

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTHOOD ON INCARCERATED MEN:
AN ANALYSIS OF PRISON PROGRAM PARTICIPATION
AND RULE BREAKING IN A NATIONAL SAMPLE OF
INCARCERATED MEN

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Approximately two million children in the United States had a parent in prison or jail in 2012 (Sykes and Pettit 2014). More than half of incarcerated adults have minor children and forty-five percent report that their children lived with them prior to incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak 2010). The negative effect of parental incarceration on youths has been a topic of increasing interest among criminologists, social researchers, and scholars. In the past four decades, growth of the penal system in the United States has fractured the family unit, creating disadvantages such as instability, economic strain, and the termination of parental rights (Pettit and Western 2004; Foster and Hagan 2007; Wildeman 2010; Sykes and Pettit 2014).

A major focus within the ongoing discussion of parental incarceration has been on mothers (Clark 1995; Carlson 2009; Chambers 2009; and Villanueva 2009). There has been less research about incarcerated fathers. In order to address this gap in the literature, I explore the impact of parenthood on the behavior of incarcerated fathers in prison. I compare the rates of rule breaking and prison program participation between incarcerated fathers and incarcerated non-fathers. Drawing from Hirschi's social bond theory (1969), I explore how the status of being a parent may influence the behavior of an incarcerated father while in prison. Recent research has studied the well-being of incarcerated parents and found that incarcerated parents are more distressed compared to incarcerated

non-parents (Roxburgh and Fitch 2013). This study emphasizes the importance of examining the implications of paternal incarceration and some of the consequences that follow.

Hirschi defines social bond theory “as aspects of social bonding which include attachment to families, commitment to social norms and institutions such as school or employment, involvement in activities, and belief that these things are important” (1969:16). Social bond theory consists of four specific components – attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. Attachment involves the values and norms associated with an individual’s social world. Commitment describes the level of obligation a person experiences in obeying the norms within their social world. Involvement describes the time and energy associated with socially acceptable and legitimate activities that inhibit deviant behavior. Belief focuses on the perception of correct and incorrect behavior derived from societal norms and values (Hirschi 1969). I argue that existing social bonds between incarcerated fathers and their children will affect their behavior while incarcerated. I expect the status of parent to have a positive effect on the behavior of incarcerated fathers compared with incarcerated men who are not fathers.

Applying social bond theory as the conceptual framework in analyzing parental status of incarcerated men may be useful in predicting behavioral outcomes such as prison program participation and rule breaking. The attachment that incarcerated fathers have with their children and families prior to incarceration, the commitment that they have internalized concerning their role, and the extent to which they were involved in the lives of their children may influence the behavior of a father in prison. Hairston’s (1998) study found that incarcerated fathers played an important role in the lives of their

children, as the majority of them had some responsibility for dependent children prior to incarceration. Many of these fathers provided nurturing roles in the lives of their children and lived with them prior to arrest. Hairston's (1998) research suggests that the components in Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory are important to fathering. I suggest that social bond theory may explain the behavior of incarcerated fathers compared with incarcerated men who are not fathers.

Literature Review

Effects of Paternal Incarceration on Children and the Family

Mass incarceration in the United States has swelled to dramatic proportions resulting in an estimated 2 million children with an incarcerated parent (Mumola 2006; Western 2010). More than half of the prisoners in the United States had custodial care of children less than 18 years of age at the time of incarceration (Glaze and Maruschak 2010). The children of these incarcerated fathers experience destabilized family relationships. Separation and limited contact make it difficult for incarcerated fathers to maintain family relationships, and correctional facilities are often far away from where the inmate lives which makes visitation impossible (Geller, Garfinkel and Western 2011).

Research examining relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children has found that in addition to challenges in maintaining contact through phone calls and mail, incarcerated fathers by definition are unable to participate in parenting responsibilities (Hairston 1998). Hairston also points out that many incarcerated fathers are dependent on financial support from their families while imprisoned, which undermines their role as provider. There are also long-term consequences of paternal incarceration on family life. Family studies report that the children and families of fathers

face diminished economic security as well as emotional challenges such as stigma, divorce and separation, that increases the likelihood of formerly incarcerated fathers living away from their children (Geller, Garfinkel and Western 2011).

The examination of the phenomenon of mass imprisonment has focused on women and children. This may be because, per the Bureau of Justice (2008), eighty-eight percent of incarcerated fathers report that their children are in the care of the mother, so attention had been drawn away from fathers. Conversations about parenting tend to concentrate on maternal responsibilities, more so than paternal responsibilities and because of this, little is known about how incarceration affects fathers who are separated from their children due to incarceration.

Scholars have examined the effect of former and current incarceration on families through studies of child-wellbeing, family functioning and marriage and divorce (Wildeman and Muller 2012). Marital stress and social stigma because of incarceration place families at a higher risk for separation and divorce (Geller, Garfinkel and Western 2011). The consequences of incarceration upon families and children is detrimental by all accounts. Research reports that children of incarcerated parents suffer from stigma, shame and exhibit increased levels of physical aggression and anti-social behaviors (Murray and Farrington 2008; Wildeman and Muller 2012).

Furthermore, studies have found that incarceration is related to problems that perpetuate inequality within family life. These include financial instability, delinquency and educational failure (Murray and Farrington 2005; Murray et al. 2012). These problems severely handicap the family and the structural inequality produced by incarceration along with the influences of the penal system fuel social and economic

disadvantage creating cumulative disadvantage (Western and Pettit 2010; Geller, Garfinkel and Western 2011). The consequences for children is that for many poor and disadvantaged children, parental incarceration has become common and significantly predicts social exclusion later in life (Foster and Hagan 2007).

