

Forever Changed: Women's Lived Experiences of Growing Up with an Incarcerated  
Father

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**Dedication**

For my mother and father...thank you for the privilege of being part of your story...

### **Abstract**

This study explored the lived experiences of women who grew up with an incarcerated father. Thirteen women were interviewed using open-ended, semi-structured questions. The research design was based on Martin Heidegger's original philosophical construct of Hermeneutic Phenomenology and was guided by Max van Manen's six-step methodical structure approach to obtain meaning making from the participants regarding their lived experience (van Manen, 1997, 2014). Feminist framework is also incorporated to recognize the uniqueness of the female experience, which has often been neglected in research related to fathering. Findings reflected the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of participants in relation to how incarceration influenced their relationship with their father as well as how this phenomenon affected other dimensions of their life and their interpersonal relationships. The findings resulted in three overarching domains for paternal incarceration: 1) daughter's perception of parental response, 2) effect on daughter's personal well-being, and 3) influence on daughter's interpersonal relationships. Future implications for research and clinical practice are discussed.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. - Maya Angelou*

### **Overview of the Research Study**

The primary objective of this research study was to explore women's lived experiences of growing up with an incarcerated father. The investigation probed into how the experience of paternal incarceration influenced daughters' relationship with their father and how this phenomenon affected other dimensions of their lives, such as with interpersonal relationships. The qualitative approach guided by hermeneutic phenomenology was employed as the method of investigation to broaden the current understanding of this particular phenomenon by addressing existing gaps in the research literature.

Phenomenology, or the study of one's experience, arose out of philosophical constructs that were immersed in epistemology, which is the study of knowledge, ontology, and being (Lavery, 1993). The research design for this particular study was based on Martin Heidegger's original philosophical construct of Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Lavery, 1993). This approach was further informed, as well as somewhat modified, by Hans-George Gadamer, who was a student of Heidegger. Heidegger and Gadamer's conceptual frameworks were utilized in this study as a way to



situate the principles and foundational elements of hermeneutic phenomenology and are elaborated upon further in the upcoming sections of this document. Since the work of Heidegger and Gadamer provided groundings in philosophical underpinnings rather than the implementation of hermeneutic phenomenology in research, the research portion of this study was guided by Max van Manen's six-step methodical structure approach to obtain meaning making from the participants regarding their lived experience, or life world, through interpretations of text (van Manen, 1997, 2014).

The findings from this study ultimately resulted from "gathering of and reflecting on lived-experience material by means of conversational interviewing" with participants (van Manen, 1997, p. 63). That being the case, this study gathered verbatim data, or text, from thirteen adult women until overall thematic saturation was reached using open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews. The interview questions centered on how paternal incarceration affected the participants' relationship with their father and other residual dimensions of their life, such as identity and self-esteem. Moreover, since qualitative inquiry is grounded in "understanding the world as seen by respondents" (Patton, 2002, p.21) and facilitates a process of discovery by learning what is happening from an insider's position, rather than "imposing a perceived or outsider's scheme" (p.28), I also allowed space for these other possible dimensions to emerge more organically rather than incorporating specific questions pertaining to these dimensions

(van Manen, 1997, 2014). For example, if a participant was conversing about paternal incarceration and she perceived a connection between her father being in prison and feeling depressed, I then asked her follow up questions pertaining to this piece of information she presented in the interview. However, if she had not offered this information and it did not emerge at any point during the interview, I did not pursue any questions specifically related to whether she had experienced depression because of her father being in prison.

The detailed interviews were recorded and transcribed and analysis of text was informed by van Manen's approach. Thus, my purpose in conducting this research was to qualitatively advance our conceptual understanding of women's experiences of the influence of paternal incarceration on the father-daughter relationship through inquiry exploring the history of the father-daughter relationship, how their relationship changed over time, and how these daughters believed this experience affected their view of self and/or interpersonal relationships.

Following van Manen's (1997, 2014) recommendations, the foundational research questions were formulated to be clear and concise, but also "lived by the researcher" (p. 44). Hermeneutic Phenomenology is grounded in the presupposition that the researcher has some knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated. Thus the questions are connected to the pedagogy of both the researchers' and participants' life-world

experiences regarding this phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). Therefore, I reflected on this phenomenon throughout the research process as much as the participants did while being interviewed (van Manen, 1997). Since I am the adult daughter of a father who was incarcerated during my childhood, I also have a personal investment and emic perspective into this phenomenon which sparked the initial exploration of this study.

Relevant literature was also used as a source to help focus the foundational research questions. Previously published materials helped me to “build significance” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 42), “clarify ideas” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 167), and “bring a focus to the study” (Patton, 2002, p. 226) by creating a catalyst by which to generate research questions. Van Manen (1997) encouraged that one “makes explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories”, including knowledge gained from prior literature, so that I am aware of where the gaps are but can “hold this knowledge at bay” and determine what is still left unanswered (p. 46). Therefore, when conducting qualitative research utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology, the research questions that emerge through gaps in the existing literature are to be viewed as a means for further exploration of “narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” (van Manen, 1997, p.66) adherence to this philosophical stance retains the flexibility needed by

allowing the precise focus of the investigation to evolve during the actual research process.

### **Significance of the Issue**

Researchers and scholars have noted that although fathers do not define their daughters' personhood, they can contribute to shaping the experience of their daughters (Doucet, 2006). Thus, by exploring women's narratives on their experiences with their fathers, it allows for examination of various aspects of this uncharted relationship. Therefore, when an unforeseen event such as incarceration affects the father-daughter relationship, having access to information on how daughters experience their relationship with their fathers during this turbulent time could be beneficial in determining how to support both paternal involvement and positive child outcomes for the daughter. It is important to emphasize that father involvement has tended to be conceptualized as more quantitative and has thus ignored meaning-making around fathering and the influence it has on children (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). There are few qualitative studies exploring the father-daughter dynamic but in a study by Way and Gilman (2000) they interviewed twenty adolescent Latina and African American girls about relationships with their fathers. Participants indicated they had expectations of their father being involved in their activities, such as school and sports, and wanted more from their fathers including time and conversation. However, it might be beneficial to implement further qualitative

studies from the daughter's perspective to shed more light on how she views her relationship with her father so there is a more comprehensive insight into this relationship.

Father and daughter relationships also receive less examination than mother-daughter relationships, which results in a lack of understanding of the father-daughter dyad (Nielsen, 2012). Studies examining parenting more often use mother report or a template that incorporates language and conceptual frameworks that are more conducive to maternal involvement, which then negates a systematic understanding of fathering in the lives of children (Marsiglio, Amato, & Day, 2000; Meeker, 2006; Nielsen, 2012). A report generated by a nationally representative sample of fathers pointed out that fathers described themselves as less significant in their daughter's life as long as she had a positive relationship with her mother (Roper Poll, 2004). Thus, fathers may often be viewed as secondary in the lives of their children compared to mothers (Nielsen, 2012). Because fathers may underestimate their importance in their daughters' lives, they may withdraw, doubt their significance and influence, and misunderstand their daughters' needs (Meeker, 2006). Understanding this dynamic is imperative because men will be fathers to daughters and continue to influence their daughter despite whatever beliefs they have about their role in her life. Furthermore, daughters may potentially have their relationship with other men affected by the relationship she had with her own father as

well as affecting her willingness to have the father of her own children be involved in their lives (Nielsen, 2012).

The father-daughter dyad may face even greater challenges when factors such as incarceration are present. However, previous studies on the effects of paternal incarceration on children tend to either not filter out gender of the child or there is a tendency to focus primarily on the father-son relationship (Geller et al, 2009; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Wildeman, 2008; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Wildeman, 2004; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Sack, 1977; Van De Rakt, Nieuwbeerta, & De Graaf, 2008). An example of this is a study examining the impact of parental incarceration on children, in which gender of child was not taken into account (Geller et al, 2009). Yet, in the discussion section, the focus was primarily on the influence the incarceration had on boys and stating that mental health services should be provided to boys. Thus, the potential needs of the daughters were negated.

Another study by Newell (2012) utilized interview and observational data based on children being taken to the prison to see their incarcerated parent. Newell claimed that while boys were more focused on their incarcerated father's characteristics, interests and traits that were similar to their own, girls expressed more disappointment and curiosity about their father being incarcerated. Girls, more than boys, reported their recognition of the absence of responses from their father when asked questions about his incarceration.

Newell also interviewed two school-based support groups for adolescents who had incarcerated parents. She described boys tending to miss the interactive, daily activities they used to share with their incarcerated parent where girls were more affected and saddened by the significant milestones in their life that their parent was missing. The recommendations from this study emphasized the need to continue exploration of how gender influences children's response to parental incarceration, primarily so that interventions and programming can identify these gender-specific needs (Newell, 2012).

Another factor identified by prior research is that fathers may parent their sons differently than their daughters including greater caretaking of their sons (Manlove & Vernon-Feagans, 2002; Morgan, Lye & Condran, 1988), engaging in play with their sons (Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, & Cabera, 2011) and spending more time with their sons (Updegraff, Delgado & Wheeler, 2008; Raley & Bianchi, 2006; Tucker, McHale & Crouter, 2003). In a study by West-Smith (2007) that interviewed adult children of incarcerated fathers, which consisted of twenty sons and five daughters, she argued that sons responded differently than daughters regarding their father's incarceration. Sons tended to have higher levels of substance abuse and interaction with the criminal justice system while daughters struggled more in retaining employment and sustaining healthy intimate relationships. These differences could be attributed to how their incarcerated father interacted with them during the incarceration process.

Furthermore, in a review of the literature on daughters and divorce, daughters typically fared worse in divorce situations regarding loss of contact as well as less financial support from their fathers (Nielsen, 2011). Although divorce is not the same as incarceration, it is still a potentially negative transition that affects the father-daughter relationship that can result in disconnection of fathers and daughters. Without further examination of the phenomenon of paternal incarceration in the lives of women, there continues to be an incomplete picture of fathering in the context of the father-daughter relationship, which may produce unique findings that are not present in the studies focusing on sons or children in general.

