I got charged.

Moreover, since returning home from prison, he perceived his outlook on life had changed.

I mean....I have a lot of hopes...but most of that is instilled in my kids now. Because...you know....I'm 43 years old and a lot of my life has passed by....so I honestly focus my outlook on life in regards to my children and make sure they're ok.

Brandon due to his military experience, he did have mental health issues and substance abuse issues as well.

Man....I've had mental health issues since the Marine corps you know...the VA (Veteran Affairs) diagnosed me with a couple of things....early on...like bipolar, PTSD, treatment for alcoholism...

According to Brandon's case file, he was currently not on any medications for any mental health conditions. Likewise, similar to his substance abuse issues, he admitted having a drinking problem before his incarceration.

Ummm....I know I did before I got incarcerated because that's how I got incarcerated. Yea...the alcohol was a powerful thing man.

Thankfully, while in prison he was able to quit drinking and is now sober. While in prison, he attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

Not it wasn't offered (Alcoholics Anonymous meetings)...not officially. You know some of the other prisoners would put groups together and meet...but nah none of the...like employees...would put it together...the prisoners had to do that.

Mesosystem:

Despite Brandon's issues with alcoholism, he reported he always had a great relationship with his children before and after his incarceration. When he went to prison, they were 14 and 16 years old and were old enough to realize what was happening. He kept constant communication with them while incarcerated even though he was not able to see them.

I had a great relationship with my kids...and...when me and their mom separated I would get them on the weekend....I was still drinking heavy...so our relationship wasn't as close as it should've been. So before I was incarcerated...there was a line there. You know...but my kids still looked to me as a father and everything else. Yea while I was inside I wrote my kids letters every two weeks to keep in touch. Their mom wouldn't bring them to see me so that was the only way I could talk to them. So I kept that as my mode of contact to let them know how much I missed them.

He did feel the relationship with his family and friends had changed since returning home. When we discussed his family bringing up the past mistakes he stated:

Yea...I agree. And to go further with that they usually see both sides...you know they remember your past and never let you forget it. You know even though they see the positives and the changes you are making...they still recall the past...yea...my mom like there are times when I tell her where I'm going...and I can tell she might not believe me. So now I just tell her everything...I let her know everywhere I go. It gets frustrating at times...but I know it's a situation I've created...so I can't get mad. As far as friends...a lot of my old friends are still drinking and partying all the time so....I basically had to separate myself from them....for the better.

Despite Brandon feeling his parents at times do not trust him or doubt him, he did feel they were a great support system. Not only emotionally, but financially by giving him money and providing a place for him to stay.

Yea...right now I stay between my mom and dad house. During the week I'm with my dad but on the weekend when I get my kids I stay at my mom's. Man....I gotta be honest with you...if not for their support financially helping me out from time to time and letting me stay with them....without a doubt I know I would be on the streets. They're a huge help...I thank God for them.

Brandon had difficulty finding sustainable employment. Before his incarceration, he had a career and was able to take care of his children. Since returning home, he was only able to work for minimum wages as a tile cleaner at a local construction company.

Yea...hopefully something temporary (his current job)...I got the job because of a friend that works there. But...it only pays like \$200 a week...and that's not enough to live off of. Not with the bills I have....Yea mostly because my friend put in a good word for me...you know...because of my criminal record I know there's a lot of jobs I won't be able to get. So for right now...it's just get what I can.

Exosystem:

Before his incarceration for two years for assault and battery, Brandon went to jail a few times because of his alcoholism. According to his case file, he had multiple arrests for drunk driving. Since returning home from his two years in prison, he had no other involvement with the criminal justice system other than monthly meetings with his probation officer. We talked about counseling before and after prison, and he reported he

did not participate. However, before going to prison, his judge made it a requirement that he participate in counseling while incarcerated but it never happened.

Nah...not really while I was in prison even though the judge said I had to. I'm not sure why...it just never happened. I met with one of the counselors...had one conversation with him...and he said "he's ok...he's fine...he doesn't need it" and that was it. From what I saw while in prison it wasn't really offered to you unless you was like crazy or on some types of meds...you know. I would sign up for as much as I could...but church and the school thing was really the only thing you could do. I was trying to do anything to make my file look good so I could get out.

Overall, before incarceration, his only hobby or activity was running which was something he developed while serving in the Marines. However, due to an injury he got while in prison, he had no other interest or hobbies.

Nah...you know my life is pretty fast going right now. Don't feel like I have time for fun or going out...things like that...too focused on trying to elevate myself and became more financially secure.

Macrosystem:

Brandon admitted that before his incarceration and trouble with the law he did not have any thoughts regarding individuals with criminal records and the criminal justice system. However, since returning home and now having a criminal record, his opinion and observations had changed.

Well...ever since I started going to jail I always thought it was a shady system. I had family members who were in and out of jail and I knew things about it. But...before I actually went to jail I didn't understand it you know...

Moreover, when asked how he feels the media viewed individuals with criminal records he responded:

Uhh....like we're wreckage...you know. Like we are beneath them. We're coming out with so many circumstances and barriers. You know...it's like you go in and come out worse. You know...I personally know people who went in jail and came out worse....because being in there does something to you. It's hard to explain...it just destroys you as a human. You know...I never messed with meth...but in prison there were people teaching you how to make it...so many chances to get into

negative stuff while you're in there to survive. So...I don't know...it can take a toll on you once you get home if you're not careful.

Brandon had a similar response when we discussed his knowledge of laws and policies before and after his incarceration. He indicated he had no knowledge of laws or policies related to felons before his imprisonment but indicated that he learned a lot about it while in prison.

Yea. Most of everything I learned while I was in prison and read law books. Before that...I knew nothing. From reading law books...and basically learning how to advocate for myself...I started reading different books and that's how I learned. To tell the truth...while in prison...I had more other prisoners teaching and educating me on the law than my own court appointed lawyer...you know. Yea...that's the only way I would learn. My court appointed lawyer...I had three different ones while in prison and I hardly talked to them or saw them...it's just a rigged system man.

Overall Thoughts and Reflection:

Since returning home, Brandon reported he had changed. Although he is not where he wanted to be financially, he reported he had overcome many obstacles. He indicated his biggest challenge since coming home has been two things. First, he was not able to find sustainable employment. The second challenge was trying to reestablish the parental duties with his children. He perceived that he did not have a parenting role with his children.

Well...as a father with a criminal record...whenever there is a dispute or disagreement between me and my ex-wife when it comes to my kids she always says "well...you're a criminal...so if they take us to court it will be my word against yours." And she's right...I know if we end up having a custody battle because of my criminal past and my current situation she would have the upper hand.

When I asked Brandon how that makes him feel, he responded by saying:

Frustrated...useless...like I'm not a father sometimes and just a babysitter because I really don't have any say in important things in their lives. Like...if I want to get them for the holidays....I have to ask her permission first. I just can't

say "hey imma get the kids for Christmas this year." I have to get her approval first...it feels like I'm a child asking my mom for something...you know.

We discussed if he felt his time in prison affected his personality or identity as a father and he stated yes. He valued the time he had with his kids because of the time he lost due to his imprisonment. In addition, due to the prison environment, he still at times reported feeling uncomfortable in public settings.

Ummm....I notice when I'm in crowded places I still feel uneasy...you know. Well...like when I'm in a public place with my kids...my son will take the lead...my daughter will be in the middle...and I'm in the back...and that's to guard her back just in case something happens in a crowded area.

As we talked about this further, he also stated:

You know...you see bad things in prison...so you just...I don't know become uneasy around a lot of people and get nervous sometimes....kind of hard to explain.

Brandon has not participated in any counseling since coming home other than the group sessions held by the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Due to his focus on finding a better job, he indicated that counseling is not necessary right now. Overall, Brandon reported the inability to find sustainable employment and the problematic relationship with the mother of his children had made his reentry back into society not as smooth or successful as he would like. However, he was optimistic about finding a better job and having a more significant role in the lives of his children.

Henry's Experience Before and After Incarceration

Microsystem:

Of the three participants for this study, Henry served the longest time in jail. He had been home for almost three years. He had no issues related to child support. During

his time in prison, he lost contact with the mother of his biological son. In addition, since returning home, he had not made contact with her.

Yea, he was like maybe five or six months (old) the most. You know...as far as me and his mom...we didn't really have a solid relationship. More like sleeping around with each other and then she ended up getting pregnant. We would talk when it had to do with the baby...but that was about it.

As our conversation progressed, he talked about it further:

Nah...not really. Like I said....before she got pregnant...we didn't really have a relationship. Just had a night together...and the result was a baby. To tell the truth...while I was in prison...we didn't speak to each other at all. Not about the baby or nothing. So I didn't really give up my rights to him...but I never tried to contact her and check on him. Even now...I've been home for almost three years...and we haven't talked. So I know nothing about him. And that's something I've always regretted...not trying to see him or be there. Now me and my lady I'm with now have a child together...so I'm focused on doing this right to sort of make up for how I fucked up the previous situation...you know.

Henry reported his life before incarceration was heading in a negative direction. He had no outlook on life or career goals.

Uhhh....I didn't really have any career goals. My outlook on life was pretty much get as much as you can...while you can...if you make it to tomorrow you did good. If not...it's what is expected....you know? Honestly.

Before his incarceration, he did not have any mental health issues but did do drugs such as alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine. Since returning home, he stated he had not used any drugs or alcohol.

Mesosystem:

When we talked about the relationship with his family before and after incarceration, he explained that it was always positive and they served as a huge support system while he was in jail, and when he got home.