In a study conducted using the National Study of Adolescent Health survey, Foster and Hagan (2007) identify patterns of social class and racial /ethnic disparities being reproduced by the intergenerational exclusion of children experiencing parental incarceration. They suggest that this process of disadvantage is initiated by a father's incarceration and socialization problems associated with a father's absence from the home due to incarceration such as low family income, unemployment and neglect. Per their findings, a father's incarceration has a direct impact on his children's educational detainment. In a similar study on the collateral consequences of parental incarceration (Foster and Hagan 2007), analysis concluded nearly half of all incarcerated fathers reported that they expected to be reunited with their children and families once released. Considering these findings, Foster and Hagan (2007) argue that support directed toward incarcerated fathers counterbalancing reentry difficulties may reduce recidivism. Support in the form of prison programming may prove to positively influence the behavior of incarcerated fathers enabling strong transitions in the process of re-entry.

Focus on Fathers

Criminal activity that results in incarceration in no way exempts men from parental responsibilities, although it does reduce their ability to meet these responsibilities (Prinsloo 2007). The status of being a parent does not suddenly vanish because a parent becomes incarcerated. The salience of parenting is found among

incarcerated fathers who have hopes and dreams for their children like fathers who are not incarcerated. Hairston (1998) specifically make this point in their study of incarcerated fathers and their relationships with their children. This research examines the parent-child relationship between incarcerated fathers and their children. They discuss the variations between societal perceptions and the real-life experiences of incarcerated fathers. Hairston suggests that child welfare policies inhibit incarcerated and formally incarcerated fathers' parenting abilities. They posit that supportive policies are needed to help incarcerated fathers rebuild and maintain parental relationships with their children.

The stresses associated with prison confinement have been studied to understand the experiences of incarcerated individuals (Sykes 1958). *The pains of imprisonment*, characterized by Sykes (1958), refers to the various forms of deprivation inmates encounter while imprisoned. These experiences of deprivation concerning freedom, family relationships, and services are important in explaining the behavior of incarcerated individuals (Adams 1992). Clearly, the available research suggests the importance of further examining paternal incarceration and how the father's involvement in the lives of their children matters even while incarcerated. Parental status among fathers deserves to be valued by society in such a way that is supportive among incarcerated fathers.

The Effect of Mass Incarceration on Fathers

The negative outcomes associated with parental incarceration upon children and family structure has been researched and discussed extensively throughout the literature, however fathers are an understudied group. Societal assumptions concerning incarcerated fathers imply that these men do not care about their children and are uninterested in parenting responsibilities (Mendez 2000). For example, public perceptions of parenting,

assumes that fatherhood is less important, given that the mother is more likely to be the primary caregiver (Hoffman, Byrd and Kightlinger 2010). The assumption is that imprisoned fathers are not invested in their role as parents. However, Edin and Nelson (2013) report through ethnographic research that the fathers studied, desired to be committed, responsible role models to their children. This research argued that society through policy changes must be challenged to support fathers who are trying to build relationships with their children.

The implications associated with incarcerated black fathers is important. Mass imprisonment disproportionately affects the lives of minorities. Pettit and Western (2004) suggest that for young black men residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods, incarceration has become normalized. Incarceration is a life event that can affect low-income, noncustodial fathers desire an ability to parent in a couple of different ways. Fathers with strong familial bonds prior to incarceration may experience a disruption causing strain between themselves, their children and their partner. Research conducted by Edin, Nelson and Paranal (2001) reports that this scenario will negatively impact the father's motivation toward rehabilitation, even reinforce criminal behavior. However, their research concludes that incarcerated fathers who had dysfunctional relationships with their children and partners prior to incarceration may be motivated through incarceration to rebuild broken relationships and address destructive behaviors prior to imprisonment.

The Social Bond and Parenting

Social bond theory suggests that the explanatory factors for deviant behavior are the result of a lack of commitment to conventional activities, lifestyle, and moral beliefs; thus, having weak social bonds can result in deviant conduct (Hirschi 1969).

Understanding the mechanisms that shape the familial relationships of incarcerated fathers can be instrumental in supporting the family structure. Family relationships are important for many incarcerated fathers as these will be the primary support they will have when they reintegrate into society (Dyer and McBride 2012). Strong social bonding with family members has the potential to positively affect incarcerated fathers. For example, Roxburgh and Fitch (2013) report that incarcerated fathers who have contact with their children while imprisoned experience less distress. Contact can strengthen the familial bonds and improve the fathers' commitment and attachment to their children resulting in positive post-release outcomes (Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris, and Fisher 2005).

The basic elements of attachment and commitment in the social bond theory suggest that incarcerated fathers may experience social bonding with their families and be internally committed to their status/role as parent. Feelings associated with social bonding can be a strong indicator of the types of behavior that incarcerated fathers will engage in while they are imprisoned. The prison experience may in turn function in a positive manner by initiating a change in behavior. Incarcerated fathers may be motivated to seek rehabilitative support that will change the behavior that resulted in their imprisonment. Fathers who had custodial care of their children prior to incarceration may be strongly motivated to correct deviant behavior that landed them behind bars. They may feel committed to returning to their families and regain the right to actively parent their children. I argue that parental status among incarcerated men motivates behavior toward seeking the benefits associated with prison programming.