Michael Lamb, a leading expert on fatherhood, suggests the need to investigate fathering, not simply from the direct response of the father, but also how he indirectly affects others such as mothers and children (Lamb, 1997). However, childhood outcomes when paternal incarceration has been present are significantly understudied and thus not clearly understood (Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Raphael, 2011). One of the factors contributing to this is that previous research has typically centered on parental reports rather than the narratives of the actual children who have been affected by this phenomenon (Dallaire & Wilson, 2009; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). As for gender differences, most studies on incarceration “do not distinguish between male and female children and those that do study male subjects” (Miller, 2006, p. 483). When it comes to



stress response, prior research indicates that boys tend to display externalized behavior problems, where girls tend to internalize their problems (Cowan et al, 1994; Cummings, Davies & Campbell, 2000). Since incarceration of a parent is likely to be a stressful occurrence in the life of a child, it can be hypothesized that boys and girls may respond differently to this event. However, without further exploration of gender differences, this question remains unanswered.

This void was addressed in this study by drawing on women's experiences with paternal incarceration to expand our knowledge of this phenomenon. This was the first qualitative research study of its kind to directly and exclusively interview (via semi-structured interviews) adult daughters in order to investigate their direct experiences, feelings and perceptions when growing up with an incarcerated father.

### **Purpose of Current Study**

Given the gap in current research and the importance of understanding this phenomenon further, my purpose in conducting this study was to obtain a more comprehensive and intricate understanding of what the experiences were of women who had an incarcerated father when they were growing up. In exploring this phenomenon, adult daughters were interviewed to further understand the following: 1) their relational experiences with their father prior to, during and post-incarceration, 2) how they described the effects of paternal incarceration on their lives, and 3) their reflections of

particular areas of their lives that were most significantly affected by their father's incarceration.

In order to facilitate this investigation, the grand tour question, "What does it mean to be the adult daughter of a father who was incarcerated during your childhood?", was used to continuously frame and guide the study with specific consideration given to how the nature of paternal incarceration influenced the essence of the father-daughter relationship and how the phenomenon of paternal incarceration potentially affected other dimensions of these women's lives, such as in their intimate relationships.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### ***I am my father's daughter- Maria Elena Salinas***

#### **Scholarship on Fathers and Daughters**

Scholarship has expanded significantly over the last 30 years on father involvement and paternal impact on children (Brotherson, Yamamoto, & Acock, 2003; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Lamb, 2010; Leidy et al., 2011; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; Vuori, 2009; Williams & Kelly, 2005). The notion of responsible fathering has become a conceptual staple for both research and programming (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Studies suggest that father involvement promotes healthier adolescent adjustment and well-being (Brotherson et al., 2003; Flouri, 2006; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Leidy et al., 2011 ), less risk-taking behavior for adolescents (Goncy & van Dulmen, 2010; Habib, et al, 2010), higher self-esteem (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Bulanda & Majumdar, 2003), enhanced pro-social behavior in children (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Flouri, Buchanan, & Bream, 2002; Flouri, 2006; King & Sobolweski, 2006; Higgins, Jennings, & Mahoney, 2010; Webster, et al, 2013) and higher success in adult intimate relationships (Van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001).

Furthermore, studies have shown how father presence and involvement specifically influenced daughters. For example, father's presence enhanced daughters'

decision-making processes, academic engagement, overall self-esteem, and mental health (Cahir, 1995; Cooper, 2000; Jackson, 2003; Williamson, 2004).

### **Cognitive Influence**

Previous research suggests that fathers promote cognitive and academic success with their daughters in a variety of ways. This includes encouraging their daughters to take calculated risks, be more adventurous, explore the world around them, overcome fear of new experiences and people, and attempt physical and intellectual tasks that may initially be anxiety-producing (Lamb, 2010; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2010). Fathers also encourage children to be independent and confident as well as more intensely celebrate their children's academic successes (Kieffer, 2008; Tessman, 1994).

Research indicates that fathers also contribute to creating agency within their daughters, which pertains to her being proactive in “establishing her own goals, assuming responsibility for her own actions and creating her own success and happiness” (Nielsen, 2012, p. 102). This process enhances her cognitive well-being due to the learning progression of assuming the initiative, being self-directed as a person and being outspoken about her needs and wants (Lamb, 2010; Nielsen, 2012).

Because of this heightened agency, daughters then tend to be more successful in their education and career, which may lead to increased income, social status and

financial independence (Neilsen, 2012). Furthermore, teenage daughters who are gifted academically tended to have fathers who encouraged them to be independent and assertive (Blanchfield, 2005). Daughters whose fathers promoted their self-confidence and self-reliance during adolescence were also more successful academically in college (Derkins, 2001). Once a child enters secondary school, the father's involvement is the most consistent variable related to children's academic achievement (Lamb, 2010).

### **Sexual Behavior**

Women's choices pertaining to sexual engagement and behavior appear to be significantly influenced by their fathers. Studies propose that paternal influence decreases daughters' sexual risk taking (Hutchinson & Cederbaum, 2011; Peterson, 2006; Stein, Milburn, Zane, & Rotheram-Borus, 2009). Furthermore, closeness and affirmation of fathers reduced internalization of problems in girls (Mitchell, Booth, & King, 2009) as well as enhanced women's comfort with their sexuality as adults (Scheffler & Naus, 1999). Adolescent daughters were less likely to obtain a sexually transmitted disease if their fathers talked to them about this issue (Bowling & Werner, 2000). In college, daughters tended to be more assertive and self-confident in refusing to have sex with men if they had a father who was more involved in their lives (Katz & Van Der Kloet, 2010). College-aged women are also more concerned than college-aged men in making sexual decisions their fathers would approve of (Miller & Lee, 2001). Additionally, daughters

are also less likely to have sex in high school if they have a close, positive relationship with their father (Regnerus & Luchies, 2006). Furthermore, if a daughter's relationship with her father is viewed as positive, then she may be less likely to engage in sexual relationships with men to fulfill this emotional need (Nielsen, 2012).

In addition, father absence has been determined to be a significant predictor in higher sexual activity and pregnancy rates in female adolescents (Barras, 2003; Ellis, Schlomer, Tilley, & Butler, 2012; Ellis, et al, 2008). Daughters with physically or emotionally absent fathers might “seek reinforcement from other males by having sex too soon, have too many partners, make poor decisions on who to date, or date older men” (Nielsen, 2012, p.74). Although certain demographic factors were not consistently controlled for in prior studies, such as socio-economic status, there was indicators that girls who come from homes in which their father is physically absent are seven to eight times more likely to get pregnant (Ellis & Essex, 2007; Ellis, Bates & Dodge, 2003; Quinlan, 2007) and daughters who claim to have less quality in their paternal relationships tend to engage in more risky sexual behavior (Ellis, Schlomer, Tilley, & Butler, 2012). The older the daughter is when she stops living with her father, the older she is when she first has sex (Ellis & Essex, 2007; Ellis, Bates & Dodge, 2003; Quinlan, 2007).

## **Mental Health and Well-Being**

Flouri & Buchanan (2003) discovered that father involvement with adolescent girls protected against psychological distress when they reached adulthood. Studies suggest that paternal influence decreases daughters' antisocial behavior (Kosterman, Haggerty, Spoth, & Redmond, 2004). College girls with insecure father attachments are more depressed and anxious than those who have secure attachments (Last, 2009). Depression during adolescence was closely connected to the type of relationship daughters have with their fathers, even more so than their mothers (Videon, 2005). College women who perceive themselves as being rejected by their fathers are more likely to be clinically depressed than daughters who feel loved (Thompson & Berenbaun, 2009). Teen girls had fewer psychological problems when their fathers were actively involved in their lives (Sarkadi, Kirstiansson, Oberklai & Bremberg, 2008). Also, daughters who described their fathers as caring and supportive were able to manage life stressors more effectively than daughters who perceived their relationship with their father to be coercive, chaotic and rejecting (Byrd-Craven, Auer, Grander, & Massey, 2012). Allgood, Beckert and Peterson (2012) also sampled ninety-nine females on their overall well-being based on their relationship with their father. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship in that fathers who were more engaged

with and accessible to their daughters had daughters who reported higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction.

### **Intimate Relationships with Significant Others**

The involvement of women in healthy, sustainable relationships also is affected by paternal influence. A daughter who has a secure, loving relationship with her father often creates “emotionally intimate, fulfilling relationships with other men in her life” (Nielsen, 2012, p.89). Daughters with positive relationships with their fathers are more likely to engage in a secure and loving relationship with their significant other (Black & Schutte, 2006). Women who have a close relationship with their father are also less anxious, less fearful and less distrustful of men (Last, 2009). Furthermore, women who were in college reported better relationships with boyfriends and being more satisfied with their appearance than daughters who had fragile relationships with their fathers (Scharf & Mayselless, 2008; Sanftner, Ryan & Pierce, 2009).

One of the few qualitative studies focusing on father-daughter relationships was Johnson (2013), who explored women’s identity pertaining to racial and gender ideals in heterosexual relationship and father influence. Forty African American women were interviewed on how their fathers affected their identification with strength and respectability as a woman in intimate relationships. Participants described a significant difference with supportive versus distant fathers. With supportive fathers, women were



able to navigate between these areas of identity more proficiently, such as both seeking out a career that was non-traditional for women and displaying more feminine behavior, with greater confidence than those with distant fathers. Participants with less involved or absent fathers also described being challenged in how to effectively date and be in a relationship with men because they did not have their father as a role model for them. These participants also believed they had to be strong because their fathers were not involved. Recommendations from this study consisted of the need for a more comprehensive examination of father-daughter relationships, particularly in regards to “meaning making and femininity ideals” (p. 889).