See that was the funny thing...like my family...our relationship it been good. But I didn't spend a lot of time around my family...you know what I'm saying. I would see them from time to time but I was busy running the streets. We had a good

relationship because I had a good family. I had a lot going on. I was busy with women...drugs...money...you know so that didn't leave a lot of time for family.

Moreover, since he has returned home from jail, his family has been a huge support.

You know...my family was right there. A lot of people don't understand it....but what you going back home to dictates a lot...you know. As far as your surrounding and if you got a support system...I know for me that was a huge factor for the reason why I was able to readjust so quickly...because of my family and because I was able to find work so soon. Otherwise...I probably would've ended up back in prison...or back to hustling...you know.

Due to his support system and the connection with his family, he had help from family members and friends in locating a job.

Man it's crazy...you know...all I can say is I have some praying people in my circle. Honestly...I found a job making like....\$10.00 an hour...or maybe \$10.50 an hour like two weeks after I came home. It was through a temp agency...but it was a job...you know. So like there wasn't a job I wasn't willing to do. There wasn't no money I wasn't willing to take...cuz I had a focus that...you know...you have to have a job.

While in prison, he stated he received no viable job training opportunities to prepare him for when he returned home.

So that's why I'm so blessed...and I thank God...cuz they don't give you no skill. Like I had a brick mason certificate....I got it while I was in there. And it was useless. Worthless. You need experience....if you ain't building nothing...them people don't care. They like you want me to hire you with a certificate and a criminal record...when I can get this guy with no certificate...but he got years of experience and no criminal record.

Additionally, he stated that before and after imprisonment, his living situation had not changed much. Before prison, he lived on his own, and since returning home, he lived with his wife and son.

Exosystem:

As a teenager, Henry did get in trouble and had a juvenile record.

I mean...I had a lot of juvenile stuff. Had like 18 months probation when I was younger before I did my long bid. I basically was a little monster when I was younger (laughs). Did a lot of foolish stuff.

A review of Henry's case file shows that since returning home, he was not in any trouble.

When we discussed it, he stated:

No....no...no...(laughs). Hell no. When I got out I was on probation for like a year...so I had to see my probation dude every few months and keep a clean drug test you know...and that wasn't a problem because I knew in order to get and keep a job...my piss had to be clean...so probation wasn't a problem...especially since I had a job which is the biggest thing they (probation officer) are concerned about....you know...

Henry did not have any hobbies or interest and did not receive any government assistance. According to his case file, he did not receive any government assistance before going to prison either. Likewise, he had not attended any counseling since returning home. A review of his case file indicated he did not participate in counseling before going to prison.

Macrosystem:

During our conversation, regarding the perception of individuals with criminal records and the legal system, before going to prison Henry reported he could relate to these individuals because he grew up with them.

I felt like they were just like me...like my homeboy daddy or something like that. You know....like all the dudes I grew up with and ran with was in and out of trouble just like me. So I guess I didn't really have any thoughts about it....because I lived in it...you know.

When we discussed his thoughts regarding the media and their portrayal of individuals with criminal records he stated that it had changed since returning home. Before his

incarceration, he did not have any thoughts regarding how the media represented individuals with criminal records.

Uhhh....I won't say I believed it...like the way they portrayed it to an extent. But you know...that's all you see. So like...it kind of fit what you saw around you. So you kind of believe it.

However, since returning home and experiencing it, his outlook has changed.

Uhhh...like we dead beats. Like we don't want to be in our kids lives. But you know...it's a lot of black fathers...a lot of brothers out there that want to be in their children's lives...but finding a job and making money makes that difficult.

His knowledge of the laws and policies that affected felons had not changed since his release. Now due to his record, he was more aware but was not concerned about it.

Nah...not really. You know...I know if you have a felony that you can't vote until your probation and fees are paid....shit like that. And you can't own a gun with a felony.

Overall, Henry felt that if it did not involve his family or his job, he was not concerned about it. His focus was simply working and spending as much time with his son and wife as possible.

Overall Thoughts and Reflections:

Henry had faced challenges since returning home from prison. However, since he was able to find and maintain sustainable employment, he reported his challenges have not been as severe when compared to the other participants. After serving nearly nine years in prison, he perceived the struggles or problems he had endured since returning home are not as bad as being back in jail.

Ummm....I guess...it's just peaceful. No beef...no drama...no non-sense. It's different forms of anxiety and aggravation and stuff...you know with the usual stuff like bills and relationships. It's just....yea peace and freedom. I mean the biggest thrill I got when I got home was like...going in the refrigerator and eating whatever. Like little things like that....it make it easier to reflect and see how good you got it and how blessed you are.

Later in our conversation, he would also bring up the fact that finding sustainable employment soon after he returned home and a strong support system were also key reasons why he did not endure many challenges since coming home from prison.

The most significant change that Henry identified was his personality and learning more patience. He stated when he was younger he lacked self-control. As he explained during our final conversation, his time in prison forced him to be more patient.

I would say one thing is it taught me patience. And that's one thing...you know...that I did not have. Patience and self-control was something I did not have before or when I first went to prison. So patience is something I definitely have now. Like no impulse control. So being in there you have no choice but to learn it...or you won't see any change. That was the biggest personality change for me...because I was a live wire at one time.

According to Henry's case file, he did not receive any counseling while in prison. He had not enrolled in counseling since his release. Overall, Henry reported that there were some roadblocks to successful reentry for him. However, finding sustainable employment and a stable support system is why he perceived that he was able to transition to being home. Even though, due to his incarceration, he was not able to maintain a relationship with his "first born" biological son, throughout our interviews he expressed his determination in becoming a better father for his newly born son.

Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion

Drawing on the results from my thematic analysis across cases, I addressed the study's research questions, which are:

1. How do convicted African-America fathers describe their experience since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?

2. In sharing their experiences, how do convicted African-American fathers describe the relationship with their children since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?
3. Overall, comparatively, how are the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers similar or different since reentry into society?

Research Question 1

How do convicted African-America fathers describe their experience since their reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?

In response to the first research question, I discussed with the participants what their experience was like since returning home from prison. More specifically, how have their lives changed since returning home from prison with a criminal record? Primary themes that emerged were:

1. Lack of job training in prison and opportunities since returning home.
2. Lack of financial stability.
3. Feeling defeated and disappointed.

Lack of job training in prison and opportunities since returning home.

Overwhelmingly, all three participants reported concerns about the lack of job opportunities since returning home. The fathers expressed feelings of low self-worth due to the limited employment opportunities that were available to them. As Ryan stated:

Yea man...don't feel like a man. And on top of that...as a man...because of my convictions I can't find a normal job...damn near impossible.

Similarly, they expressed feelings of frustration and uncertainty regarding their career path and future as providers. According to Ryan:

I mean...it's looking more difficult because with the record it's harder to do what you wanna do. It stops a lot of things I want to try and accomplish. And with my record...I don't see any office jobs in my outlook you know....so that's why I say I don't know.

Furthermore, there was agreement among the participants regarding the lack of job training opportunities while incarcerated. As Brandon stated:

Yea...you know cuz there's nothing in prison that really sets you up for a career once you get home....an opportunity to learn a new trade or something like that...it doesn't really happen.

Unlike Brandon and Ryan, Henry received a job training opportunity while in prison.

However, he reported that the job training he received while in prison was useless once he got home. As he stated:

You know while I was inside I did get a certificate to do brick mason. I went through the class and got the certificate and everything. But once I got out it was useless because I did not have any work experience....it was just a piece of paper.

As we discussed it further, Henry stated:

The managers were like, "yea you got the certificate, but you don't have any actual work experience as a brick mason." They pretty much said that they could hire someone without a certificate but with the work experience and have to deal with less hassle because they wouldn't have to worry about dealing with a felon. They basically shitted on my certificate...and I just threw it in the trash and started applying for whatever job I could get. And to be honest...that's when I was able to get the job I have now.

Each father reported that sustainable employment would alleviate many of their problems. Finding a job was their top priority and essential in order to succeed.

Lack of financial stability

Among the participants, there was a consensus that due to their criminal conviction they dealt with financial instability. All three participants for this study had employment, but only one of the three participants reported having sustainable employment and the ability to take care of themselves. All three fathers had jobs, but not

all three thought they made enough money at their jobs to live comfortably. As Ryan stated:

But that ain't nothing when you only getting paid like \$7.50 an hour and your check be like two hundred and something each week...that ain't nothing to survive off of. Nobody need to be working for that.

Additionally, the fathers described times of frustration regarding the minimum pay they received and the inability to be financially sustainable. As Ryan mentioned:

Like...for real some weeks...I be broke the same day I get paid.

Ryan goes further to explain how he usually budgets his money each week when he gets paid:

Well...like when I get paid I give \$50.00 to my cousin for rent, a money order for child support...food... and whatever is left go towards my kids if I get them that weekend. Other than that, I usually stay broke.

Ryan also discussed how excited he was when he got his current job but his excitement quickly changed when he realized how minimum the pay was:

You know when I first got my job I was excited because I got some type of job...but once you get there and see how everything work you get frustrated. Sometimes I get there and don't get any hours depending on how slow it is. Just sometimes feel like a nobody and that nothing you try is every gonna work.

When I asked Brandon about how he budgeted his money he stated:

Oh yea. I try to pay \$60.00 per week towards child support. But when you factor in my insurance...food... court fines and fees to probation...gas and other things...money gets tight real quick.