Fatherhood Among the Incarcerated

Dyer, Pleck and McBride (2012) have examined the identities of fathers and concluded that while incarcerated the prison identity is at odds with what these men believe about their roles as fathers. Applying social bond theory, these men have attachments and feel commitments to the children they left behind. Therefore, noting the confusion that incarceration causes is important when considering what these men believe about their roles as fathers and observing their behavior while imprisoned. Research has found that incarcerated fathers perceive parenting behind bars to mean the ability to have contact with their children while incarcerated (Dyer et al. 2012). In other words, the respondents in this study identified parenting as having contact with their children. The association between parenting and contact was salient among these fathers.

The identity of parenthood for fathers in prison is problematic. Some incarcerated fathers choose to sever relationships with their families, believing that this is in the best interest of their children (Swisher and Waller 2008; Hairston 1998). Additionally, “the identities of fathers in prison are likely to be highly influenced by the norms of that institution” (Clarke et al. 2005:223). Although, being imprisoned might motivate fathers toward stronger familial commitments, the prison experience itself, consisting of restrictions and interactions with other inmates; make it difficult for incarcerated fathers to maintain parental identity and familial relationships (Waller and Swisher 2006). Furthermore, the ultra-masculine substructure, based on “emotional stoicism” (Muth and Walker 2013:294) which is necessary for surviving the prison environment, requires imprisoned fathers to exchange their family persona for a fighting persona (Marsiglio, Roy, and Fox 2005).

In a study of incarcerated fathers in England, Clarke et al. (2005) report that fathers indicated difficulty maintaining effective parenting and some of the respondents chose to detach from parenting because of the shame they felt about being imprisoned. This study concluded that the structure of the penal institution influences the identity of fatherhood in prison negatively and will jeopardize the re-entry process for fathers upon release. The separation may make a father feel alienated toward his children as a result of having been confined and unable to participate in active parenting. A solution to these outcomes may easily rest upon the availability of prison programming initiatives designed to support the parental status of incarcerated fathers. Although there have been prison programs supporting parenthood in women's prisons, few programming opportunities have been made available for male prisoners and their children (Morash, Haarr and Lila Rucker 1994).

Prison Programming

An innovative study called *The Presence Project* (Muth and Walker 2013) experimented with prison-based father-child biographical projects and journaling which yielded positive outcomes suggesting that incarceration did not have to represent an inactive or dormant period for fathers in prison. Research conducted on the impact of prison-based arts programs (Brewster 2014) reported that inmates involved in the programming showed positive outcomes reflecting self-confidence, greater emotional control, social competence and time management. According to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (Moses and Smith 2007), incarcerated individuals who were employed through private companies while incarcerated, secured jobs upon release more quickly

and had lower recidivism rates compared to those who worked in traditional correctional industries.

Programs such as the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP), created by Congress in 1979 encourages partnerships between local and state correctional facilities and private companies to provide ‘real life’ employment opportunities for prisoners (NIJ 2007). Programs such as these increase employable skills, and improve the life chances of prisoners establishing successful transitions related to re-entry. Participation in prison programming, can help incarcerated fathers address personal needs.

Most studies suggest that for male and female prisoners, program participation increases self-esteem, fills idle time, strengthens the ability to navigate within a prison environment and leads to less prison rule breaking behaviors (Gaes and McGuire 1985; Fagan 1989; Ryan and McCabe 1994; McCorkle, Miethe, and Drass 1995; Jiang and Winfree 2006). Studies have also indicated that inmates looking forward to release are invested in acquiring new skills as a chance for a fresh start and are less likely to be involved in rule violations (Jiang and Winfree 2006; McCorkle et al.1995). Moreover, existing research has found that prison programs involving a high percentage of educational, vocational, and industrial opportunities for inmates report lower rates of rule breaking behaviors (McCorkle et al. 1995).

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to compare the behavioral patterns of incarcerated fathers with incarcerated men who are not fathers. Does the behavior of incarcerated fathers differ from the behavior of incarcerated men who are not fathers? The main

objectives will be: (1) to examine whether parental status influences the behavior of incarcerated men measured by participation in prison programs and rule breaking; and (2) to determine how prior custodial care and contact with children while incarcerated influence the behavior of incarcerated fathers.

Hypotheses

H1: Incarcerated fathers are more likely to participate in prison programming than incarcerated men who are not fathers.

H2: Incarcerated fathers are less likely to participate in rule breaking behavior than incarcerated men who are not fathers.

H3: Incarcerated fathers who had custodial care of children prior to incarceration are more likely to engage in prison programming than incarcerated fathers who did not have custodial care prior to incarceration.

H4: Incarcerated fathers who had custodial care of children prior to incarceration are less likely to engage in rule breaking behavior than incarcerated fathers who did not have custodial care prior to incarceration.

H5: Incarcerated fathers who have contact with their children are more likely to participate in prison programming, compared with incarcerated fathers who have no contact with their children.

H6: Incarcerated fathers who have contact with their children are less likely to break prison rules, compared with incarcerated fathers who have no contact with their children.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Data

To examine how parental status affects the behavior in regards to prison program participation and rule breaking behavior of incarcerated men, I use secondary data from the Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities (2004). The Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities (SISCF) was administered on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) conducted by the Bureau of Census. The survey supplies national data about inmates under the supervision of state-operated custodial facilities. The data were obtained from October 2003 to May 2004 through personal interviews. Inmates in state facilities shared information about their family background and personal characteristics, prison activities, program participation, criminal history, current offense sentence, prior substance abuse/treatment programs, and use of weapons.