Interestingly, daughters, more than sons, of divorced parents have been found to be less trusting and less satisfied with their romantic relationships (Jacquet & Surra, 2001) and have poorer communication skills in intimate relationships (Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). When engaged, the daughters, more than sons, believes their marriage will fail (Whitton, 2008). However, in another study, adult women who experienced the divorce of their parents tended to have more satisfying relationships with men if they continued to have a positive relationship with their father post-divorce (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001).

Overall, it appears that fathers tend to have a significant influence on the substance of their daughter’s romantic relationship, perhaps even more than mothers

(Danes, Frieman & Kitzmann, 2006). This may also be due to daughters being more concerned about what their father thinks of their choice of a partner and are more anxious about his approval (Dubbs & Buunks, 2010).

Although prior research has shed light on the importance of paternal engagement in the lives of daughters, the literature is limited in exploring the interior of father-daughter relationships. Because father involvement has been examined quantitatively for the most part, meaning-making around father and daughter experiences regarding their relationship has not been extensively examined (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). This is particularly noticeable for fathers who are incarcerated.

### **Absent Fathers and Effect on Daughters**

Despite positive outcomes for children with considerable father involvement, the U.S. Census reported in 2000 that nearly 30% of all children lived in homes where biological fathers were not present. Within African American households, this number climbed to 60%. Father absence has been reported to negatively affect children due to the loss of a parental figure, male role model and a financial contributor to the family system (Guzzo, 2011; McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013; Lin & McLanahan, 2007; Williams, 2005). Studies also indicate that less involvement can have negative effects on fathers, such as higher levels of depressive symptoms (Davis, Caldwell, Clark, & Davis, 2009) where more meaningful paternal involvement can produce a sense of purpose,

reconnecting with positive values and attitudes and improved relationships overall for men (Daly, Ashbourne, & Brown, 2013). In exploring how father absence specifically affects daughters, there are indicators that this can create negative outcomes for women and daughters potentially faring worse than sons regardless of socioeconomic or racial factors.

Daughters are more likely than sons to feel rejected after divorce. In a 20-year study with 175 children, three times as many daughters as sons felt their relationship with their father had deteriorated after the divorce (Ahrons, 2007). In a 30-year study involving nearly 2500 children, daughters' relationships with their fathers were more damaged than sons post-divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Girls overall report worse relationships with their divorced father than sons do (Stamps, Booth & King, 2009). College daughters were less likely than sons to believe their father wanted to spend time with them (Fabricius, 2003), to feel satisfied with the amount of time they had together (Finley & Schwartz, 2007) and be content with current relationships (Harvey & Fine, 2010b; Frank, 2004; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008). Years after the divorce, adult daughters were less likely than sons to improve their relationship with their father (Scott, Booth & King, 2007).

In a phenomenological study conducted by East, Jackson and O'Brien (2006), nine adult women were interviewed on the impact of father absence in their lives.

Women reported feeling dismissed and rejected by their father, as well as experiencing significant sadness and hurt. Women also discussed losing respect for their father and that their father's decision to leave his family continued to negatively affect their relationship with their father, even in adulthood. Other studies have examined father absence in relation to women's educational endeavors. Women who had fathers that were absent in their lives tended to be less successful in college, had diminished cognitive development and poorer school performance (Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Krohn & Bogan, 2001).

Furthermore, there are discrepancies in research of possible gender differences of daughters and sons regarding father absence. Studies have found small, but statistically significant effects that fathers tend to marry and stay married to mothers when they share a son, fathers report a higher level of marital satisfaction and enhanced quality in father-child interactions when they have a son, and fathers tend to have custody of sons more often when there is a divorce (Bernier, Jarry-Boileau, & Lacharite, 2014; Morgan, Lye & Condran 1988; Raley & Bianchi, 2006). Daughters tend to fare better in regards to receiving attention from their father and having more father involvement if they have brothers (Harris & Morgan, 1991). Daughters also expressed higher rates of emotional longing and wanting more father involvement from their father after a divorce compared to sons (Finley & Schwartz, 2007). In the Lundberg, McLanahan and Rose study (2007), sons born to parents who were not married tended to receive the father's surname more

than daughters and fathers were more likely to live with a son one year after birth compared to a daughter. The authors indicated this might be related to fathers' beliefs of the importance of a male being involved with sons to enhance their developmental process. However, within one year after the child was born, there was little support noting any difference in the amount of time or money fathers invested in their child regardless of gender.

In other studies examining father absence, gender differences of the child were only slightly statistically significant and some studies reported barely any difference at all (Mitchell, Booth & King, 2009; Carlson, 2006). Furthermore, null hypotheses tend to not be reported in studies and therefore differences may be even lower than suspected when examining father absence and a child's gender (Raley & Bianchi, 2006). The message implied, though, is that the father-son relationship somehow supersedes the father-daughter relationship in terms of fathers prioritizing their connection to their sons. Therefore, there needs to be more empirical studies on gender as well as studies examining father absence specifically due to incarceration. How is incarceration different or the same when the father may still be involved but is not physically present?

Fortunately, there has been a shift in father involvement post-divorce in which younger generations of fathers are generally spending more time with daughters as well as sons (Rianchi, Robinson & Milkie, 2006; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2010; Sandberg &

Hofferth, 2001), One of the most critical factors of father involvement, however, has been identified as maternal gatekeeping. If a mother degrades or marginalizes the children's father, this can have a negative effect on the father-daughter relationship (Klockars & Sirola, 2001). The willingness of the mother to support the father in his relationship with his daughter may depend on the type of relationship she had with her own father (Nielsen, 2012). Therefore, the quality of the parents' relationship can significantly affect the father-daughter relationship in which a positive parental relationship can promote the father-daughter relationship where a negative parental relationship may diminish it (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2010; Sano, Richards & Zvonkovic, 2008; Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014). For example, adolescent girls felt more unloved and angrier at their father than boys in families where the mother criticized the father (Koerner, 2004). Afifi and McManus (2010) speculated that the animosity of daughters towards their father may be the mother tending to disclose more damaging information to daughters rather than sons in divorce situations which might create psychological distress for daughters (Afifi & McManus, 2010).

As described before, for fathers who want to be involved, maternal gatekeeping is an obstacle. If co-parenting is continuously a challenge due to the mother being critical or unresponsive, then the father may potentially forsake the relationship with his daughter (Brown, Sullivan, Manning & Neff, 2011; Kulika & Tsorefb, 2010; Stevenson, et al.,

2014; Troilo & Coleman, 2012). Interestingly, mothers who keep the gates open typically had a good relationship with her own father (Titelman, 2008; Cannon 2008; Chiland, 1982; Krampe & Newton, 2006; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2010). Thus, the status of the current father-daughter relationship tends to be recreated in the next generation (Nielsen, 2012). This is an important factor when examining the father-daughter relationship in the context of incarceration because the contact the father has with his children may be contingent on the relationship he has with their mother.

### **Father Absence Due to Incarceration and Impact on Children**

Father absence due to incarceration has been deemed to have considerable negative outcomes for children, particularly for children who are already experiencing significant familial and community challenges. There has been a significant focus on the examination of fragile families in American society (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2009; Gibson-Davis, 2008; Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004; Pattillo, Weiman, & Western, 2006; Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel & McLanahan, 2001). The combination of living in poverty and having a lack of fathering, such as with paternal incarceration, during critical developmental stages of childhood increases daughters risk for developing cognitive, social and psychological problems (Clayton & Moore, 2003; Moore et al., 2009; Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012 ).

In 2011, the U.S. Justice Bureau reported there were 7.1 million individuals in the United States who were either on probation, paroled or incarcerated. Of this, 92% of incarcerated parents are fathers (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Additionally, 1.5 million children have a parent who is incarcerated, with the majority of these children being under the age of ten (National Center for Children and Families, 2010). If half of these children are girls, then this means that there are approximately 750,000 daughters with fathers currently in prison. Thus, incarceration continues to be a central problem facing families, communities and most significantly children who have a parent in prison. Incarcerated fathers experience unique challenges in relation to parental involvement in the lives of their children. For many incarcerated men, fathering in prison involves a sense of helplessness and frustration (Arditti et al., 2005). Incarceration may generate challenges for men to identify and conceptualize themselves as fathers due to the extrication from their children, which may also create complications for reunification during the reentry process (Dyer, 2005).

For both the families and the offender, incarceration can lead to parental strain, economic hardship for the parent who is not incarcerated, and significant emotional stress (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Geller, et al, 2009; Schwartz-Soicher, Geller, & Garfinkel, 2011; Swisher & Waller, 2008). Negative effects on the family unit consist of the deterioration and disconnecting of family relationships, particularly with the



incarcerated person, and psychological and emotional turmoil on family members (Hairston, 2001). Paternal incarceration affects daughters by putting them at an even higher risk of being physically aggressive and sexually active, breaking the law, becoming depressed and anxious, and feeling abandoned (Bernstein, 2007). Many father-daughter relationships are damaged or destroyed entirely during imprisonment (Bernstein, 2007; Braman, 2004; Confort, 2008). Also, fathers may perceive that the relationship with his children is based on the relationship he has with the children's mother and that she is the gatekeeper in terms of the amount of contact he has with his children (Arditti et al., 2005; Geller, 2013; Roy & Dyson, 2005; Swisher & Waller, 2008). The mother may rarely bring the daughter to visit the father in prison (Roy & Dyson, 2005). Swanson, Lee, Sansone and Tatum (2013) interviewed 185 fathers at a maximum security correctional facility in regards to the perceived barriers that fathers felt restricted their relationship with their children. Lack of support by the maternal figure and "negative or unforgiving attitudes" from their children were ranked as the most significant obstacles, even over the restrictions of the prison setting (p.468). Thus, the contact may be ceased between the father and children because the couple relationship either ends or is turbulent as well as perceived estrangement by his children.