Likewise, due to his criminal record, Brandon had no hope for finding sustainable employment that does not involve manual labor, as he stated:

You know...everyone wants financial security. And with my record...I don't see any office jobs in my outlook you know....so that's why I say I don't know. With my current job, I hope it's just temporary. You know...I got the job because I have

a friend that works there. But it only pays like \$200 a week...and that's not enough to live off of...not with the bills I have.

During our conversation, Brandon would later mention that due to his criminal record, he has to settle for whatever job is available:

Yea...mostly because my friend put in a good word for me...you know...because of my criminal record I know there's a lot of jobs I won't be able to get. So for right now...it's just get what I can.

The feeling of frustration was common among the fathers. Despite working long hours at their current jobs, due to the minimum pay they were unable to take care of themselves or their children.

Feelings of failure and no hope for the future

Among the participants, there was a collective feeling of failure and not much hope for achieving success in the future. Because of their criminal record and continued frustration with lack of financial security, the participants identified feelings of desperation, survival and a general sense of no hope for the future. Likewise, the participants described a sense of failure and frustration as result of being “held back” due to their past mistakes. As Ryan stated:

Makes you feel like whatever you do or whatever changes you try to make...your past always gonna hold you down.

Ryan stated further:

I mean...it's looking more difficult because with the record it's harder to do what you wanna do. It stops a lot of things I want to try and accomplish.

Due to his limited income, Brandon felt frustrated and described feeling like he was in a difficult battle:

It feels like sometime this is an unwinnable war...if not for my mom and dad...I'd be homeless because I can't afford an apartment with the little money I make.

In addition, because of their frustration and continued “setbacks,” the participants admitted to feeling desperate and unsure of what to do. According to Brandon:

You know, they know my situation and what’s going on. But sometimes they don’t care they just want you to go out there and get it even if that means doing something illegal.

Brian also mentioned the impact his criminal record and related circumstances had on his overall emotional well-being.

Like...like all we are is failure. All we do is wrong. Like they don’t believe in us...period.

In addition, there were feelings of frustration and failure related to the lack of job opportunities and feeling outmatched when competing with others for employment. As Henry stated:

And a lot of times they don’t look at your resume...they just see that mark on your record and in these days and times that’s why a lot of people lie about their record...you know...because it’s cut throat out here. You have like 75 people applying for one job...and if you have a record you automatically move to the bottom of that pile...I mean....it’s a tough game to play...you know.

Of the three participants, Henry felt the least amount of frustration mainly because he had sustainable employment. When I asked him any words or advice he had for the fathers feeling frustrated or defeated, he stated:

Man....I would just tell those brothers to stay persistent. Keep your kids in mind while you grinding and trying to make moves and they’ll give you all the strength you need to endure the bullshit you go through in trying to find a decent job. But whatever you do...don’t go back to your old ways. It seems like the easier path sometimes...but keep in mind where you just coming from (jail) and pray....pray for your blessings and even when you get frustrated...just pray.

Because of their conviction, the participants identified feelings of uncertainty about their future in the job market. Likewise, the repeated job denials caused them to feel inferior and incapable of providing for their children.

Research Question 2

In sharing their experiences, how do convicted African-American fathers describe the relationship with their children since reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition?

In response to the second research question, I discussed with the participants how the relationship with their children has changed since their reentry into society.

Primary themes that emerged were:

1. Relationship with mothers determines relationship with children.
2. Criminal record plays a role in vision fathers have for themselves in the lives of their children.
3. Children as motivation to stay out of trouble.

Relationship with mothers determines relationship with children.

Among the participants, there was an agreement that the relationship the fathers had with the mother of their children, determined the relationship with their children. Because of the negative relationship with the mothers related to financial issues, they were not able to see their children. In discussion, one father reported aggravation because he is unable to get all his children at once. As Ryan stated:

Like every other weekend....but I can't get them all at the same time. It's like one weekend this baby mama will let me get them and the other one won't and vice versa. Like I be trying to get them altogether.

Similarly, Brandon expressed the same frustration and annoyance when trying to see his children.

Like...if I want to get them for the holidays...I have to ask her permission first. I just can't say "hey imma get the kids for Christmas this year." I have to get her approval first...it feels like I'm a child asking my mom for something...you know.

Overall, the fathers reported the mothers determined the amount of contact they had with their children. Additionally, the fathers viewed the mothers as playing a vital role in the level of comfort the children felt around the fathers.

Although Henry did not have any troubles with his wife pertaining to his son, he did mention having friends in similar situations that experienced difficult relationships with the mothers of their children. As he stated:

You know...you got your baby mama that all they want is the money... " I want my money for your child and until I get my money...don't ask to see your son." You know...I got homeboys who are going through that right now. But it's not that they wanna be deadbeat daddies...it's they can't find a job to provide...or they owe child support...it's just a lot man.

He stated further:

Yea man. I got a homeboy right now that owe for child support. He pay when he can but not consistently. And now...he aint' seen is daughter in like 4 months cuz the babymama won't let him until he pay what he owe. You know...it's crazy.

Criminal record plays role in vision fathers have for themselves in the lives of their children.

Due to their criminal record, the participants reported they had no authority when it came to raising or taking care of their children. Likewise, they perceived all the authority and "final word" came from the mothers instead of a mutual agreement. As

Brandon stated:

Well...as a father with a criminal record...whenever there is a dispute or disagreement between me and my ex-wife when it comes to my kids she always

says “well...you’re a criminal...so if I take you to court it will be your word against mine.” And she’s right...I know if we end up having a custody battle because of my criminal past and current situation she would have the upper hand.

When I asked Brandon how that made him feel he stated:

Frustrated...useless...like I’m not a father sometimes and just a babysitter because I really don’t have any say in important things in their lives.

Additionally, Ryan expressed that due to his criminal record that he will never be able to become the father he imagined.

I mean...it just make me feel like I ain’t never gonna be like the father that I want to be.

Due to their record and time away in prison, the fathers indicated the mothers decided their parental role. They had no control or input regarding the children’s daily lives and activities. Likewise, due to their criminal record and obligations, the fathers reported missing time with their children. For example, because of the arrears in child support that Ryan owes, he goes to jail often and as a result, misses opportunities to be with his children. According to Ryan:

It’s like...I mean it’s like I know there’s a certain time of year I know I’m already about to get this letter...I’m already about to go to jail and about to be gone for about a month. It done got to the point now where I’m used to it so when I know I’m going I just set my mind for it and get my routine. Like my day to day routine while I’m inside...call my momma to make sure money on my books...and get ready to get it over with.

Children as motivation to stay out of trouble.

The relationship and presence of their children played a big role in the participants not returning to prison and staying out of trouble. The fathers described the relationship and contact with their children as important in keeping them motivated and focused on staying positive. As Ryan stated:

I got friends that sell drugsand mostly in the streets and everything they doing...is either gonna lead them to the grave or jail. And I got kids...I can't be out there hanging with that...I just think about my kids...and what's gonna happen with them if I get caught up.

Likewise, Ryan identified the support of his children (and parents) as the reason he was able to feel less secluded and not feel alone.

Some times....luckily I have my kids...and my parents...so they keep me from having those thoughts...and feeling isolated...because it's easy to do that when you're in jail...you know.

In addition, Ryan mentioned the importance of being a better father for his children than his father was for him. As he stated:

I want to be a whole different father than my daddy was for me...because like he wasn't really there when I was growing up. He was barely there...my whole life I can only remember my father buying me one pair of shoes. My momma pretty much took care of me and whatever my momma couldn't do I did for myself.

As the conversation continued, Ryan indicated the importance of his children in his life:

Man...without my kids...I would be broken. They're the only reason why I grind so much and why I'm so focused on trying to find a better paying job. They keep me focused and always keep a smile on my face....even when they get on my nerves (laughs). If not for them...I would have no reason to stay out of trouble so there's a good chance I would be running the streets if not for them...and that's just me being honest...you know.

For Brandon, his children were not only a source of motivation when he returned home; they were also an important part of his recovery from alcoholism. As he stated:

Me personally.... I knew getting into trouble could keep me from my kids and getting out so I just stayed away from my it and that's how I sobered up.

Brandon also reported that his children were the only reason he attempted to keep a positive relationship with his ex-wife:

Yea me and my ex don't get along at all. She has a new husband so she's all about him and what he wants. Honestly...if not for my kids...me and my ex would have no contact with each other at all after we got divorced. But in order to see my kids I have to talk to her...and that's just the way it is.

Henry, as mentioned earlier, did not have a relationship with his first-born son, which is something he always regretted. Now that he has a son with his current wife, he stated he is trying to do his best now to make up for it:

You know...because I didn't handle fatherhood right the first time...I see my 2 year old as my second chance. You know? I mean...I think about my oldest son a lot and sometimes want to try and track him and his mom down just to see how he's doing. But it's been over 10 years....not even sure what I would say if I ever met him. Or if he even knows I exist. So either way I'm just trying to do right this time around and be there 24/7. I need this...he's (his 2 year old son) my second chance.

Despite the continued frustration they fathers experienced, their children were a constant motivation for them to stay out of trouble. It is because of their children that the fathers were able to stay out of jail and continue to work towards becoming more sustainable.

Research Question 3

Overall, comparatively, how are the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers similar or different since their reentry into society?

In response to the third research question, I examined overall how the experiences of the fathers were similar or different since returning home. After extensive data analysis, there were no specific differences regarding the fathers and their experiences since returning home from prison. Although one father reported he had sustainable employment, that aligned more with the first research question. The themes that emerged regarding similarities were:

1. Strong support system
2. Feeling no use or need for counseling

Strong support system.