The survey included 225 state male prisons which were selected after a two-stage selection process was completed. In the first stage, prisons were randomly selected and in the second stage inmates were selected by a list provided by each facility. The list included all inmates who utilized a bed the previous evening. Inmates were assigned numerical values that corresponded to the list prepared by the facility. Thirteen thousand and ninety-eight male inmates were selected for inclusion in the study, and of those, 11,569 were interviewed. Prior to the interview, inmates were told that participation was voluntary, that all interview information would be kept confidential, and that the

information gathered would be used for statistical purposes with no participant identified in the survey results. This information was provided verbally and in writing. Interviews were about an hour in length and were completed with the assistance of computers that provided questions for the interviewer. The sample for this study consisted of 11,166 male respondents of these 8,131 answered the parental status question in the survey, with 5,830 indicating they were fathers.

Variables

Dependent Variables

In this study, I compare fathers with non-fathers and measure two variables that are proxies for commitment or level of involvement on the part of prison program participation and rule breaking. Prison Program Participation was measured by inmate's responses to a number of items that asked about a variety of types of prison programming. I measure four types of programs: vocational programming; educational programming; religious programming; life skill programming. Responses were coded with (1) if the respondent participated and (0) if they had not participated. Rule breaking was measured by survey questions in which inmates were asked about a series of specific custodial violations.

Based on the severity of the offense, I created two compound variables measuring serious violations, respectively. Serious violations included having been found guilty of or written up for; being in the possession of alcohol (5%), a weapon (7.2%), stolen property (2.5%), physical assault against another inmate (26%), or staff member (6%), and an 'other major violations' category (7.3%). Respondents who answered yes to the above statement were coded as (1) and (0) for those who answered no. Responses were

summed to form a major violations scale with a range of 0 to 6. For minor violations inmates were asked if they had ever been found guilty or written up for the following violations: verbal assault on an inmate (10%) or staff member (17.2%) possession of an unauthorized substance (27%) being out of place (30.2%) disobeying orders (47%) and an 'other minor violations' category (18.2%).

As for the measure of serious violations, respondents who answered yes to any of the violations were coded as (1) and (0) for those who answered no. All responses were summed to form a minor violation scale which ranged from 0 to 6.

Independent Variables

The status of fatherhood was derived from a question in the survey asking if the respondent had children, including adopted and stepchildren (I don't know why the survey included step-children). The question asked: *Do you have any children, including step or adopted children?* Parental status was coded (1) if the inmate answered yes and (0) if the answer was no. To measure custody, the survey question asked: *Now I am going to ask you some questions about your [children who are] currently under age 18. Were any of these children living with you just before your current incarceration?* Custody was coded (1) if the inmate answered yes and (0) if the inmate answered no.

The measure for contact between incarcerated fathers and their children was established by examining variables that measured the frequency of contact through mail, telephone calls, and visits. The questions included: (1) *since your admission to prison about how often have you made or received calls from any of your children? Would you say daily or almost daily, at least once a week, at least once a month, less than once a month, or never?* (2) *How often have you sent or received mail from any of your*

children? (3) How often have you been personally visited by any of your children?

Contact with children was coded (1) if the inmate reported receiving mail, phone calls or visits once a month or more and (0) if the inmate reported never receiving mail, phone calls or visits or experiencing these types of contact less than once a month.

Control Variables

A number of covariates were included in the analysis based on existing literature. These include age, length of sentence, whether the inmate is serving a life sentence, and whether the inmate had been convicted of a violent crime. Inmate age ranges from sixteen to eighty-four. Violent crime was coded (1) if the inmate answered yes and (0) if the inmate answered no, when asked if they were currently incarcerated for committing a violent crime. Length of sentence ranges from six months to fifty years. Inmates were categorized as serving a life sentence if they indicated that they had received a life sentence or if their total consecutive sentence exceeded fifty years or more.

Analytic Strategy

The primary interest in this study is to test the effect parental status has on the behavior of incarcerated fathers in term of prison program participation and rule breaking behavior. Logistic regression models were used to examine the relationship between the outcome variables and the predictors. I present the analysis in three sections. The first section includes **H1** and **H2** which focus on prison program participation and rule breaking behavior among incarcerated fathers compared with non-fathers. The regressions explore whether being a father increases the likelihood of prison program participation and decreases the likelihood of breaking prion rules. I expect parental status

to predict a positive relationship with prison program participation and a negative relationship with rule breaking.

The second section includes **H3** and **H4** which focus on the behavior of incarcerated fathers who had custodial care or lived with their children prior to arrest compared with incarcerated fathers who did not. I expect custody to predict a positive relationship with prison programming and a negative relationship with rule breaking. The third section includes **H5** and **H6** which focus on the behavior of incarcerated fathers (in terms of prison program participation and rule breaking), who have contact with their children compared to incarcerated fathers with little to no contact with their child or children. I expect contact to predict a positive relationship with prison program participation and a negative relationship with rule breaking.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Descriptive results are shown in Table 1 the sample for this analysis consists of 11,166 incarcerated men with an average age of 35 years. The average sentence is 10 years with 11.4% inmates serving a life sentence. Concerning reports of violations among inmates, the measure of major violations is skewed indicating, as one would expect, that major violations are relatively rare. The average number of violations is .502, with twenty-six percent of the sample reporting one major violation and only 9.7% reporting two or more major violations. The average number of minor violations is 1.5, with forty-three percent of inmates reporting one minor violation and 29% reporting two or more minor violations. Table 1 shows the five types of prison program participation. Educational (32.1%), religious (30.3%), and vocational/job training (28.1%) have the highest rates of participation with about a third participating in these programs and about one in five inmates participating in life skills (23.8%) and other types of programming (22.1%).