The loss of a parent to incarceration is often devastating and de-stabilizing for children (Mazza, 2002). In a qualitative study by Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) exploring

the experiences of children who had an incarcerated parent, children stated they were aware of the stress both their father and mother were experiencing and the children often assumed the adult-like responsibility of trying to make the situation better. The children also emphasized they wanted to have a relationship with their incarcerated father. This was supported by Shlafter and Poehlmann's (2010) study that focused on children with incarcerated parents who were ages four to fifteen and primarily girls. Results indicated that for the most part children wanted contact with their parents, especially if they had a positive perception of their parent. Also, children who had more contact with their parent tended to experience less "fear and alienation" and have fewer negative feelings towards the parent (p.410). In a recent study by Yocum and Nath (2011), seventeen children and eight mothers were interviewed regarding their anticipation of the father coming home from prison. All of the participants, including both mothers and children, indicated they wanted the children to have a relationship with their father, even though several noted they were hesitant about whether or not the father would recidivate. Unfortunately, only around 40% of inmates maintain regular contact with their children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Children may not visit their father because of challenges in the visitation process such as long distances to travel to the prison, their caretaker not bringing them for visits, not being able to have physical contact with their father in the prison and feeling

disrespected by staff in the correctional facility (Arditti, 2003; Clopton & East, 2008; Dyer, 2005; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Furthermore, fathers may also struggle with maintaining a relationship with their children because they are too illiterate to write letters or cannot read the letters their children send to them or they cannot afford to make phone calls (Day, 2005). This is particularly challenging due to the primary way of contact between an incarcerated parent and their child is through letters or phone calls (Mazza, 2002; Schlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014).

Unfortunately, the loss of contact due to incarceration has been linked to maladjustment for children including poorer academic achievement, more troubled peer relationships and early involvement with the legal system (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Dannerbeck, 2005; Van De Rakt, Murray, & Nieuwbeerta, 2012). Furthermore, children may also bear witness to the arrest of their father, including seeing him taken away in handcuffs and put into a police car, as well as experiencing the criminal court process, including the sentencing of their father (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010; Mazza, 2002). Statistics vary from approximately 20% of children being present at the arrest of their parent (Raeder, 2012) up to 83% of children witnessing the arrest (Kampfner, 1995). This can create a sense of abandonment for children as well as fear and confusion (Mazza, 2002). This is further enhanced if the father has limited or no contact with their child while incarcerated (Miller, 2006). Instability for children can be further heightened by

children possibly having to change their living arrangements, either by living with relatives or be placed in foster care if their mother is unable to care for them and/or moving from their house and changing schools due to a lack of financial stability (Geller, et al, 2009; Glaze & Maruschak, 2009; Raphael, 2011). The outcome of these experiences can result in a lack of trust, low self-esteem, anger at authority, and hypervigilance (Mazza, 2002).

Research has also detected symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in children who have an incarcerated parent. This is particularly accurate if the children were exposed to the arrest of their parent or their parent's criminal activity (Bocknek, Sanderson, & Preston, 2008; Murray & Murray, 2010). Stigma and secrecy are also issues that children of incarcerated parents struggle with and can be traumatizing (Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009; Foster & Hagan, 2009; Kampfner, 1995; Miller, 2006; Phillips & Gates, 2011; Raeder, 2012). Children are often stigmatized because of their parents' crime, are assigned negative attributes, and may be ostracized by peers, teacher and other family members (Phillips & Gates, 2011). Furthermore, children may be misled or outright lied to regarding their parents incarceration by adults in their lives under the guise of protecting the child (Phillips & Gates, 2011). This can lead to children not trusting authority figures once children discover the truth.

Children may also be placed in a situation in which they are told not to reveal that their parent is incarcerated to others outside the immediate family, which creates a sense of ‘secrecy’ in the home and potentially heightens the shame of the incarceration (Clopton & East, 2008; Phillips & Gates, 2011, p. 288; Raeder, 2012). Therefore, children can be distrustful of others, withdraw and be hypersensitive to how they are treated (Phillips & Gates, 2011). This limits the likelihood of children talking about their experience to others or reaching out for help so they suffer in silence (Murray & Murray, 2010). There is limited research on how the effects of stigma affect children of incarcerated parents, particularly later in life. This is important because there are indicators that stigmatization can lead to behavioral and emotional problems in both childhood and as adults, including social exclusion and isolation into adulthood (Geller et al, 2009; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Therefore, comprehending the longer-term effects of parental incarceration on children may be helpful in determining more beneficial interventions with this population (Foster & Hagan, 2009; Raphael, 2011).

Research on meaning-making of both father and daughter’s experiences during incarceration is also limited. In a study by Arditti, Smock and Parkman (2005), 51 incarcerated fathers were interviewed on their experience of incarceration and how they perceived this affected their ability to be an involved parent. Fathers communicated

feeling helpless and that they were unable to be a “good father” while they were in prison (p. 275). Tripp (2009) also conducted a qualitative study with 25 incarcerated fathers on their identity as a father while in prison. Findings reflected that fathers regulated contact with their children and visits were often difficult for the father, they attempted to stay connected to the identity they had as a father prior to incarceration, and they had high expectations about future possibilities for their relationship with their family and children during reentry. However, for both of these studies, gender of the child was not a variable.

Families also face several new challenges during the reentry process. Each year there are more than 600,000 individuals who return home after serving time in prison (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Often these individuals have little assistance with the reintegration and reunification process into their families and communities. Families may also be unprepared for what this transition will entail. Challenges during incarceration are often carried over into the reentry process including relationship strain, emotional distress among family members, social stigma of the incarceration, and the continuation of financial stressors (Foster & Hagan, 2009; Geller et al, 2009; Lebel, 2012; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Phillips & Lindsay, 2011). Additionally, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2011) estimates that 67.5% of persons released from prison will be rearrested in three years. Therefore, children and fathers may experience the loss of their relationship multiple times over the course of a child’s life.

The cycle of imprisonment among large numbers of individuals, mostly minority men, is increasingly concentrated in poor, urban communities already encountering enormous social and economic disadvantages (Hunt, 1996; Imber-Black, 2008; King, 1993; Miller, 2006). Many individuals remain plagued by substance abuse and health problems upon reentry into the community (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Research on incarcerated men who maintain contact with supportive family members suggests they have greater success after release, such as better employment outcomes and reduced drug use, than those who do not (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010; Foster & Hagan, 2009; Phillips & Lindsay, 2011). Thus reentry may be successful for fathers who have economic and emotional support.

Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, Harris and Fisher (2005) conducted a study in which they interviewed men who had recently been paroled about variables that reduced recidivism. One of the findings was that participants who had support from family and friends were more successful in their reentry process. In another study, fathers whose children visited them in prison were less likely to return to prison and to have problems reuniting with their families upon release (Travis, McBride & Solomon, 2005). Recommendations from these studies reveal the need for a concentrated focus on family relationships to prevent higher recidivism rates. Through obtaining daughters' narratives who had a father that was incarcerated, it can provide a glimpse into the needs of children

during this turbulent time as well as indicators on how to potentially keep fathers and daughters connected during both the incarceration and reentry process.

However, some studies propose that fathers and family members may have unrealistic ideas or ambivalent views of family life when the father returns home, particularly regarding the relationships with his children (Day, Acock, Bahr, & Arditti, 2005; Tripp, 2009; Yocum & Nath, 2011). Because of the challenges associated with incarceration, father-child relationships often weaken. Thus, the attachment between the incarcerated parent and their child may be diminished or create further separation if the relationship was already unstable (Murray & Murray, 2010).

### **Theoretical Considerations**

The current study was about deconstructing the father-daughter relationship when paternal incarceration has been present through the narrative of the daughter. In examining this relationship, the theoretical models that shaped the paradigm of this research included Hermeneutical Phenomenology and a Feminist framework. These models reflect meaning-making in relation to the father-daughter relationship and honoring the voices of women, which provides a unique dimension to this study both in relation to gender as well as marginalized narratives.



## **Hermeneutical Phenomenology**

The two historical figures credited with the development of the primary phenomenological paradigms are philosophers Edmund Husserl (phenomenology) and Martin Heidegger (hermeneutic phenomenology). Phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience within the life world (van Manen, 1997). The aim for both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology is to develop meaning and shared understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). However, there are also distinct differences between these two frameworks. Husserl focused primarily on the here and now as well as perceptions of future based on current knowledge. Heidegger, in contrast, believed that comprehension evolves from historically understanding one's past and how they situate themselves in the world based on these previous experiences (Polkinghorne, 1983). This can include elements of culture as well as gender, and that people are immersed in social and historical contexts that cannot be separated out from their world views (Heidegger, 1962; Munhall, 1989). Heidegger argued that everything that is encountered in one's life is referenced to their prior understanding of the world (Koch, 1995). Heidegger also perceived meaning-making as a dyadic experience in which a person is being influenced by the world while also influencing the world based on their previous experiences (Munhall, 1989).

Thus, Heidegger deemed interpretation as critical in the process of developing understanding (Munhall, 1989). The interpretive process focuses on historical meanings of experience and effects on both individual and social levels. (Polkinghorne, 1983). The key component to hermeneutics as an interpretive process, then, is that of a particular phenomenon being developed through language (Polkinghorne, 1983). This is primarily conducted through texts consisting of written or verbal communication (Kvale, 1996).