Each of the participants expressed appreciation for their support system when they returned home from prison. The support system, in the form of family and friends, provided a resource for guidance, motivation, housing and even financial support.

According to Brandon:

I mean...because of my father who helps me from time to time I'm able to stay head above water...but if not for his help...I'd be in trouble and probably back in jail. It feels like sometime this is an un-winnable war...if not for my mom and dad...I'd be homeless because I can't afford an apartment with the little money I make.

Brandon also stated later in the conversation the importance of his family emotionally:

You know sometimes I just get frustrated and pissed off with my situation. Sometimes I just wanna quit and just disappear. But my parents and my kids always motivate me to keep going. They keep me from going crazy. This system is so messed up and crooked...you feel like you're losing no matter what you try. But my family...they keep me focused...and give me a lot of emotional support.

Similar to Brandon, Ryan felt his family was a big support system. As he stated:

My mom has been a real helpful since I got home. She takes me to work and picks me up. She even gives me money from time to time when she sees I'm struggling. I thank God for her but feel bad sometimes when she has to help me out because...you know...she's my mom...I'm supposed to be helping her out and giving her money from time to time. Not the other way around...and she's struggling just as much as I am...so...I don't know...it's just crazy sometimes.

As the conversation continued I asked Ryan how it feels having his mom to support him financially even though she is struggling, he stated:

Man...makes me feel like a burden. You know...I'm a grown fucking man and I have to ask my mom for money. Make me feel like a 5 year old kid all over again man. Fucking embarrassing.

As Henry mentioned, while in prison, his family was an important support system as well.

Hell yea. If it wasn't for my family...my mom....my sisters...coming to see me it would've been very hard time to do. But luckily they were there to support me...encourage me...keep me focused on trying to stay out of trouble so I could come home.

Additionally, the fathers identified the support system they came home to was key in keeping them focused and out of trouble. According to Henry:

A lot of people don't understand it....but what you going back home to dictates a lot...you know. As far as your surrounding and if you got a support system...I know for me that was a huge factor for the reason why I was able to readjust so quickly...because of my family and because I was able to find work so soon. Otherwise...I probably would've ended back up in prison...or back hustling...you know.

Feeling no use or need for counseling.

None of the fathers in the study indicated a need for counseling. Even though, since returning home they all reported experiencing frustration, feelings of low self-esteem, and hopelessness, the need or use of counseling was not a priority. As part of the requirement of being a client with the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, the fathers were required to attend weekly group sessions. During these group sessions, the fathers discussed their jobs, the relationship with their children and any problems they were currently experiencing. The fathers reported the meetings were beneficial for the connection with the other fathers but not for the counseling aspect. As Ryan stated:

Uhhhh....through the fatherhood program I do the weekly group sessions but that's about it. Other than that...nah. Going to those are aiight...I get to see other fathers going through the same non-sense I'm going through and that's a relief. To know it's not just me.

Ryan also indicated that counseling was not a concern when he got home:

Yea...if it don't involve finding a new job or making more money...I'm not really interested in it. And honestly....if I did want to go to counseling...how could I afford it?

Unlike Ryan, Brandon was required to attend counseling as part of his sentence.

However, as he reported, he did not receive it while in prison. As he stated:

Yea...as part of my sentence because of my drinking and time in the military the judge ordered that I had to do counseling while in prison. I was like ok...whatever. But when I got inside I never received it. All I had was a quick meeting with one of the counselors...he asked me a few questions and was like, "well, I don't think you need counseling...you seem ok." And that was it, I never received any counseling while in there. I attend AA groups for my drinking...and that was ran by the prisoners. Other than that...nah.

When asked about the possibility of counseling once they returned home from prison,

Henry stated:

Nah....man. I ain't felt like I needed it...I could have used some direction...but once I got home....getting a job was what I was focused on and all I cared about.

Due to the need to provide and try to find a stable source of income, the fathers reported they did not have the time or money to attend counseling even if they thought it might be beneficial. According to Henry:

No. Like counseling and therapy is not on my mind...you know...just grinding and making moves.

As the conversation continued, Henry discussed counseling further. He stated:

Counseling seems like a waste of time for me right now. If I attended counseling I might have to miss time from work which means less money. My focus right now is working and making money. Now if I could find counseling that was free and maybe closer to where I live at...I might think about it. But other than that...I don't see a purpose. You know as the man your goal is to provide and protect...I don't see how counseling...therapy...or whatever you wanna call it...can help me with that.

As mentioned earlier, the fathers in this study reported no need for counseling because of their focus on finding a job. Attending counseling for help is not a priority they identified as an immediate need right now.

Summary

The purpose of conducting the current study was to explore the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since returning home from prison while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. I sought to gain insight into how convicted fathers' criminal record affected their lives and the relationship with their children. Furthermore, I interviewed three fathers that were clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition and used the research questions to allow the fathers to provide feedback on their experiences post-release. Results from the interviews and data analysis showed the fathers overall had similar experiences. The fathers reported experiencing difficulty finding sustainable employment, relying heavily on their family and friends as a support system, and experiencing daily struggles in maintaining a relationship with their children, which strongly depended on the relationship they had with the mothers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The current study explored the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since their reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Three participants took part in three interviews each along with a view of their case files to provide further context and background information. The goal of this study was to (a) explore the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since their reentry into society, (b) in sharing their experiences, examined how convicted African-Americans fathers described the relationship with their children, and (c) compared the overall experiences of the convicted African-American fathers for similarities or differences since their reentry into society. First, I explored how the lives of the convicted African-American fathers have changed since returning home with a criminal conviction. Secondly, I examined the relationship between the convicted African-American fathers and the relationship with their children since returning home. Lastly, I explored the similarities or differences in the experiences of the convicted fathers since coming home from prison. Following is a brief discussion of the study results, limitations of the study, implications for practice, future research, and how the findings of my research add to the current literature in the field of counseling.

Overview of Findings

As presented in Chapter 4, the results of the study were presented in two parts to account for the individual and cross-case analysis that is part of conducting a multiple

comparative case study (Yin, 2014). For the individual case analysis, I used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977) as the theoretical framework to show the experiences of the fathers within the different levels of the ecological system. Secondly, for the cross-case analysis, I used the research questions for this study to gain further context into their experiences and the relationship with their children. Next, I will first briefly discuss the results of the individual case analysis.

Individual Case Discussion

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) as the theoretical framework for this study, I examined how the lives of the fathers changed through the different levels within the ecological system. For each level within the system, incarcerated fathers had different experiences in their lives since returning home from prison. Because of the stigma and barriers associated with a criminal conviction, the context and experiences of the convicted fathers changed. The fathers had issues with employment to overcome but also issues related to mental health or substance abuse issues because of their incarceration. Another challenge the fathers encountered is a condition referred to as prisonization (Sykes, 2007). Prisonization occurs when individuals develop a tough demeanor and view others with suspicion and distrust to survive prison (Sykes, 2007). This mental toughness may be necessary to sustain prison but can create problems once individuals return home and try to reestablish communication with their family and friends (Sykes, 2007). Therefore, upon release, the convicted fathers had trouble in reforming relationships with their children and family because of the experience and exposure to prison. Throughout our conversations the fathers mentioned having difficulty reconnecting with their children because of their inability to show

vulnerability or exhibit emotion. In order to survive prison the fathers had to create a tough external demeanor, but this same concept did not translate well to the outside world as they tried to reestablish communication with their children, family and friends.

Over the years, the Ecological Systems Theory (1977) has undergone a few changes and is now exists in different versions. Additionally, the theory also exists in different phases, which coincide with the development of the theory over time (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The first phase of this theory focused on the environmental changes and the implications of these changes on the individuals that live and grow in these environments. More specifically, this phase focused on the examination of the interrelations between the developing person and the changing in the micro and macro context (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The second phase highlighted human development and the role played by a person's characteristics in their development. In the third and current phase, which I used for this study, focuses on proximal processes. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), "human development is the process of reciprocal interaction between an active, developing biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols that are located within the immediate environment" (p. 25). To be effective, the vital interaction must occur on a consistent basis over a prolonged period (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These continued forms of interaction in the individual's immediate environment are the proximal processes. Examples of proximal processes include (a) group or solitary play, (b) learning new skills, (c) reading, and (d) performing complex tasks (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Simply stated, the concept of proximal processes means that as humans, we learn through mimicking others. We learn by ourselves from those around us by assimilating from their skills, habits, and insights. Through this

process, individuals not only learn how to develop motor skills but also learn behaviors of how to express pleasure, disappointment, and anger. When considering convicted African-American fathers, this concept is essential. While in prison, due to their environment, convicted fathers develop habits and expressions that are necessary to survive the environment of prison (prisonization). However, upon release, these same habits may not be suitable for reestablishing a relationship with their children and family. Therefore, convicted African-American fathers need to learn new habits and behaviors once they come home to be able to readjust to their new environment. Within each level of this theory, the fathers have experienced changes in their lives that have affected their experience since coming home. The level that experienced the most change due to the father's criminal record was the Microsystem.

Within the Microsystem, the fathers experienced differences in their employment outlook and overall outlook on life. Before incarceration, they had stable employment and income. However, after returning home and because of their criminal conviction, they struggled to find gainful employment that pays reasonable wages. The fathers reported frustration because of the minimum pay they received from their current employer. Their experience is similar to current statistics, which demonstrate, on average convicted felons take home 40% less pay annually when compared to individuals without criminal records (The Sentencing Project, 2016). Furthermore, upon release, the feeling of judgment and shame occurs often once convicted felons return home (Travis, 2005). The fathers feel a need to try to make up for past mistakes and continually trying to prove they are a not the same person (Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005).