Table 2 shows that forty-two percent of inmates surveyed reported that they were living with at least one child under the age of eighteen prior to their incarceration. Concerning contact with children, mail contact with children is the most common, with 45% of fathers reporting that they receive or send a letter to a child (the question inmates were asked does not make the distinction between sending or having received a letter

from a child). Telephone contact once a month or more frequently is reported by about a third of fathers (32.4%). Frequent in-person visits with children are rare – only 14.5% of incarcerated fathers report having received a visit from a child once a month or more.

Table 1. Description of Key Analytic Variables (N= 11,166)

Construct	Variable Description	Mean (Standard Deviation)/Percentage
Age	Range 16-84	35.3 (10.7)
Length of Sentence	Sentence in years: Range = .50 - 50	10 (10.4)
	<i>Life Sentence:</i> All respondents serving 50 years or more.	11.4% (.318)
Serious Violation	6-item scale summed. Have you ever been found guilty of... 'an alcohol violation, 'possession of a weapon,' 'possession of stolen property,' 'physical assault on another inmate,' 'physical assault on a staff member,' 'any other major violations'?' (1=yes, 0=no). Range= 0-6.	.502 (.817)
Minor Violation	6-item scale summed. Have you been found guilty of... 'verbal assault on another inmate,' 'verbal assault on a staff member,' 'possession of an unauthorized substance,' 'being out of place,' 'disobeying orders 'any other minor violations'?' (1=yes, 0=no) Range= 0-6.	1.50 (1.25)
Violent Crime	Currently sentenced for a violent crime? (1=yes, 0=no)	1=3,644 (45.4%) 0=4377 (54.6%)
Prison Program Participation	Vocational (1=yes, 0=no)	1=3,094 (28.1%) 0=7,912 (71.9 %)
	Education (1=yes, 0=no)	1=3,538 (32.1%) 0=7,472 (67.9%)
	Religious (1=yes, 0=no)	1=3,329 (30.3%) 0=7,671 (69.7%)
	Life Skills (1=yes, 0=no)	1=2,617 (23.8%) 0= 8,380 (76.2%)

Table 2. Description of Key Analytic Variables

Construct	Variable Descriptions	Mean (Standard Deviation)/ Percentage
Parent	Do you have any children? (0=no, 1=yes)	0= 4,380 (56.7%) 1= 5,831 (41.8)
Custodial Parent	Fathers who reported living with at least one child under the age of 18 prior to incarceration. (0=no, 1=yes)	0=3,954 (53.3) 1= 3,440 (46.7)
Contact with Children	Range 0-1 0= Never or less than once a month 1= 'At least once a month' to 'daily or almost daily'	
	Mail Contact	0=3,192 (55%) 1=2,622 (45%)
	Phone Contact	0=3,935 (68%) 1=1,883 (32.4%)
	Visits	0=4,956 (85%) 1=859 (14.7%)

Table 3 indicates the control variables that include age, violent crime, length of sentence, and life sentence were all significantly associated with participation in prison programming. For instance, the odds of participating in vocational programming is 53% higher among inmates currently incarcerated for violent crimes ($p<0.001$). Parental status is associated with prison program participation. For example, Table 3 shows that the odds of participating in educational programming is 8.43% lower among incarcerated fathers compared to non-fathers and this is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. With respect

to participation in other prison programs, the results show that there is no significant difference between fathers and non-fathers.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Predicting Program Participation by Fatherhood

Status				
	Vocational Programming Model	Educational Programming Model	Religious Programming Model	Life Skills Programming Model
Independent Variables	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Age	-.010 (.002)***	-.021 (.002)***	.008 (.002)***	-.008 (.002)***
Violent Crime (1=yes, 0=no)	.429 (.051)***	.318 (.049)***	.263 (.049)***	.189 (.053)***
Length of Sentence	.026 (.003)***	.024 (.002)***	.013 (.002)***	.017 (.003)***
Life Sentence (1=yes, 0=no)	.914 (.085)***	.765 (.084)***	.487 (.084)***	.479 (.090)***
Father (1=yes, 0=no)	-.040 (.048)	-.088 (.046)*	-.073 (.046)	-.053 (.049)
Intercept	-.348	.114	-.835	-.524
R ² (Adjusted)	.059	.047	.027	.021

Notes: Unstandardized beta's (standardized error). Significance Levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.
N. S. = non-significant.

Table 4 examined the relationship between parental status and rule breaking behavior. This table indicates that incarcerated fathers are no more or less likely to commit serious (4.31%) or minor violations (4.5%) compared to non-fathers. Additionally, control variables such as age, violent crime, length of sentence, and life sentence were all significantly associated with rule violation. For example, the results show that the odds of engaging in serious violation is 132% higher among inmates who are serving life sentences compared to those who are not and this is statistically significant at the .001 level. Table 4 also shows that the odds of engaging in minor violations is 61% higher among incarcerated men who are serving a life sentence compared to their counterparts who are not. This finding is statistically significant at the .001 level.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Predicting Violations by Fatherhood Status

Independent Variables	Serious Violations	Minor Violations
	Model b (SE)	Model b (SE)
Age	-.027 (.003)***	-.020 (.004)***
Violent Crime (1=yes, 0=no)	.386 (.068)***	-.032 (.081)
Length of Sentence	.021 (.003)***	.018 (.004)***
Life Sentence (1=yes, 0=no)	.843 (.108)***	.481 (.135)***
Father (1=yes, 0=no)	-.044 (.064)	-.046 (.076)
Intercept		
R ² (Adjusted)		

1=31 to 60 Years of Age is excluded group.