Another significant difference in Husserl and Heidegger pertains to bracketing. Phenomenology is described as more “foundationalist” in that it attempts to construct a “correct answer” or “valid interpretation” of texts that are not “dependent on the biographical, social or historical position of the interpreter” (Lavery, 2003, p. 6). Hermeneutic phenomenology, however, is described as “non-foundationalist” and “focuses on meaning that arises from the interpretive interaction between historically produced texts and the reader” (Lavery, 2003, p. 10) and thus is socially constructed. Therefore, Husserl bracketed his beliefs and experiences to determine the essence of another’s experience without the influence of his own (Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes the subjective, life world experience of the researcher and “does not seek to set aside biases and assumptions, but sees them as embedded and essential to the interpretive process” (Lavery, 2003, p.8; Polkinghorne, 1983; van Manen, 1997). The researcher is aware of their own “social, historical and

cultural experiences of the phenomenon under investigation without attempting to disregard them and is interested in how this influences the data that is emerging” (Laverty, 2003, p.8). Thus, comprehensive bracketing is impossible due to the researcher always having some level of prejudice, or not being value-free, given their own historical experiences of being in this life world (Gadamer, 2004).

How the researcher positions herself with the data differs between Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. In phenomenology, the focus is on honoring the experiences of the participants rather than the author’s interpretation of the data (Creswell, 1998). This includes utilizing an intuitive inquiry that consists of the researcher putting aside their own assumptions of the phenomenon, exhaustive and repetitive contemplation of the data, and development of core themes arising directly from the participants’ experiences (Moustakas, 1995). This strand of phenomenology is often referred to as transcendental essentialist and more descriptive in nature. In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology involves a co-construction of the data between the researcher and the participant as they engage in a hermeneutic circle of understanding (Gadamer, 2004). The researcher and participant partake in conversation “to bring life to the experience being explored, through the use of imagination, the hermeneutic circle and attention to language and writing” (Laverty, 2003, p.9).

The hermeneutic circle is how understanding is developed in hermeneutic phenomenology. Interpretation is a fusion of horizons, a dialectical interaction between the expectation of the interpreter, and the meaning of the text (Polkinghorne, 1983). A 'horizon' is a range of vision that includes everything seen from a particular perspective (Lavery, 2003, p. 8). Questioning is an integral part of the interpretive process to help create new horizons and understandings between researcher and participant through ongoing conversation and dialogue, which creates text (Gadamer, 2004). Hermeneutic phenomenology consists of a continuous dance between the parts and the whole of the text (Gadamer, 2004). The researcher develops a deeper understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon as he/she migrates between the parts and paying attention to how their view of this experience shifts as they move between these two areas (van Manen, 1997).

Gadamer and Heidegger also had diverging approaches to hermeneutical phenomenology, particularly in relation to the authenticity of the researcher. Gadamer supports the researcher being an active and passionate participant in the process of understanding, particularly if the researcher has directly experienced the phenomenon of interest (2004). Therefore, the aim of the hermeneutic circle is to create shared understanding and reforming an experience to encompass both the researcher and participant by melding their two horizons (Gadamer, 2004). Two horizons come together to expand the full horizon to encompass multiple meanings (fusion of horizons) regarding

a particular phenomenon, such as paternal incarceration (Gadamer, 2004). Particular philosophical perspectives, such as feminism, social constructionism and postmodernism, can also be part of informing this process (Gadamer, 2004). Understanding, then, is always open to revision when confronted with more convincing evidence and interpretations (Gadamer, 2004). Therefore, the researcher must be open to being transformed in this process and having their standpoint challenged as much as the participant is (Gadamer, 2004). There also needs to be reflexivity in the research process in which the researcher acknowledges (s)he cannot completely bracket their experiences or assumptions, but also be mindful and perceptive of these areas and allow oneself to be open to new understanding and experience (Dahl & Boss, 2005).

The hermeneutic circle as described by Gadamer and other concepts of Heidegger's phenomenology help inform van Manen's method of analysis and were used as a framework for the interpretation and analysis of this research. Koch (1995) stated "hermeneutics invites participants into an ongoing conversation, but does not provide a set methodology" (p. 37). Thus, since Gadamer and Heidegger are centered in ontology and epistemology, van Manen's analytic structure is utilized in this study because of his distinct focus on methodology (Lavery, 2003).

## **Feminist Framework**

Feminist theory examines women's roles and experiences, particularly in relation to gender inequality (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Qualitative inquiry is useful in capturing these experiences by creating agency for women in which their stories are told using their own language and expressing their personal meaning around life world events. Daly (2007) described this in stating, "qualitative study in human development is concerned with understanding the motives of individuals as they seek to meet their needs, their decision making strategies as they navigate complex environments and the way they organize their lives around goals such as being economically secure or having satisfying relationship. Gender plays an important role in understanding how individuals subjectively navigate these environments"(p. 68). Although I recognize there are divergent perspectives on what constitutes a feminist approach (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Frances, 2002), I examine fatherhood in the context of acknowledging that both mothers and fathers can be nurturing, have positive attachments, and be valuable in the lives of their daughters ( Doucet, 2006; Ehrensafet, 1995; Silverstein & Auerbach, 2007; White, 2006).

Moreover, though fathers do not define their daughters' personhood, they can contribute to shaping the life experiences, or life world, of their daughters. There are indicators that men want to be more emotionally involved as fathers and not simply

viewed as the breadwinners of the family (Brooks, 1991; Silverstein, 1996). Because men's and women's roles are socially constructed, only viewing fathers from an economic perspective in regards to their children continues to perpetuate constricting stereotypes in gender relations (Doucote, 2006; Silverstein, 1996). In examination of women's narratives regarding their fathers allowed various dimensions of this relationship to emerge that had not been explored in previous research. This permitted recognition of the uniqueness of the female experience, which has often been negated in research in relation to fathering, and challenged a presupposition that children's experiences are similar despite gender.

Furthermore, children of incarcerated parents, particularly children of color, are often marginalized as a result of the stigma and lack of opportunities that are created from the incarceration of their parent and are thus referenced as collateral damage (Foster & Hagan, 2009; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Raeder, 2012). This population tends to be "underserved and understudied" (Miller, 2006, p. 473). Therefore, exploring the narratives of an adult child who experienced parental incarceration allows space and permission of voice for those who have often been considered voiceless or 'invisible' (Miller, 2006; Phillips & Gates, 2011, p. 286; Raeder, 2012). Since these participants may have been in positions of being marginalized because of experiencing parental incarceration, it emphasized the need for the contribution of a feminist lens to assist in

reflecting on these power imbalances in both the father-daughter relationship and within a socio-historical and cultural context. As Gilgun (2014) stated, “any research that allows people to speak for themselves and interpret their own situations to others is inherently emancipatory... Traditions of emancipatory intent are strong in qualitative research because of its emphasis on understanding the experiences of others in their own terms and then conveying their accounts to larger audiences” (p. 12).

This research adhered to fundamental principles identified by feminist researcher and philosopher, Marjorie DeVault (1990), which encompassed: 1) using the language that women use to describe their experiences, including “exploration of incompletely articulated aspects of women’s experiences” (DeVault, 1990, p.100), 2) listening carefully to the construction of women’s accounts of their experiences and creating an ethical, genuine, non-exploitive space for women to tell their stories, 3) paying attention to how “women’s speech is represented in order to portray participants respectfully” (DeVault, 1990, p.109), and 4) being intentional and respectful in disseminating the research to audiences to enhance the understanding of women’s experiences and promote the expansion of women’s voices (DeVault, 1990).

### **Preliminary Study on Lived Experiences of Previously Incarcerated Fathers**

In a prior study I conducted, the lived experiences of recently incarcerated fathers were explored in their relationship with their daughters prior to, during and post-



incarceration (Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014). Thirteen fathers living in transitional housing were interviewed about their relationship with their eldest daughter under the age of 18 years old. The framework of the study was primarily guided by Moustakas's Transcendental Phenomenological approach to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of fathers' experiences through their attitudes, recollections, feelings and perceptions regarding this relationship.

Findings reflected fathers reevaluating relationships with women after the birth of their daughter, decision-making on contact with their daughter during incarceration and reentry, identifying as their daughter's protector, recognizing that their incarceration affected their daughter, and experiencing both optimism and apprehensiveness in reconnecting with their daughter during the reentry process. Brief summaries of the findings are revealed below:

### **Reevaluating relationships with women after the birth of their daughter**

Some of the fathers reflected on their intimate relationships with women preceding the birth of their daughter, including their daughter's mother. Fathers revealed feeling shameful of how they had treated women earlier in their lives. This ranged from infidelity, being physically or verbally abusive, and having negative feelings towards women in general. Many of the fathers said they gained more respect for women after their daughter

was born and determined they needed to take on more responsibility as a positive male role model in their daughter's life.

### **Decision-making on contact with their daughter during incarceration and reentry**

Fathers described a thoughtful, deliberate decision-making process of how much and what type of contact to have with their daughter while they were incarcerated. Most of the fathers limited communication and often refused visits from their daughter with the assumption they were protecting her from being exposed to the prison setting. All of the fathers in the study attempted to maintain some sort of contact throughout their entire incarceration with their daughter, whether through phone calls, letters, cards or visits.

Contact was also a significant issue during reentry. All of the fathers in this study were in some type of transitional housing while they were on supervised release from prison and therefore did not live with their daughter. Most of the fathers did not want their daughter to visit them in these facilities because it was not a safe place for their daughter with other offenders living there, because they did not want her to ask a lot of questions about why they were there, and because it was painful for them when their daughter had to leave again.

### **Identifying as their daughter's protector**

Fathers maintained that protecting their daughter was a significant part of their identity as a father. Despite their incarceration and criminal history, fathers emphasized they wanted to be an example of what a "good man" is for their daughter, which

consisted of defending and safeguarding her, particularly from other men. Some fathers reflected on the protection of their daughter as being an act of redemption in which keeping her safe and ensuring nothing bad happened to her was a way to make up for the time they spent away from their daughter while in prison. Fathers expressed regret for not being there for their daughter while incarcerated because they believed they were unable to protect her during that time and were fearful about their little girl growing up in a “crazy world.” Fathers believed that hiding the truth from their daughter (about their incarceration) was essentially protecting her.