Therefore, because of the inability to find sustainable employment, the fathers have issues with becoming financially stable and taking care of their children.

Within the mesosystem, each father reported issues trying to reconnect with their family members and friends since returning home. Likewise, the fathers also reported trying to stay away from negativity and any temptations that might send them back to prison such as selling drugs or other illegal activities. The exosystem also presented barriers for the fathers such as the stigma they felt convicted African-American fathers live with because of the way the media portrays them. The fathers reported feeling like “deadbeat fathers” or “absentee fathers” because of the way the media shaped their narrative and leaving them with no voice to advocate on their behalf. Lastly is the macrosystem, which had the biggest impact on the fathers. At this level, specific laws in place such as laws that prevent convicted felons from applying for housing or receiving government assistance are important reasons why the fathers lack financial stability or a positive outlook on life. If the fathers could get opportunities to apply for educational loans to get a college education or apply for government assistance to find decent and affordable housing, many of the barriers they are currently dealing with would not be a factor.

Hagedorn (2013) published a dissertation exploring the psychological perspective for convicted felons returning home from prison. In the study, the researcher reformatted Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory to account for the changes convicted felons encounter in their environment upon reentry. After a comparison of the model used in Dr. Hagedorn’s (figure 2) study, there are some similarities and differences the fathers of this study reported.

The first similarity is the difficulty the fathers reported in trying to reestablish a relationship with their family and friends has highlighted in the mesosystem. Each father reported their own degree of difficulty in trying to show their family they had changed. Likewise, within the exosystem the fathers reported difficulty trying to juggle new responsibilities of probation and hearings in court. For example, as stated earlier, Brian was currently on probation and had bi-monthly required visits with his probation officer. Moreover, due to issues with child support, Ryan often had to go to court, which at times became difficult to do due to his lack of transportation. After a thorough review of the interviews with the participants and a comparing the results with Hagedorn’s model, the only differences reported by the participants was no mention of any mental health or substance abuse issues once they returned home. As mentioned previously, each of the fathers upon reentry felt no need for counseling and did not see it as a priority once they returned home. Their focus was to find employment and reestablish their relationship with their children.

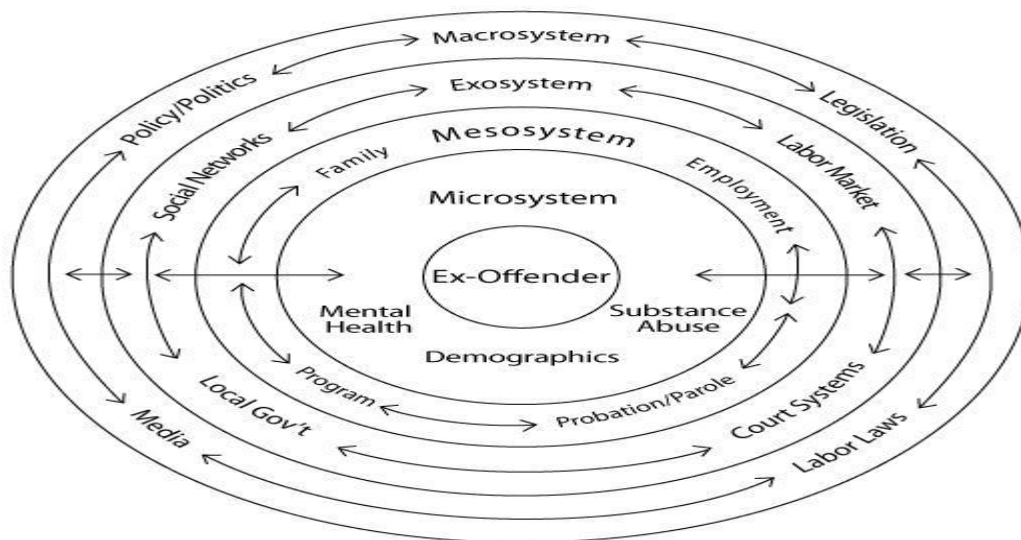


Figure 5.2 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model as Applied to Prison Reentry

Two of the fathers in this study were on child support. However, while in prison, their payments continued to accumulate even though they were in jail and not able to make payments. In addition, due to their limited income, they were unable to make lump sum payments towards their arrears to avoid jail time. This unfortunate circumstance is a result of their incarceration and current policies in place that does not allow changes to child support payments while the father is in jail. Incarcerated fathers with an established child support order are still legally required to make payments while in prison (Pearson & Grisworld, 2002). And since many courts rule that incarceration is a form of voluntary unemployment, the father is not allowed to have his child support order modified while incarcerated (Morgan, 1998) which can lead to substantial arrears that are owed once they are released (Wozniak, 1995). Researchers found that inmates with child support orders enter prison owing an average of \$10,543 in unpaid child support. While in prison, they accumulate another \$20,461 in child support debt, in addition to 12% interest and 6% penalties (Thoennes, 2002). The arrears create another barrier for convicted fathers that return home from prison with no savings or assets along with limited job training and work experience.

Individually and collectively, each participant in this study indicated different levels of frustration in their lives since returning home. Feelings of uncertainty were also prevalent throughout the interviews. Despite their hard work, dedication, and persistence, the participants reported they were continually encountering barriers. Although each of them had jobs, finding sustainable employment was difficult. Likewise, repeatedly trying to reconnect with family and friends and prove they had changed was an uphill battle.

Next, I will briefly discuss the results of the cross-case analysis, which highlighted the research questions for this study.

Cross-Case Discussion

The first research question examined the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers since returning home from prison while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. The primary themes that emerged are:

1. Lack of job training in prison and opportunities since returning home.
2. Lack of financial stability.
3. Feeling defeated and disappointed.

Overall, the fathers reported that the lack of job training opportunities offered in prison contributed to the limited employment options post-release. Because of their conviction and lack of training, there were not many sustainable jobs available to them. Their reported experience supports the literature, which indicates that incarceration restrains an individual's ability to attain work experience and diminishes their job skills (Holzer, Raphael, & Stroll, 2003). As a result, when incarcerated men return home they are likely to be involved in social groups that devalue employment in the traditional labor market (Hagan, 1993; Sullivan, 1989). They are also less likely to complete their education and enter secondary labor markets with employment opportunities related to minimum pay and strenuous manual labor (Hagan & Coleman, 2001; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Wilson, 1987) which is consistent with the experiences of the participants in this study.

The second theme that emerged from the first research question is the lack of financial stability. Throughout the study, fathers expressed thoughts of low self-worth

due to their inability to support themselves and their children financially. Furthermore, they reported feelings of shame for having to rely on their family members and friends for financial support. This feeling of reliance on others can cause a father to feel devalued and challenges their manhood (Pearson & Davis, 2003). Because of limited job opportunities, jobs with minimum pay and having to rely on others for support, individuals with criminal records are more likely to resort to illegal activities to gain financial stability (Visher, 2013).

The third theme that emerged is feeling defeated and disappointed. Throughout the study, the fathers recalled experiences of defeat and disappointment due to their current circumstances. Furthermore, because of their criminal record, they provided details of continuous instances of being devalued and disappointed due to missed opportunities. Researchers (Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Petersillia, 2003; Travis, 2005) show that released prisoners are not prepared to face the challenges of reentry. Convicted fathers when they return home often feel stress and overwhelmed (Huebner, 2005). They see so many barriers and obstacles in front of them and are not sure how to solve these problems or where to turn to for assistance (Visher, 2013). The task of trying to solve these problems cannot only lead to stress and disappointment but the potential for the onset of emotional and psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety (Dill, Mahaffey, Mosley, Treadwell, Barkwell, & Barnhill, 2016) which can play a significant role in the fathers' ability to be able to reintegrate.

The second research question explored the relationship between the convicted African-American fathers and their children since returning home from prison while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. The primary themes that emerged are:

1. Relationship with mothers determines relationship with children.
2. Criminal record plays a role in vision fathers have for themselves in the lives of their children.
3. Children as motivation to stay out of trouble.

Throughout the study, the fathers reported the relationship with the mothers determined the relationship with the children. Moreover, participating fathers indicated the relationship with the mothers depended on their financial contribution. Because of the father's limited income, constant disagreements with the mothers occurred often and became worse over time. Fathers returning home from prison reported the main reason for conflict with the mother of their children is finances (Roy & Dyson, 2005). The fathers are not able to financially provide or contribute which leaves the mother to take care of the children by themselves (Showalter & Jones, 1980). In addition, researchers (Hannon, Martin, & Martin, 1984; Hariston, 2003) show that convicted fathers felt the mothers, to ensure they provided financially, used the children as "bargaining chips." This further created friction between the mother and father along with feelings of hate and discord that take years to repair (Hannon, Martin, & Martin, 1984; Hariston, 2003).