Notes: Unstandardized beta's (standard error). Household income is centered.

Significance Levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N. S. = non-significant

Table 5 shows the results of the logistic regression analysis for custodial fatherhood in regards to prison program participation. The results indicate that there is no association between prison program participation (e.g. vocational, religious, and life skills) and custodial father status. However, custodial fatherhood status is significantly associated with participation in educational programming. The results show that the odds of participating in educational programming is 6.4% lower among fathers who lived with their children prior to incarceration compared to fathers who did not.

In terms of covariates, the odds of engaging in religious programming is 63% higher among incarcerated fathers who are serving life sentences compared to those who are not. This is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. Table 5 shows that the odds of fathers currently incarcerated for violent crimes, participating in religious programming is 19% higher compared to their counterparts who were not. This finding is significant at the 0.05 level. Additionally, the odds of fathers participating in life skills programming is 37.4% higher comparatively ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5. Logistic Regression Predicting Program Participation by Custodial**Fatherhood Status**

	Vocational Programming Model b (SE)	Educational Programming Model b (SE)	Religious Programming Model b (SE)	Life Skills Programming Model b (SE)
Independent Variables				
Age	-.004 (.004)	-.025 (.004)***	.015 (.004)***	-.006 (.006)
Violent Crime (1=yes, 0=no)	.487 (.191)***	.266 (.067)***	.173 (.067)*	.134 (.071)
Length of Sentence	.029 (.004)***	.020 (.003)***	.016 (.004)***	.020 (.004)***
Life Sentence (1=yes, 0=no)	.553 (.131)***	.377 (.129)**	.491 (.127)***	.318 (.137)*
Custodial Father (1=yes, 0=no)	-.062 (.340)	-.066 (.061)*	.107 (.061)	.077 (.065)
Intercept	-.572	.171	-1.287	-.727
R ² (Adjusted)	.052	.030	.026	.019

Notes: Unstandardized beta's (standard error). Significance Levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N. S. = non-significant.

Table 6 show the results for the logistic regression predicting rule breaking among custodial fathers. There is no association between custodial fatherhood status and rule breaking behaviors (14% lower for serious violations and 4.5% lower for minor violations).

Table 6. Logistic Regression Predicting Violations by Custodial Fatherhood Status

	Serious Violations Model b (SE)	Minor Violations Model b (SE)
Independent Variables		
Age	-.035 (.006)***	-.028 (.006)***
Violent Crime (1=yes, 0=no)	.432 (.096)***	-.005 (.112)
Length of Sentence	.018 (.005)***	.010 (.006)
Life Sentence (1=yes, 0=no)	.673 (.168)***	.351 (.208)
Custodial Father (1=yes, 0=no)	-.150 (.091)	-.046 (.076)
Intercept	-.138	2.727
R ² (Adjusted)	.054	.020

1=31 to 60 Years of Age is excluded group.

Notes: Unstandardized beta's (standard error). Household income is centered.

Significance Levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N. S. = non-significant.

Table 7 shows the results for the logistic regression predicting program participation by visits from children. This table indicates that the odds of engaging in vocational programming is 18% higher among fathers who have contact with their children compared to those with little to no contact and this is a statistically significant at the 0.05 level. In addition, Table 7 shows that the odds of engaging in life skills programming is 26% higher among fathers who have contact with their children compared to those with little to no contact ($p < 0.01$). The analysis shows that age is a predictor of engaging in prison programming. For example, the odds of engaging in religious programming is 0.6% higher among older inmates ($p < 0.05$). With respect to length of sentence, the odds of participating in life skills programming is 1.8% higher among incarcerated men serving longer sentences ($p < 0.001$).

Table 7. Logistic Regression Predicting Program Participation by Child Contact

Independent Variables	Vocational Programming Model b (SE)	Educational Programming Model b (SE)	Religious Programming Model b (SE)	Life Skills Programming Model b (SE)
Age	-.010 (.003)***	-.019 (.003)***	.006 (.003)*	-.010 (.003)***
Violent Crime ($I=yes, 0=no$)	.444 (.063)***	.308 (.060)***	.217 (.060)***	.212 (.064)**
Length of Sentence	.027 (.003)***	.021 (.003)***	.014 (.003)***	.018 (.003)***
Life Sentence ($I=yes, 0=no$)	.777 (.107)***	.557 (.105)***	.510 (.104)***	.383 (.112)**
Child Contact ($I=yes, 0=no$)	.165 (.072*)	-.052 (.070)	.097 (.069)	.231 (.072)**
Intercept	-.402	.026	-.840	-.558
R ² (Adjusted)	.053	.034	.025	.023

Notes: Unstandardized beta's (standard error). Significance Levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N. S. = non-significant.

Table 8 shows the regression results predicting violations by child contact. This table shows that although child contact is associated with serious violations this association is not statistically significant. For example, the odds of committing a serious

violation is 12.5% lower among fathers who have some contact with their children compared to those with little or no contact. However, this finding is not statistically significant. Other covariates such as age, length of sentence, and life sentence are associated with rule violations. For example, the odds of engaging in minor violations is 47% higher among fathers who are serving a life sentence, unlike their counterparts who are not serving life sentences ($p < 0.05$). Table 8 indicates that the odds of fathers engaging in minor violations increases as the length of sentence of sentence increases ($p < 0.05$). This finding is consistent with fathers serving life sentences ($p < 0.05$).