Many of the fathers said they had protected their daughters prior to incarceration by compartmentalizing their criminal activities. Some scheduled their criminal activities where they believed it did not interfere with time with their daughter. Others talked about being gone for a few days to “take care of business”. All of these fathers described this as “not bringing the streets home”. Even though they were aware that engaging in these types of activities was not healthy, they often stated they did not feel they had a choice because it supported their family and their lifestyle. Most of the fathers also believed that their daughter was not aware of their criminal activity although they acknowledged it probably affected their relationship with daughter. Many fathers wished they could change the time in their lives when they engaged in criminal activity or were incarcerated now that they could reflect on how destructive their choices were to their relationship with their daughter.

**Recognizing that their incarceration affected their daughter**

Most of the fathers believed their incarceration had some impact on their daughter, although a few stated their daughter was really young and probably did not fully understand where they were. However, even these fathers reported their absence during that time most likely affected their daughter negatively. Fathers reflected on their daughter being upset and disappointed in the fact that they missed important activities in her life, as well as experiencing grief with her father being absent.

**Optimism and apprehensiveness in reconnecting with their daughter during reentry**

Fathers reported experiencing both optimism and apprehensiveness in their ability to reconnect with their daughter during the reentry process. To begin with, all fathers expressed hope for their future with their daughter following the reentry process. Most of the fathers wanted to be a positive role model for their daughter and to support her dreams of going to college, walking her down the aisle at her wedding, and encouraging her to be successful in life. Some of the fathers talked about being more present in their daughter's life and regaining her trust—that they will be there for her when needed. Some fathers wanted to resume child support payments and provide financially for their daughter. Fathers also described the happiness of being able to pick up the phone and call their daughter whenever they wanted, and of their daughter calling them. Fathers articulated the importance of how their daughter viewed them.

The fathers who were estranged prior to incarceration expressed a more passive role in reconnecting with their daughter, such as stating they would be “lucky” if they even received visitation or they were going to “put the ball in my daughter’s court” if she wanted to connect with the him. It is important to note that these three fathers wanted a relationship with their daughter, yet it appeared they were more apprehensive about this being a possibility. A few of the fathers also dialogued about concerns pertaining to legal matters with their daughter, particularly related to custody. These fathers worried that the courts would not grant them visitation due to their felony record. Although many of the fathers in this study had a cordial relationship with their daughters’ mother, a few fathers were apprehensive about how the mother would react now that they were out of prison and wanting to reestablish a connection with their daughter. Most stated that in order to have a good relationship with their daughter, there needed to be a good relationship with the mother.

The study showed the need for more research and clinical practice on the special dynamics of father-daughter relationships when a man has been incarcerated. Since this study did not have access to how the daughter felt about the relationships with their fathers, the father may have remembered events in a more positive light or recounted experiences pertaining to incarceration differently than his daughter may have. Therefore, interviewing daughters was imperative in constructing a more balanced account of this phenomenon.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

*Somehow, out of the haze of multiple competing perspectives, we share desires to understand persons in context from their points of view, to be immersed in those contexts, to produce material grounded in human experience, and to have positive influences. These shared meanings constitute a kind of home base for qualitative family researchers and qualitative researchers in general-Gilgun, 2014, p.13*

The use of qualitative methodology requires the ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and constantly open to experience (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 1997, 2014). This was the first study to explicitly focus on the perspectives of adult daughters who had fathers that were incarcerated during childhood. Qualitative interviews were conducted with participants focusing on lived, meaning-making experiences of their relationship with their father prior to and during incarceration, as well as the influence they felt this experience had on their lives. The reentry process was also explored with participants if this was applicable to their situation. Interviews centered on gathering thick descriptions, feelings, recollections and perceptions of their experiences with their father to better understand the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1997, 2014).

This study was primarily guided by van Manen's hermeneutical phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1997). Meaning-making was created by the

participants as they described this particular lived experience (Creswell, 1998). Furthermore, I have personal experience regarding the subject matter of this study, which lends itself to the initial exploration of the father-daughter relationship during incarceration. Therefore, my experience allowed for an emic, or insider, perspective on the subject matter from the viewpoint of a daughter with an incarcerated father during her childhood (Daly, 2007).

## **Research Design and Methods**

### **Participant Selection and Recruitment**

Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used for this study to ensure the participants met inclusion criteria and make certain there was a shared experience of the phenomenon of being an adult woman who had a father that was incarcerated during her childhood (van Manen, 1997; Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research selects participants who have life world experience that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience (Polkinghorne, 1983; van Manen, 1997). The number of participants necessary for studies of this type varies depending on the nature of the study and the data collected along the way. Researchers may continue, for example, to engage in interviews with participants until they believe they have reached a point of saturation, in which a clearer understanding of the

experience will not be found through further discussion with participants (Sandelowski, 1986; Lavery, 2003). Snowball sampling was incorporated because participants could possibly be aware of other women who experienced this phenomenon. Since this study had a very specific population as the focus it may have been difficult to recruit simply through more traditional methods such as displaying study flyers in heavily populated locations. Since phenomenology is grounded in understanding a particular phenomenon rather than the generalizability of findings, this sampling technique appeared appropriate for this study (Patton, 2002).

The criteria for the recruitment of participants was as follows:

1. The participant was age 18 or younger at the time of incarceration and was older than 18 at the time of the interview.
2. The participants' father must have been incarcerated for at least a two-year period during her childhood.
3. The crime that the father was incarcerated for could not be against the mother of his daughter or any of his children.
4. The father must have been incarcerated in a state or federal prison and not in a county jail due to differences in these settings, such as jails tending to be for shorter sentences and located in the community the person lives in.



Participants were recruited in multiple ways. This included displaying flyers at local community agencies that specialized in working with fathers during reentry with the hopes that fathers would inform their daughters of the study or daughters might see the flyers when visiting their father. These agencies consisted of a fathering project, a mentoring-based program and a halfway house. Professionals who worked in these agencies also agreed to inform potential participants of the study. Several community agencies that work primarily with women's issues also agreed to display flyers on the study and professionals there informed potential participants of the study. Finally, information on the study was distributed by list serves and displaying flyers at local colleges. Interested persons contacted me directly to go through a screening process to ensure they met the criteria for the study. During this initial conversation I disclosed the purpose of the study and my personal experience with this phenomenon by acknowledging briefly that my interest in conducting this study came from my father being incarcerated when I was a child. Upon completion of their interview, participants were also asked if they were aware of anyone else who met the criteria of the study and may want to participate. I gave the participant a copy of the flyer to give to other potentially interested persons so they could contact me directly if they were indeed interested. Interviews were conducted at a place of convenience for the participant, such as their home or place of employment, and by phone.

## **Participants**

In total, thirteen women from a Midwestern metropolitan area participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 19 to 64 with the mean age being 33 years. Participants identified their ethnicity in the following ways: two African Americans, two Native Americans, one Latina, six White Euro-Americans, and two mixed Native American and African American heritage. Three completed high school, five completed some college and three graduated from college. One participant did not finish high school while one participant completed an advanced college degree. Eight of the participants had never been married, one was divorced, one was separated, and three were married with one of them being in her second marriage. Eight participants had children and all except one was twenty-five or younger when they had their first child with two having children at sixteen and two at eighteen. Four had biological parents who were never married, six had parents who were divorced, one had parents that were separated and two had parents that were still married.

The majority of participants reported they had fathers who completed high school while three had fathers that did not finish high school, one completed some college and two graduated from college. Participants said that the number of children their father had ranged from one to six children with one participant being an only child and one participant was the only daughter. Only one of the participants reported currently

communicating with her father daily while six of the participants rated this as a few times a month and three stating a couple times a year. For three of the participants, there was no communication with their father because one of the women chose not to communicate with him and the father being deceased for the other two women.

Regarding incarceration, six of the participants indicated their father was incarcerated once, four stated he was in prison twice, one stated three times, and two stated eight times or more. Participants believed the criminal charges for their father's incarceration consisted of: three for drugs, one for insider trading, two for homicide, two for drunk driving, two for assault/theft, two for sex crimes, and one for prostitution. The length of time fathers were incarcerated over a participants' childhood from the age of birth to eighteen years old ranged from two to sixteen years with the mean being 8.2 years. The age of the participant when her father went to prison was between one and seventeen years old with the mean age being six years old. Nine of the participants were under the age of ten when the father was first incarcerated. While their fathers were in prison, ten of the participants lived with their mother the entire time while one participant lived with her grandmother and one lived with her aunt. Another participant lived with her mother for a short time and then went into foster care. Only one of the participants had ever been incarcerated herself and three had been in intimate relationships with someone who had been in prison. For the participants who had children, they stated none

of their children had ever been incarcerated. Three participants admitted to substance abuse issues, eight stated they had been in an abusive intimate relationship and seven stated they had struggled with mental health issues, particularly with depression.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews varied on the length of time with the range being 90 minutes to almost three hours. I audio-taped and later transcribed the interviews. The interviews began with a description of the general focus of the study and obtaining informed consent (See Appendix A). The participants also completed a brief demographic form that included the incarceration history of their father. Participants were given a \$25 gift card for their participation in the study. Interviews were conducted at participant's homes, places of employment, local coffee shops and by phone.

The interview format involved a primary grand-tour question, followed by semi-structured interview questions concerning the participants' experience of their relationship with their father (See Appendix B) (Creswell, 2007). The grand-tour question is meant to capture broad interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation and guide the trajectory of the interview (Creswell, 2007). For this study, the grand-tour question was: What are the experiences of women who had incarcerated fathers during their childhood? I began the interviews by asking participants a warm-up statement to talk about their first memories of their father and then proceeded to the grand tour

question. Additional follow-up questions were directly linked to what participants reported after this warm-up question and were continuously aimed at better understanding the phenomenon under investigation within the context of their experiences with their father, particularly surrounding incarceration and the effect this had on their life (Creswell, 2007).