The second theme that emerged is the father's criminal record playing a role in the vision they have for themselves in the lives of their children. Because of their conviction and limited income, they reported they had no control over their children's lives. Their opinions did not matter in regards to significant issues with their children such as education or living arrangement. Often throughout the interviews, the fathers discussed feeling useless or like a "babysitter" and not a father. Overall, convicted fathers encounter ambiguous and conflicting messages about their duties and responsibilities as

parents when they return home (Roy & Dyson, 2005). They have no role of authority concerning their children and view the mothers as “gatekeepers” with all the control (King, 2003). Likewise, because of their conviction, convicted fathers have limited advantage when dealing with custody issues. Researchers (Lanier, 2003; Marisglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005) show that convicted fathers are likely to lose in custody battles primarily because of their criminal record. The judge perceives that the father can potentially return to prison, which can create an unstable home environment for the child.

Throughout the interviews, the fathers referenced their children as the number one priority and the reason they remained focused. Likewise, their children became a source of hope for the future. In fact, one father during our conversations stated he no longer had a positive outlook on his life but instead placed his hope in his children. The relationship between a convicted father and his children play a vital role in the father’s ability to reintegrate back into society (Bales & Mears, 2008; Hariston, 2002; Klein, Bartholmew, & Hibbert, 2002). Fathers who have a positive relationship with their children are likely to work more hours, pursue furthering their education, and are less likely to return to prison (Turner & Peck, 2002). Waller (2004) found that men in contact with their children at 6, 12, and 24 months after release were less likely to return to prison when compared to men not seeing their children at all. Due to their incarceration, convicted fathers reported feeling obligated to be in their child’s lives to make up for lost time (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Moreover, they indicated a need to redeem themselves and set a good example to make sure their children do not make the same mistakes (Arditti et al., 2005; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001).

The third research question focused on examining how the experiences of the convicted African-American fathers in this study were similar or different since their reentry into society. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there were no specific differences regarding the fathers and their experiences. The primary themes that emerged regarding similarities were:

1. Strong support system
2. Feeling no use or need for counseling

For each participant, their support system consisting of friends and family was vital in their reintegration. Without the support their family and friends, the fathers indicated they would likely be back in prison. Not only did the fathers discuss the emotional support they received from their family, but the financial support as well. In fact, one father lived with his family. He reported that without their financial support and providing him a place to stay, he would be homeless.

For individuals returning home from prison, their support network is vital to their success and avoiding criminal behavior (Johnson, Selber, & Lauderdale, 1998). In conjunction with providing support, family acceptance and encouragement is also vital for successful reentry. A study conducted in a New York prison found members of the sample that illustrated optimistic attitudes about their release felt acceptance from their family for their past mistakes (Nelson et al., 1999). There is limited current research that explores the success of formal support systems for returning prisoners such as reentry programs. However, for convicted fathers returning home, multiple avenues of support (informal and formal) is necessary to help them reintegrate and reestablish a relationship with their children (Visher, 2013).

Although convicted fathers do benefit from a support system of family and friends, throughout the study, the fathers also mentioned having to disconnect from former friends because they participated in illegal activities. Likewise, although the fathers were grateful for the support they received from family, they reported at times their family doubted them. It is common among released prisoners to feel burdened with having to prove themselves to family and friends (Naser & Visher, 2006). The fathers in this study described examples of family and friends questioning them and doubting their intentions. Although the fathers in this study were grateful for their support system, seeking forgiveness was be a demanding process.

The use of counseling was not a concern for the fathers in this study. The primary goal of the fathers was finding employment, which they reported was more critical and necessary. In their eyes, finding sustainable employment was more urgent versus seeking counseling for any emotional pain they were experiencing. Although the fathers in this study were not interested in counseling, individuals returning home from prison are more prone to have mental health issues (Turney, Wildeman, & Schnittker, 2012). Many health consequences have been correlated to incarceration including hypertension (Wang et al., 2009), functional limitations (Schnittker & John, 2007), poor self-rated health and stress-related diseases (Massoglia, 2008). These health consequences seem likely when considering the number of stressors convicted felons endure once they come home including finding a job and trying to reestablish their lives. Turney, Wilderman, and Schnittker (2012) examined the link between depression along with economic and social integration for inmates returning home. The researchers determined that fathers returning home to financial stability had greater success with social integration. In contrast, fathers

returning home lacking financial stability had a strong likelihood of exhibiting symptoms of depression. Additionally, fathers with less financial stability post-release are likely to show signs of physical ailment such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease (Pearlin et al., 2007).

Due to incarceration, convicted felons also experience a psychological condition commonly known as prisonization (Sykes, 2007). This concept refers to the ways inmates cope with the prison environment by, “suppressing weakness and emotional vulnerability in favor of an impassive, strong appearance” (Turney, Wilderman, & Schnittker, 2012, p. 102). To survive prison, they view others with distrust and suspicion (Toch & Adams, 2002). Although these feelings of mistrust, anger, and toughness are necessary to survive prison, once an individual comes home and tries to reintegrate, this can create additional barriers.

A theory that relates to this experience is Stress Process Theory (Pearlin, 1989). This theory suggests stressors emerge from specific social contexts associated with the experiences of low-income, marginalized groups such as going to prison. As described in this theory, incarceration becomes a source of stress proliferation, which is, “the expansion or emergence of stressors within and beyond a situation whose stressfulness was initially more circumscribed” (Pearlin et al., 1997, p. 223). According to this theory, a primary stressor triggers the emergence of secondary stressors. In regards to this study, incarceration is the primary stressor that triggers secondary stressors such as lack of financial stability and difficulty in reestablishing a relationship with their children. Even after release, the secondary stressors from incarceration are likely to grow and intensify.

Understanding these stressors is important when considering fathers returning home as they try to reestablish communication and trust with their children and family.

Limitations of Study

As with all research, there were limitations to this study. The first limitation of this study was the limited number of participants. The recommended amount of participants for conducting a comparative or multiple case study is three to five (Yin, 2014). Due to the participants that were unwilling to participate, I was only able to recruit three. For the participants that were not willing to participate, a number of them reported feeling uncomfortable sharing private and personal information. As the researcher, I attempted to alleviate these concerns by explaining to them their participation was voluntary and they could refuse to answer questions or end involvement in the current study at any time. For each participant that participated, copies of the transcribed and coded interviews were available for them to review and clarify to ensure I conveyed their experiences in the right context. Furthermore, because I only collaborated with one organization to recruit participants, the findings of this study were not applicable across all disciplines in the field of counseling and conclusions drawn from this study cannot represent the experiences of all convicted African-American fathers.

A further limitation of this study was the potential for interaction between the researcher and participant influencing their answers to the interview questions. As an African-American male interviewing other African-American men, coming from a similar background, my presence may have altered the participants' responses to the interview questions, which may have affected the overall findings of this study. Through

rapport building and repeated contact through phone and text, I tried to help the participants feel more relaxed to receive honest feedback.

The final limitation of this study was my subjectivity and personal biases to the research topic and participants. When conducting qualitative research, the data appears through the researcher's lens and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). My personal experience as an African-American male growing up in poverty with friends and family members that are convicted fathers may have influenced my interpretation of the data obtained from the interviews and participant files. Additionally, my clinical experience as a social worker working with individuals from the similar backgrounds may have also played a role in the way I interpreted and presented the data. Through the process of journaling and peer debriefing I was able to view my thoughts and receive feedback from colleagues regarding my interpretation of the data.

Through this study, there were two challenges I faced in order to implement it. The first challenge was coordinating the times for the interviews with the participants. Each of the fathers in this study had full-time jobs so coordinating a reasonable time to meet with them to do the interviews was a tedious process. Most of the interviews took place at the library but for one for one of the participants, I had to do the final interview at their place of employment. Another challenge was coordinating a time to meet with the caseworkers to view the participant files. To try to alleviate this I would come to the agency either early in the morning before the caseworkers started meeting with their clients or late in the afternoon once the office was closed and the clients were not present. Overall, each of the caseworkers had busy schedules but was flexible in letting me come to the agency and view their files.

Implications

Counselor Education

The results of this study implied that convicted African-American fathers' criminal records contribute to a loss of opportunities to find gainful employment and difficulty in regaining a parenting role in the lives of their children. This finding was noteworthy and provided further understanding for counseling students into the experiences of this marginalized group. Furthermore, an understanding of the systemic barriers in place that makes it difficult for convicted African-American fathers to regain their lives and find financial stability.

Currently, the United States incarcerates more individuals than any other developed country in the world (Prison Policy, 2016); with this in mind, there is a likely chance counseling students may encounter clients with criminal records. Therefore, it would be beneficial to include more knowledge in coursework that discusses the experiences of individuals with criminal records. For example, counselor educators can dedicate an entire lesson plan or discussion to help increase student's awareness of the experiences of convicted African-American fathers. Alternatively, requiring an advocacy project based on gaining more insight into the criminal justice system and the experiences of convicted fathers that would (a) help students gain more knowledge about issues related to convicted fathers through research and practice experience, and (b) potentially gain students interest in understanding the importance of advocacy. Likewise, have speakers, non-profit organizations and counselors that are familiar with this population speak to students to provide more context and understanding. In conjunction, instructors could ask students to watch documentaries that give more insight into United States criminal justice

system and the experiences of convicted fathers once they return home. Moreover, through teaching these topic counselor educators can help counseling students become more culturally competent and more comfortable with viewing and understanding these fathers from their contextual perspective (Vontress, 2005).

For counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators, understanding the experiences of convicted African-American fathers can help students better understand the worldview of clients that come from a different background. Because the experiences of convicted African-American fathers is a topic not often taught in counseling courses, being uneducated about this particular group of individuals puts counselors at risk of not knowing the barriers and empirical research that are available. Furthermore, addressing the needs of diverse clients to improve their overall well-being is one of the primary duties of counselors and the counseling profession (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). These values align with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), which discusses the importance of counselors advocating and addressing obstacles that may potentially hinder the growth of clients (A.7.b) and recognizing the community resources and support networks that can play a role in the successful reintegration of convicted African-American fathers upon release (A.1.d). Therefore, counselor, supervisors, and counselor educators have an ethical responsibility to become more educated on the experiences of this marginalized group to inform clients, supervisees, and students.