Table 8. Logistic Regression Predicting Violations by Child Contact

Independent Variables	Serious Violations	Minor Violations
	Model b (SE)	Model b (SE)
Age	-.030 (.004)***	-.021 (.005)***
Violent Crime (1=yes, 0=no)	.417 (.087)***	-.030 (.100)
Length of Sentence	.018 (.004)***	.015 (.005)*
Life Sentence (1=yes, 0=no)	.769 (.140)***	.387 (.168)*
Child Contact (1=yes, 0=no)	-.134 (.104)	.052 (.121)
Intercept	-.442	2.014
R ² (Adjusted)	.056	.017

1=31 to 60 Years of Age is excluded group.

Notes: Unstandardized beta's (standard error). Household income is centered.

Significance Levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N. S. = non-significant

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

My analysis finds limited support for my hypotheses. In hypothesis 1, I state that incarcerated fathers are more likely to participate in prison programming than incarcerated men who are not fathers. To the contrary, my analysis indicates that incarcerated fathers are significantly less likely to participate in prison program participation in regards to educational programming. This finding is surprising given that some studies have found that the role of fatherhood is salient among incarcerated fathers. Taking the social bond theory into consideration, what a father believes about his role and responsibilities toward parenting might influence behavior. There is a possibility that this finding is not explaining everything here.

The sample was derived from 220+ state prisons. Prison programs are not universally available in all facilities and the agency of the fathers has been assumed. The assumption being that fathers have the opportunity while incarcerated to participate in prison programs. Additionally, this availability would depend on the type of facility. For example, high security facilities (e.g., maximum security) are more punitive rather than rehabilitative. Another possibility is that among facilities that offer programming, inmates might need to meet specific requirements to participate. The programs included in the analysis did not examine programming specific to parental status. This could have influenced these findings.

In Hypothesis 2, I stated that incarcerated fathers are less likely to participate in rule breaking behavior than incarcerated men who are not fathers. This hypothesis is not supported by the analysis. Incarcerated fathers are no more or less likely to commit serious or minor violations compared to non-fathers. My analysis showed no association between rule breaking behavior and parental status. The regression analysis predicting rule breaking had many missing observations compared to the original sample size. There is the possibility that not all the facilities offered specific information regarding the behavior of some inmates. Inmates may have also answered the survey question concealing their rule breaking behavior. This finding should be viewed with caution.

In Hypothesis 3 and 4, I state that incarcerated fathers who had custodial care of children prior to incarceration are more likely to engage in prison programming and less likely to break rules compared to incarcerated fathers who did not. These hypotheses are not supported by the analysis. Regression results indicate that whether fathers lived with their children prior to incarceration or not does not predict either type of behavior. There are two underlying possibilities for this null finding. First, studies report that most incarcerated fathers are not married to the mothers of their children, do not reside in the same household as their children, and have children with multiple partners (Waller and Swisher 2006; Wildeman 2010). Second, there are situations where incarceration has a protective effect on families and children. For example, abusive fathers or those involved in substance abuse and drug trafficking can place their families and children in danger. Removal from the household due to incarceration, separation or divorce is intuitive under these circumstances.

Turney and Wildeman (2013) found that paternal incarceration negatively influences the relationship between fathers and children who live together prior to incarceration. Children may be ashamed that their fathers are in prison, feel anger, have witnessed the arrest of their father, thus be emotionally damaged (Murray and Farrington 2008). Other research reports that incarceration restricts the relationship between an incarcerated father and children, because of the inability to have contact with the children. This would negatively impact the relationship between an incarcerated father and his children. Most incarcerated parents are confined in facilities one hundred miles or more away from their families (Mumola 2006). Distance can have a negative effect on maintaining a relationship for incarcerated fathers and their children.

In Hypothesis 5, I state that incarcerated fathers who have contact with their children are more likely to participate in prison programming compared with incarcerated fathers who have little to no contact with their children. The analysis found some support for this hypothesis. Fathers who experienced contact with their children were shown to participate in vocational and life skill programming at a higher percentage compared to fathers experiencing little to no contact with their children. This finding is consistent with other research. Mendez (2000) reports that the fathers in his study who experienced contact with their children showed interest in participating in child rearing programs. Mendez concludes that prison program participation among incarcerated fathers can be useful in developing productive citizens.

In Hypothesis 6, I state that incarcerated fathers who have contact with their children are less likely to break prison rules compared with incarcerated fathers who have no contact with their children. Although the analysis partially supports hypothesis 5

depending on the frequency of contact experienced by the incarcerated father, there is no association between engaging in rule breaking and whether the father experiences contact or little to no contact with children. Therefore, hypothesis 6 is not supported.

The results of this study show that contact is a stronger predictor of behavior related to parental status than custody. Specifically mail contact. This analysis shows that having contact with children has more significance on the behavior of incarcerated fathers than custodial or living arrangements. This is not a surprise as previous research has reported that contact between incarcerated parents and their children increases well-being among inmates and maintains intimate family ties (Mendez 2000; Hairston 2001; Secret 2012; Roxburgh and Fitch 2013).