This conversational process centered on obtaining deeper exploration of the participants' stories by examining the meaning-making of participants through their language, perceptions and lived experiences of the father-daughter relationship (van Manen, 1997). Examples of these follow-up questions included, "What was your relationship like with your father prior to incarceration?" and "What is your experience of your relationship with your father while he was in prison? Probing questions were also utilized to obtain thicker descriptions of the participants' experiences. Examples of probing questions consisted of "how has this relationship changed or affected you", "describe the quality of your relationship during this time" and "please say more about that". I recorded direct quotations, key words, moments of silence, and my own reflections of the interview to enhance the authenticity of the data collection process (van Manen, 1997).

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

“Phenomenology claims that in order to grasp the essence of a thing, it is necessary to take phenomena as the object of the analysis” (Tarozzi & Mortari, 2010, p.23). The analytical progression for this study was grounded in van Manen’s approach with the Hermeneutical Circle initially explored by Gadamer (Lavery, 2003). This involves the circularity of interpretation and coherence of the whole and its parts (to and fro motion) (Gadamer, 2004). Gilgun describes interpretation as “researchers becoming steeped in the meanings that research participants attribute to the events and actions in their lives. It is the job of the researchers to make sense of this material. They do so through the use of concepts and theories” (Gilgun, 2014, p.12). This is a continuous process that consists of constantly immersing oneself into individual narratives and revising the understanding of the data to obtain a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the whole (Gadamer, 2004). Final interpretations will arise through a fusion of text, the participants, the researcher and the life world contexts that they are drawing their information from (van Manen, 1997).

The analytical process itself was directed by van Manen’s six step “methodical structure” (van Manen, 1997, p. 30) for hermeneutic phenomenological research. These six steps are outlined below and provided a framework for the research method. It is important to note that these steps are fluid and although they are sequentially listed, there

tends to be more of a circular dynamic that occurs during analysis (Gadamer, 1975).

Consideration is also given to van Manen's approach for isolating the prominent themes contained in the data.

#### 1. Turning to the nature of lived experience:

The initial step in this process was determining and being interested or curious about a specific aspect of a human experience and exploring the meaning individuals connect to that experience (van Manen, 1997). This research was initially born out of my experience of growing up with an incarcerated father. Due to being female, I had a specific curiosity around how this phenomenon influenced daughter's in particular. Thus, the research question became "What is the lived experience of women who had incarcerated fathers growing up?" The research process was continuously being directed by this overarching question to ensure the methodology was concise in addressing it, particularly in the recruitment of female participants who also had this life world experience.

#### 2. Investigating experience as we live it:

The data collection method implemented to investigate the lived experience of women who had incarcerated fathers growing up was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Interviews

allowed for the participants and me to re-live the participants' original experiences as they narrated them to me. The participants were asked to describe their experience of this phenomenon in their own words to add depth and breadth to the current understanding of this issue. Also, to assist participants in grounding themselves regarding an accurate timeline of when particular life events occurred, a lifeline was also incorporated into the interview process. The lifeline used in this study was adapted from Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), which employs a lifeline activity to guide trauma survivors through their significant life events (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011). For the purpose of this study, however, the lifeline was simply used as a visual tool to assist participants in determining when particular experiences occurred regarding pre, during, and post incarceration.

Analysis for hermeneutic phenomenology actually begins with data collection such as the interview itself and the initial transcription of the interview (Daly, 2007; Van Manen, 1997). Non-verbals, such as pauses, crying, and raised voice, were included as an observation of the participants' behavior during the interview and these were also taken into consideration during the interpretive process (Gilgun, 2014). At this point, I was already beginning to formulate ideas around patterns I was seeing, my own reflective process, and possible categories that were coming out of the meaning-making created by participants of their experiences (Gilgun, 2014).

3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon:



In order to reflect on the essential themes it was necessary to first identify the themes and sub-themes that were prominent in the data. During the interview I sought to recognize significant themes in the participant responses and encouraged elaboration on these points in order to ensure sufficient data was collected for analysis. After each interview the recording was transcribed verbatim and then analyzed by identifying common themes and assigning meaning to these experiences (van Manen, 1997). I achieved this by immersion in the data through a detailed reading approach that consisted of reading and re-reading the transcripts, moving between individual transcripts, and looking for common meanings the experience had for the group of participants. Statements, words and phrases that were believed to be of significance were selected during this process to form initial themes and sub-themes.

Interviews were transcribed and then I listened to them a second time to ensure the transcript was accurate. Transcripts were formulated using William Wargo's format in which line numbers and page numbers were incorporated for the entire manuscript, the right margin was set at two and a half inches to make notations of meaning units and memos and possible emerging categories and themes, and significant quotes were highlighted (2013). This was beneficial, not only as part of starting the analysis process, but also when there were multiple researchers reviewing the transcripts to create a systematic format of coding the data. At times, there were up to three researchers coding

an interview, which will be described in more detail in the verification strategies section of this chapter.

Additionally, for each transcript, each researcher completed a brief summary of the interview, a descriptive memo of key ideas or issues that jumped out at the researcher regarding the participants' experience, a theoretical memo pertaining to potential theories or frameworks the participants experience may have been resonating with from existing literature, and a reflective memo on the researchers own personal subjective thoughts and feelings about the interview. Codes were established through the review of the literature, each researcher having extensive knowledge of family systems and dynamics, and my familiarity of the interviews along with my personal and professional immersion in the area of paternal incarceration (Gilgun, 2014). A database was created to organize all the data and track the various stages of examination of the data as it was being shaped through analysis. This process was in conjunction to documenting my reflections in a journal that I began at the start of the research process.

#### 4. Describing the phenomena in the art of writing and rewriting:

As the cycles of writing and re-writing continued during the research process, there was constant revising and refining of the material (van Manen, 1997). Ideas that were formed during data collection and transcription become refined during this writing and re-writing stage as well as in the reading and re-reading of the transcripts. Constant

questioning and reflection of the emerging themes allowed for a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the participants.

As the analysis phase continued, a color coding scheme was implemented in which different colors were used for the multiple categories and themes that had begun to emerge. Once this process was completed, all of the sections of text and quotes for a particular color were combined and reviewed again to ensure the interpretation for that particular category or theme was consistent and accurate throughout all thirteen of the participant interviews. If there were sections of text that did not appear to coincide with the other sections or if the category still appeared to be too broad, I revisited the original transcripts to determine if a particular section indeed did represent that category, if it perhaps was a better fit in a different category, or if it needed to be removed all together from the final analysis. I also determined if perhaps a category needed to be collapsed into themes if the category still appeared too broad or if there might be an entire other category that was present. Categories came forth and allowed the implicit meaning of the text to become explicit, such as maternal response to paternal incarceration (van Manen, 1997). Van Manen (1997) describes the explicit expressiveness of the text through asking ‘what is the text saying and how is it speaking to us’ (p.7). I then determined how each category was connected to other categories and a “model, theory or framework” into which the “category is embedded” (Thomas, 2003, p.4.) was constructed. A model of

paternal incarceration and the effect it had on daughters began to emerge during this back and forth process of engaging the data and it was tweaked and modified multiple times before it reached its current version.

Inductive reasoning was implemented in this study to reduce and condense a large amount of textual data into more manageable components, to “establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data are both transparent and defensible” and to create a “model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which were evident in the text” (Thomas, 2003, p.2). Deductive analysis is based on prior findings and “preconceptions” in research in which data comes out of theory whereas inductive reasoning allows findings to “emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data” and in which theory is derived from the text (p.2). Thus, inductive reasoning is more in alignment with participant-driven research and allows for the interview, or text, to stand both independently and collectively in the analysis process (Thomas, 2003). Therefore, in alliance with feminist principles of honoring women’s voices as individuals as well as a whole, inductive reasoning seemed most appropriate for this study.

##### 5. Maintaining a strong and orientated relation to the phenomenon:

Although the interviewing and transcribing of data can often be arduous, I was passionate and dedicated to furthering the comprehension of the effect of incarceration on

families. This helped in ensuring that I stayed on-task and orientated to the continuation of the study. To prevent becoming sidetracked with the participants' narratives or becoming distracted by my own experience with this phenomenon, ongoing systems were put into place consisting of a reflective journal where I documented my thoughts, observations and feelings. I also engaged in frequent dialogue with my doctoral committee to refocus my attention on the purpose of the research, and gave myself a specific timeline for each component of the study to be completed.

### **Reflexivity of the Lead Investigator**

*My Dearest Holli, How is my favorite person? You! Daddy is sorry that he had to hang up the phone so fast last time we talked. I did want to talk a lot longer but I ran out of time. I hear you are doing well in school and have made friends with several of your classmates. Daddy wants to thank you for the nice picture you painted! I have them pinned to the wall in my room so I can look at them every day. Maybe someday Mommy can bring you here to see me. It's been a long time since I have held you in my arms and kissed you goodnight...I love you and miss you Holli. Maybe someday soon we can all be together again. Kiss Mommy for me and you be a good girl. Remember you are always in the heart of your Daddy. I love you—letter from my father in*

*Waupun Correctional Facility, 1982*

Reflexivity refers to the need for the researcher to be self-aware and have the ability to decipher their emotional response or cognitive process from the participants (Ahern, 1999; Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Dally, 2007; Farnsworth, 2010; Gilgan, 2014; Holloway & Biley, 2011; Primeau, 2007). This process begins in the pre-research phase in which the researcher identifies their own relationship to the phenomenon and examines their motivations, assumptions and interests in the phenomenon even prior to the literature review (Finlay, 2002). This is critical because it allows the researcher to approach the study with openness and wonder, which is fundamental to this method (Finlay 2002).