Counseling Practice

The findings of this study have substantial implications for counselors working with convicted African-American fathers and their children. For example, because of the

lack of job opportunities available for convicted fathers once they return home, they may become frustrated and begin to have feelings of low self-worth. If left unacknowledged; the fathers may begin to experience depression, anxiety or other health-related issues. Additionally, the experience of prison can cause fathers to become less emotional, unable to relate and feel socially uncomfortable in public settings (Dill, Mahaffey, Mosley, Treadwell, Barkwell, & Barnhill, 2016). Through counseling and well-informed counselors, the fathers can become better equipped to handle life outside of prison and have a better chance of successful reintegration.

For school counselors, this study can provide a better understanding of the effect that incarceration of the father has on children. While incarcerated, the quality of the father-child relationship can suffer due to distance and lack of contact (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998). The involvement of fathers in the lives of their children shows an overall improvement in the child's mental health capacity (Lamb, 1997). However, the absence of the father can cause children to exhibit aggressive behavior, lack of effort in schoolwork, and difficulties in expressing emotions (Tripp, 2001). For school counselors working with children of incarcerated fathers, this study can provide guidance and more information into the effect incarceration has on the child that is without their father to provide support and guidance.

Upon release, fathers may experience a rough transition to "family life" once they experience the harsh reality of prison (Day, Acock, Bahr, & Arditti, 2005). Their identity as a father may take time to resurface, and this transition can be difficult for the fathers and children alike (Tripp, 2001). Likewise, a secure family connection and support system play an essential role in the transition of incarcerated fathers (Berg &

Huebner, 2011; La Vigne, Visher & Castro, 2004; Sullivan, Mino, Nelson, & Pope, 2002). For marriage and family counselors this study can assist in understanding and assisting families of incarcerated fathers on the potential barriers that may await them upon release. Additionally, help families to understand the importance of maintaining contact with the fathers while incarcerated to provide support and ease their transition back home.

Upon release, convicted fathers deal with many barriers and obstacles they have to overcome which include finding sustainable employment, reestablishing a relationship with their children, and trying to maintain a positive relationship with the mother of their children (Naser & Visher, 2006). To the counselor undereducated about the barriers and experiences of convicted fathers, the client may present as resistant to treatment, which can influence how the counselor interacts with the client in regards to goal setting and treatment planning. For counselors being knowledgeable about the experiences of this population can help to address these issues and find effective strategies and interventions to help these fathers deal with the stress and stigma of being a convicted felon. Additionally, for counselors understanding the importance of theories within multiculturalism can better address issues of social justice, privilege, and oppression (Jun, 2010) that convicted fathers deal with on a daily basis.

When working with convicted African-American fathers, counselors must also consider the importance of finding employment. Upon release, convicted felons focus is finding a job, taking care of their children, and reestablishing their parental role as provider. The focus of convicted fathers is to find employment, which makes counseling, not a priority. Each of the fathers in this study reported often the importance of finding a

job once they returned home. Finding employment was the priority and counseling was not and viewed as something that was not a necessity. As counselors, we must be aware of this and be equipped to provide resources and services that may help convicted fathers find employment opportunities. For example, knowing local community agencies that help convicted felons find employment. Likewise, counselors should expect convicted fathers to feel instances of frustration and anger at the lack of job opportunities available. Counselors can also teach these fathers different techniques to deal with frustration and pressure as they search for employment and work on rebuilding the relationship with their family and children. Techniques such as journaling can be helpful and provide a positive and therapeutic way for these fathers to voice their anger and frustration.

Research

To gain more understanding of the experiences of convicted African-American fathers, more analysis must occur in regards to the barriers these fathers face upon release and the impact incarceration has on the relationship with their children. While there is research available that discusses the parental effect incarceration has on children (Bilchik, Seymour, & Kreisher, 2001; Johnston & Gabel, 1995; Moses, 1997), minimum research exists within the counseling profession that discusses the impact a criminal conviction has on African-American fathers post-release. Likewise, there is a need for further research to explore the emotional and psychological impact a criminal record has on convicted fathers once they return home.

There is also the need for more research to discuss the systemic barriers in place including current laws and policies that make the transition home for convicted African-American fathers stressful and overwhelming. Likewise, more research on the

experiences of convicted fathers from different demographic backgrounds such as Hispanic, Caucasian or even Native American. Furthermore, researchers can examine the impact of a criminal record on convicted African-American fathers from a quantitative perspective. For example, having convicted fathers complete a survey or questionnaire exploring their experiences since returning home can help to generalize these findings and not exclude it to one specific demographic group.

Additionally, research can focus on the experiences of the convicted fathers from different qualitative research designs. For example, using an ethnographic research design, researchers can explore the culture of convicted African-American fathers by understanding shared meanings within the group. Conducting ethnographic research requires extensive participant observation and interviewing (Glesne, 2011). However, the researcher can develop thick descriptions needed for getting to know how people within this group construct and share meaning. Future qualitative research can gain insight into this group by employing a participatory action research design (PAR). Through this method, the researcher works with fathers collaboratively to educate and empower them on better understanding their situation (Glesne, 2011). Furthermore, the researcher assists the group in generating and analyzing information to transform their thinking and gain a better understanding of their reality (Kendon, 2005). Overall, the goal of future research should focus on changing the narrative when thinking of convicted African-American fathers to show these fathers are not “deadbeat dads” or lazy but just dealing with barriers and obstacles that are hard to overcome.

Lastly, future researchers should focus on the importance of building rapport with the clients before conducting the interviews. Due to time constraint, I was not able to get

to know the participants and get more information on their background and lives before incarceration. Through the process of rapport building, future researchers can potentially gain more insight from the participants due to their comfort level. Although I do feel the participants had a reasonable level of comfort in discussing their lives with me, if I had more time to get to know them there is more information I could have received to strengthen this study and gain further understanding of their experiences.

The criminal justice system in America is in need of a revamp and overhaul. Despite current reforms such as the elimination of mandatory sentencing for non-violent drug offenses, the American prison system still incarcerates more individuals than any other country in the world (Marbley & Ferguson, 2005). There needs to be a change in the criminal justice system that focuses more on rehabilitation and less on punishment. Likewise, there needs to be more programs and initiatives that focus on preparing inmates for their release, so they are equipped with the necessary skills to survive life outside of prison. Currently, there are still laws in place in states such as Arkansas, South Carolina, and Texas that permit individuals with criminal records from receiving federally funded public assistance such as food stamps and public housing. Resources like federally funded assistance programs are essential for convicted felons when they return home to provide sustainability as they look for employment. Policy makers need to reevaluate these laws and policies to ensure resources and services are available for inmates post-release to reduce barriers and provide support.

There have been some policy changes for convicted felons at the state and federal level. For example, South Carolina signed into law the Omnibus Crime Reduction and Sentencing Reform Act in 2010. This law is a package of sentencing and institutional

reforms to slow the growth of South Carolina's prison population. The purpose of the law is to divert non-violent offenders away from prison and instead place them under the supervision of the Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardon Services. Because of this law, there is a decrease in incarceration in South Carolina, which has saved the state an estimated \$491 million. In 2008, the Obama Administration created the Second Chance Act to improve the outcomes for people returning to communities from prisons and jails. The purpose of the act is to reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and assist states in addressing the growing population of inmates returning home. The policy focuses on four areas: jobs, housing, substance/mental health abuse treatment, and families. The policy intends to help inmates find employment, affordable housing, treatment services and ensure the inmate-family relationship remains intact while incarcerated and upon release. As an incentive to encourage employees to hire convicted felons, the federal government created the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). This initiative provides federal tax income benefit for businesses who hire individuals from specific target populations. The qualifying target populations include vocational rehabilitation clients, temporary assistance for needy families' recipients (TANF), and recently released felons. As part of the program, employers can receive a tax credit ranging from \$2,400 to \$9,600. Currently, the state of South Carolina participates in the program as part of the Department of Employment and Workforce.

There is also a need for more policies and laws that focus on the expungement process. An expunged record makes it easier for convicted felons to find employment (Marbley & Ferguson, 2005). It provides them access to more employment opportunities, educational, financial assistance, the right to vote, and the ability to apply for government

assistance. Currently, the expungement process is time-consuming requiring a convicted felon to get a signed petition, maintain stable employment and pay a processing fee. Additionally, depending on the conviction and the state where the crime took place, the expungement can cost up to \$1,000. In South Carolina, the expungement process costs up to \$500 and can take up to a year to complete. There needs to be a more streamlined expungement process that is less time consuming and more affordable. For each of the fathers in this study, having the opportunity to expunge their record would give them a new outlook on life. They would be able to apply for jobs and have better chances of getting better paying jobs, which would help them to become more sustainable. In addition, they would not have to settle for the jobs they have now which required strenuous manual labor but minimum pay.