This finding is consistent with Roxburgh and Fitch (2013) who report that child contact among inmates is associated with the well-being of incarcerated parents. Intuitively, fathers who have contact with their children while incarcerated can experience motivation because of social bonding, thus participate in programs. These fathers may be motivated to participate in programs designed to address issues related to successful re-entry once released. The average sentence length of incarcerated fathers is six years and most will be released before their children are 18 years old (Mumola 2006). This is important because many fathers living with their children prior to incarceration plan to live with them once they are released (Maldonado 2006). Additionally, relationships between fathers and children is not necessarily contingent upon living arrangements as reported by literature.

My finding suggests that contact with children while incarcerated has a richer effect in a positive direction on incarcerated fathers than living with their children prior to

incarceration. Custodial care of children prior to incarceration has no influence on prison program participation or rule breaking. The data indicate that incarcerated fathers who have mail and telephone contact with their children are more likely to participate in programming that has the potential to help them adjust to life once they are released. The relational aspect of contact is consistent with the commitment element of the social bond theory. This finding illustrates the idea that contact while incarcerated strengthens the social bond that fathers have with their children whether they lived with them prior to incarceration or not. Fathers with contact are significantly more likely to participate in prison program participation that in turn results in positive post-release outcome (Bahr et al. 2005).

Study Strengths

This study identifies a gap in the literature on incarcerated fathers (Hairston 1998; Visser 2011; Secret 2012; Dyer et al 2012). Much of the literature on parental incarceration addresses issues concerning mothers and children. Literature has discussed the topic of parental incarceration in response to the phenomenon of mass imprisonment. The emphasis on women and children has suggested that parental status matters among inmates, however specific factors associated with understanding paternal incarceration, is less common.

Public perceptions conflict with the real life experiences of incarcerated fathers and there is a need to focus on the realities of paternal incarceration. Identifying methods to encourage positive relationships with incarcerated men and their children is essential to promote strong, healthy families and less recidivism. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Mumola 2006), incarcerated parents are less likely to be violent offenders

compared to non-parents and approximately half of incarcerated parents were on probation or parole when arrested. This is consistent with the high rate of recidivism among the incarcerated, highlighting the need for structural policy changes to support released prisoners. Understanding how parental status impacts the behavior of fathers in prison can shed light on ways to establish productive prison policies. For example, prison programs can be created to support fathers and assist them in maintaining contact and relationships with their children. Positive structural assistance has the potential to serve the unique needs of fathers while incarcerated.

Study Limitations

The survey included maximum, medium, and minimum-security level prisons. This might have affected the response rate to some of the questions, and in some institutions, inmates may not have been available to answer questions that were not relevant to the institution where they are confined. For example, not all institutions offer prison programming and maximum-security level institutions traditionally have prisoners locked down the majority of the time they are in custody. Second, some of the measures used are problematic. For example, the custodial care variable was created based on a single question asking the inmate if he lived with his minor children, including adopted and step, a month prior to incarceration. This question was poorly constructed and introduced systematic bias against poor fathers. Given that men who are poor are more likely to remain in custody prior to being sentenced, these fathers may not have been capable of posting bail. This means that a father may have lived with his children for years prior to incarceration, yet been in jail away from his family during the months before being sentenced. The wording of this question excludes fathers in this situation

and loses a lot of information. Understandably, this may be the reason why this analysis did not show custody influencing behavior. Additionally, parental status may not have been a representative measure in that some men may have denied parental status due to child support enforcement.

Future Research

Given that researchers have identified parental incarceration as an emergent social problem in the United States (Sykes and Pettit 2014), research is necessary to understand the implications associated with mass incarceration. Parental status matters to incarcerated individuals, namely men, most of whom will be released and return to their communities. The effect parental status has on the behavior of these men is worthy of research. By examining paternal incarceration in regards to parental status and behavior, policy makers can be better informed about the types of provisions and rehabilitative programs that can be established to promote, strengthen, and even repair relationships with incarcerated fathers and their children.

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APPENDIX

Table 9. OR's for Prison Program Participation / Fatherhood Status

	voc prog	edu prog	reli prog	life skill
age	0.99	0.97	1.00	0.99
violent crime	1.53	1.37	1.30	1.20
length of sentence	1.02	1.02	1.01	1.18
life sentence	2.49	2.14	1.62	1.61
father	0.96	0.91	0.92	0.94

Table 10. OR's for Violations / Fatherhood Status

	Serious Violations	Minor Violations
age	0.97	0.98
violent crime	1.47	0.96
length of sentence	1.02	1.01
life sentence	2.32	1.61
father	0.95	0.95

Table 11. OR's for Prison Program Participation /Custodial

	voc prog	edu prog	rel prog	life skill
age	0.99	0.97	1.01	0.99
violent crime	1.62	1.30	1.18	1.14
length of sentence	1.02	1.02	1.01	1.02
life sentence	1.73	1.45	1.63	1.37
custodial father	0.93	0.93	1.11	1.08

Table 12. OR's for Violations/ Custodial

	Serious Violations	Minor Violations
age	0.96	0.97
violent crime	1.54	0.99
length of sentence	1.01	1.01
life sentence	1.96	1.42
custodial father	0.86	0.95

Table 13. OR's for Prison Program Participation/Contact

	voc. Prog	Eduprog	rel prog	life skill
age	0.99	0.98	1.00	0.99
violent crime	1.55	1.36	1.24	1.23
length of sentence	1.02	1.02	1.01	1.08
life sentence	2.17	1.74	1.66	1.46
child contact	1.91	0.94	1.10	0.57

Table 14. OR's for Violations/Contact

	Serious Violations	Minor Violations
age	0.97	0.97
violent crime	1.51	0.97
Length of Sentence	1.01	1.01
Life Sentence	2.15	1.47
child contact	1.05	1.05