Reentry programs for inmates are essential in providing needed assistance for inmates after they return home (Travis, Robinson, & Solomon, 2002). However, there is also a need for more reentry programs that operate systematically and collaboratively. Reentry programs need to collaborate with businesses, colleges and universities, faith-based institutions, and communities to provide opportunities for inmates to find employment and become contributing taxpaying citizens. One example of a reentry program is the “Second Chance” program located at the Manning Correctional Institution in South Carolina. This program houses inmates six months before their release and teaches prisoners how to write resumes, apply for jobs, and prepare for interviews. The inmates can also receive daily visits from family and friends. The program started in 2014 and had more than 500 participants that have gone through the program, and many were able to find jobs post-release.

Likewise, in California, San Quentin Prison offers college-level education for inmates through an in-prison college program. Through this program, inmates can earn college credits and a college degree that can be extremely helpful upon release. Researchers (National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 2013) found that in-prison college education programs efficiently lower the recidivism rate and inmates who receive a college degree while in prison stay crime-free longer versus those who did not participate in the program. Louisiana has a Re-Entry Court program designed for younger inmates to learn a trade that includes plumbing, welding, and culinary arts. The inmates in the program also receive a certificate to confirm their hours of training for employers. Pioneer Human Services, a program in Washington State, provides services for convicted felons, which include treatment for substance abuse, housing, job training, job interview training, apprenticeships, employment opportunities and assistance-getting driver's license and voting rights back. There is a need for programs like these throughout the country that offers a multitude of services for inmates to help them transition back home. Each of the fathers in this study had no contact with any reentry programs offered. Although each of them attended the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition as a client, this agency was not a reentry program. With the assistance of a reentry program, the fathers could possibly have a better chance to find employment and seek other resources such as housing or mental health counseling.

There is also a need for policies that allow inmates with a child support order to alter their payments while in jail. While incarcerated, inmates with a child support order accumulate arrears and are unable to modify the order while incarcerated (Pearson & Davis, 2003). Some states have begun to adopt a multi-agency collaboration to assist

imprisoned fathers with child support issues. For example, the state of Washington has a reintegration team comprised of the Department of Social Services, Department of Probation and Parole, and the Bar Association that focuses on creating a plan for inmates before their release, which includes support services for child support. In Illinois, the child support agency along with a program called the Safer Foundation provide fathers assistance with child support modifications to ensure their child support obligations match their earning and ability to pay. In South Carolina, the Fatherhood Coalition, a state program funded by the Fatherhood Initiative, provides services specifically for fathers with a criminal record and or issues with child support by working with the local courts to modify payments to avoid jail time. Two of the fathers in this study (Ryan and Brandon) were on child support. However, Ryan was the only one that consistently went to jail due to the arrears he owed in child support. Through the assistance of the Fatherhood Coalition program, he was able to avoid jail time and the judge was more lenient with his case. Nevertheless, despite their help, Ryan still owed a substantial amount in arrears, which made it hard to pay with the minimum income he received from his job working at the car wash.

Finally, there is a need for more programs and initiatives to help sustain the relationship between the child and incarcerated father. A positive father-child relationship for convicted fathers can provide the father motivation and support to stay out of trouble. Researchers (Emory, 2018) have found the incarceration of the father increases the chances of children exhibiting aggressive or externalizing behavior. Likewise, children of convicted fathers are more prone to feel shame or embarrassment because of their father's criminal record (Visher, 2013). In New Jersey, the Department of Corrections

adopted a parenting curriculum called Active Parenting Now. The course, which is specifically for incarcerated fathers, emphasizes the importance of encouragement and authoritative parenting. It also aims at cultivating children's self-esteem, responsibility, and cooperation. The RIDGE Project, located in Ohio, provides inmates with subsidized telephone service and letter-writing supplies that allows fathers to continue contact with their children while in prison. Similarly, in South Dakota, the Department of Social Services along with the Department of Corrections gives incarcerated fathers the opportunity to create video diaries their children can watch from home to maintain communication. More funding and new initiatives must continue to preserve the relationship between incarcerated fathers and their children. It not only provides a father a way to stay in contact with their children, but it also create a safeguard for children to know that their fathers miss them, even while in prison.

The findings from this study confirmed previous studies by researchers (Visher, 2013; Fulcher, 2012; Alexander, 2010; Turney, Wildeman, & Schnittker, 2012) which show that despite the changes in policies, new initiatives and available programs, convicted African-American fathers are still a marginalized group facing a number of barriers post-release. The lack of sustainable job opportunities in conjunction with the inconsistent communication with their children creates a difficult situation for these fathers when they return home.

This study adds to the literature in many ways. First, this study explored the experiences of convicted African-American fathers once they return home, while previous researchers (Roy & Dyson, 2005; Turner & Peck, 2002, Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998, Tripp, 2001; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Lange, 2001) only studied the

experiences of fathers while incarcerated. Secondly, this study added to the current literature by focusing specifically on convicted African-American fathers and not convicted fathers in general. Lastly, the findings of this study add to the counseling literature by showing the impact the relationship between the convicted father and the mother has on the contact between the father and their children. Fathers that participated in this study reported frustration at the lack of sustainable job opportunities but were thankful for their children and the support system consisting of their family and friends. I hope this study added to the counseling literature by shedding light on the experiences of these fathers. Through consistent exposure, education, and advocacy, these fathers can begin to regain their lives and no longer feel like second-class citizens.

Conclusion

Results from the current study indicated that convicted African-American fathers have many barriers to overcome once they return home. Additionally, due to their criminal conviction, the father-child relationship is impacted. Because of this study, there are a number of things I know now that I did not know before conducting this study. First, I was not aware of the issues with child support that existed for convicted African-American fathers. Secondly, I was not aware of the limited opportunities convicted felons have in regards to access to government assistance and the ability to apply for educational loans to attend college.

Counselor and counselor educators should further educate counseling students on this marginalized group and ways they can be empowered. For these same reasons, supervisors and counselors who work with convicted African-American fathers or their children should also gain more insight into the daily frustrations and obstacles this group

endures on an individual and systemic level. Researchers should continue to examine this area from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective to disseminate the findings to the counseling profession for of education and exposure. The hope is through further research and education, this marginalized group receives better treatment, counseling, and support.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH FATHERS

Interview #1: Fathers' lives before incarceration:

Microsystem

1. What was your outlook on life?
2. What were your career goals?
3. Did you have any mental health or substance abuse issues?

Mesosystem

1. What was the relationship like with your children?
2. What was the relationship like with your family and friends?
3. Were you employed? What kind of job did you have?
4. What was your living situation like?

Exosystem

1. Before incarceration, have you ever been involved with the criminal justice system?
2. What were your hobbies, do you participate in any activities?
3. Did you receive any governmental assistance? If so, what kind?
4. Did you participate in any counseling? If so, what was the reason and how often?

Macrosystem

1. What were your thoughts regarding individual's with criminal records and the legal system?
2. How did you think the media represented or reported on individuals with criminal records?
3. Did you know of any laws or policies that made it difficult for felons to get jobs, vote, etc?

Interview #2: Father's lives after incarceration:

Microsystem

1. What is your outlook on life?
2. What are your career goals?
3. Do you have any mental health or substance abuse issues?

Mesosystem

1. What is the relationship like with your children?
2. What is the relationship like with your family and friends?

3. Are you employed? What kind of job do you have?
4. What is your living situation like?

Exosystem

1. Since returning home, have you been involved with the criminal justice system?
2. What are your hobbies, do you participate in any activities?
3. Do you receive any governmental assistance? If so, what kind?
4. Do you participate in any counseling? If so, what was the reason and how often?

Macrosystem

1. What are your thoughts regarding individual's with criminal records and the legal system?
2. How do you think the media represents or reports on individuals with criminal records?
3. Do you know of any laws or policies that are making it difficult for felons to get jobs, vote, etc?

Interview #3: Overall Thoughts and Reflection

1. What has the biggest change in your life since returning home?
2. Did prison have any effect on your personality or identity as a father?
3. Did you receive any counseling while in prison? If so how often?
4. Since returning home, have you received any counseling, if so how often? Has it been beneficial?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

My name is Douglas Bates, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. In partial fulfillment of my degree requirements, I am conducting a dissertation study. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of convicted African-American fathers since their reentry into society while clients at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. In particular, I am aiming to examine the potential barriers that convicted African-American fathers face in trying to reestablish their lives and maintain a relationship with their children. I believe that you, being incarcerated, an African-American father and a client at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, will bring a valuable perspective that can lead to a greater understanding of this particular group. Therefore, I am inviting you to participate in this study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in three (3) interviews. The interviews will focus on your experiences as a convicted African-American father and the impact incarceration has had on your well-being and relationship with your children. In addition, with your permission and the permission of the staff at Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, I will review your case files for information related to this study.

The individual interviews will take place at a time and place that you and I agree on as convenient which will more than likely be at the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition or local public library. Each interview should last between 60 and 90 minutes. Each of the interviews will be audio recorded so that I can make certain to accurately represent what you have shared with me. I am the only person who will have access to, or listen to, the recordings.

During this study, you will not be required to answer any questions with which you are uncomfortable. Your participation is confidential. The data that I gather during the study will be kept in a secure location in my laptop that is password protected. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will always remain concealed in all presentations of this work.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to participate. If you decide to participate in the study, you may quit at any time

during the research process. I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study.

As an incentive for participating, for each interview you will receive a \$25.00 visa gift card. After each interview you complete, you will receive a \$25.00 visa gift card that will total to \$75.00 (\$25.00 for 3 interviews). If you would like to participate, please contact me at the phone number or email address listed below.

Warm regards,

Douglas Bates, MSW
Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education and Supervision Program
Wardlaw College
(803)543-2605
batesds@email.sc.edu

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Printed Name of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Date