The first component of this process is acknowledging my own story in regards to paternal incarceration. I was four when my father was arrested on drug charges and sent to prison for five years. I lived with my mother and maternal grandparents during that time and subsequently my parents divorced while my father was incarcerated. My father maintained contact with me through phone calls, letters and I visited him with my mother a few times. Prior to his incarceration, I would describe my relationship with my father as positive and he was very involved in my development. Post-incarceration, my father relocated approximately three hours from me due to me because a court order stated he could no longer live in the county where the offense occurred. My relationship with my father was somewhat estranged due to his time in prison and also the physical distance

between him and I during reentry. However, he did visit on occasion and called frequently. I also maintained a connection with his family and my mother was very supportive of my relationship with him. My father became ill with Lou Gehrig's disease when I was in my early twenties and he died when I was 26 years old. We never spoke about his time in prison or any issues related to this experience in my or his life. However, we did reconnect emotionally while he was dying and I forgave him for all the past hurt in our relationship as father and daughter. In many ways I feel I have come to understand my father more in death than I ever did in life, particularly through this research process, and I am grateful for the time we had together as he was a loving and good man.

During this study, I wrote regularly in a journal regarding my own personal experience with my father. This provided an outlet for my thoughts and feelings so they did not get tangled up in the experience of the participants I was interviewing. I also reflected on these journal entries as I was transcribing the interview to ensure I was separating my voice from that of the participants. This was incorporated into a reflexive memo at the end of each transcript to consider and internally dialogue about my experiences in relation to the participants' experiences, which helped establish my story from their story. I included a few excerpts below from reflexive memos that I documented during the analysis of the interviews:

1) This was a heavy interview for me given it was my first one and I was getting used to asking the questions as well as being open to receiving information the participant was giving me. My experience was somewhat different from hers in that my mother was always honest and open with me, I had a poor relationship with my stepfather, my father and I had a good relationship throughout my life. However, the emotional rollercoaster is familiar as well as being ashamed and embarrassed about having an incarcerated father. I admired her strength and vulnerability in taking a risk of attempting to reconnect with her father despite her feelings towards him. My father and I also did not discuss his incarceration or how it affected me so I could empathize with this.

2) I was struck by the multiple losses this participant experienced in her life and her courage in reconnecting with her father later in life for the sake of her daughter and to know her grandmother again. I empathized with her regarding her father missing important events in her life and the ambivalence of reconnecting with him after so much time had passed. I also connected strongly with her love for animals and finding solace in those relationships when the rest of the world seemed to turn upside down, such as I did as a child with my dog Suzette. Also the aspect of not having choices as a child and having to live with our parents decisions is always a tough pill to swallow. Also, having positive male role



models is important as for me this was my grandfather and uncle and later in life my brother.

3) Understood her struggle in wanting a relationship yet being hesitant because not wanting to be let down again by father. Also empathized with her not wanting him at her high school graduation due to her ambivalence about their relationship and also being at a public event in which other people may know her father and know he had been in prison. There is a lot of shame in this and embarrassment. Appreciate her ongoing journey of trying to understand and come to a place of peace with her father. Also was saddened by her thought of wondering if her father thought about her as these were common thoughts I had too.

This process helped in being able to clarify my own personal value systems, acknowledge areas where I may have been more subjective, recognize any anxiety, irritability or pleasure that was occurring for me both during the interviews and the analysis, and identify any feelings that could indicate a lack of neutrality such as criticism, withdrawal, and/or over identifying with the participants (Ahern, 1999; Primeau, 2003).

6. Balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole:

Although analysis began with individual interviews, the ‘parts’ reflection allowed these stories to be gathered together as a “whole” (van Manen, 1997, 2014). Reading the

interview transcripts, considering the understanding of the whole, writing about the phenomenon, scrutinizing the parts again and writing some more prior to considering one's position is a process that continued throughout the production of this study (van Manen, 1997).

Thematic analysis, as described by Arminio and Hultgren (2002), is an “unloosening that occurs only as the researcher spends a great deal of time seeking to understand the text” (p. 456). In order to attribute meaning to the data, van Manen (1997) suggests three methods for isolating thematic statements. These methods are the detailed reading approach, the selective or highlighting approach, and the holistic reading approach. In the detailed reading approach, van Manen (1997) proposes that the researcher looks at each sentence or group of sentences while asking, “What does this sentence, or sentence cluster, reveal about the phenomenon?” (p. 93). The selective or highlighting approach asks which statement is most revealing or relevant about the phenomenon in question. In the holistic reading approach, van Manen suggests examining the text as a whole and asking which notable phrase captures the fundamental meaning of the text (1997). The themes extradited from each of these approaches are then used as a framework to create a text, which aims to capture the essential meanings of the phenomenon that have become evident within the data (van Manen, 1997).

### **The detailed reading approach**

This method was chosen for this study primarily because it appeared to be the most intensive and rigorous of the three (van Manen, 1997). In this method, the researcher examines each sentence or group of sentences individually and inquires how it relates to the larger phenomenon. Van Manen also encourages the use of art, poetry and literature to assist in supporting emerging themes around a particular phenomenon (van Manen, 1997; Piercy & Benson, 2005). Rigorous and systematic reading and re-reading the transcripts and incorporating a data reduction through an open coding process in which key words and concepts were identified that appeared in particular sentences or groups of sentences and then grouping these together was the first method of analysis.

This process of analysis was implemented using the interview transcripts of each participant individually, which was then used as the basis of second level analysis, and is the development of subsequent themes and sub-themes (van Manen, 1997). Memo writing was incorporated at this stage as part of the audit trail where reflections, assumptions and decision making regarding how codes were labeled or how categories were beginning to emerge was documented in the texts (LaRossa, 2005). Content analysis was utilized as a method for reducing the data into manageable indicators, or meaning units, in which “words, phrases, or other units of text classified in the same category are presumed to have similar meanings” (Weber, 1990, p. 47). Categories were defined by concepts that

were similar in nature, such as concepts that reflected a participant's father not acknowledging her pain, her father not holding himself accountable for the crime or the effect it had on the family, and her father blaming others initially filtered into a broad category of "perception of father".

Although the interviews were coded independently of one another to ensure the voice of the individual was captured, consistency was also applied between the interviews since I was coding all the interviews. Additionally, there was constant comparison between interviews in regards to words or phrases that were being coded similar to one another. Inter-coder reliability was also implemented during content analysis with two other researchers reading some of the interviews and determining how closely their coding schema aligned with my own (Weber, 1990). I then met with the other two researchers and dialogued with them to create a shared understanding between us regarding how we coded and our individual interpretations of the data. The majority of the codes were consistent amongst us. If there was a discrepancy in terms of meaning or interpretation of a particular code, we returned to the text to attempt to establish consensus in the meaning using the exact language and context of the participant and/or it documented as something to ask the particular participant during the member checking.

To achieve the second level of analysis, significant statements were highlighted, key words, phrases and ideas were grouped together, and then three primary categories,

as well as supporting themes and sub-themes, were developed from these groups by reading and re-reading the data and spending considerable time contemplating the meanings emerging from the text (van Manen, 1997). Gathering the transcripts from all the participants and examining them as a whole allowed statements to be compiled into common categories. Similar ideas within each interview were grouped together and extrapolated before identifying quotes that gave an overall impression of the interview. Categories and themes changed multiple times before they were finalized into their current format. Saturation was reached by combining particular codes across all thirteen interviews into a particular category or theme and this resulted in a common and consistent story for the participants where there was no longer any 'new' information being produced from the interviews. This continued until all the primary themes were identified.

### **Ethical Considerations**

#### **Verification Strategies to Enhance Trustworthiness of the Data**

Issues of reliability and validity of the quality of this type of research have been addressed through the examination of rigor, trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity (Beck, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Hall & Stevens, 1991). The component that was present during the entire course of the research, particularly during analysis of the data, was acknowledgment of my own experience, presuppositions and perspective on the

subject area (van Manen, 1997). My suggestions included incorporating a reflective journal where I documented and processed my thoughts, feelings, and decision-making regarding the research process to enhance trustworthiness and authenticity (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 1997). The use of a reflective journal is one way in which a hermeneutic circle can be engaged, moving back and forth between the parts and the whole of the text (Gadamer, 1962). This interpretive process continues until a moment in time where one has reached sensible meanings of the experience, free from inner contradictions (Kvale, 1996). For a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the multiple stages of interpretation that allow patterns to emerge, the discussion of how interpretations arise from the data and the interpretive process itself are seen as critical (Koch, 1995). I consistently challenged myself to consider my own experience and explicitly acknowledge my perception and/or stance on the phenomenon being studied (van Manen, 1997).

Another way of strengthening the trustworthiness and rigor, according to Koch (1994), is by the researcher establishing an audit trail describing and justifying all the steps undertaken in the research process. A detailed and rigorous audit trail was incorporated in which I documented all decision-making for the study and this was overseen by my doctoral advisor. Verification strategies for trustworthiness and credibility of the data were further enhanced by regularly debriefing with my doctoral

committee members on my experience with the data in conjunction to my personal experience with this subject matter to enhance objectivity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). I also recruited a second researcher who did not have personal experience or knowledge of this subject matter, but had extensive experience in qualitative research, to assist in the coding and analysis of the data and she coded seven of the interviews independently. My doctoral advisor also coded four of the interviews independently and then my advisor, the second researcher and I met to compare convergence and divergence in the coding. This process of peer-checking assisted in there being multiple interpretations incorporated of the text rather than just my own. This also created the opportunity for dialogue amongst collegial peers about the coding process to enhance the integrity of the text analysis through inter-rater reliability.

In adherence to phenomenological principles, follow-up interviews, or member-checking, were incorporated to confirm that the participants believed I had adequately represented their experience and I was able to clarify any gaps or uncertainty the participants may have had (van Manen, 1997). This process is critical from a feminist perspective to ensure that women's voices are being accurately portrayed in research without assumptions being imposed by the researcher (DeVault, 1990).

Member checking can be used in a variety of ways in research ranging from participants commenting or reflecting on specific sections of the research that apply

specifically to them to participants being invited to comment on the interpretation and analysis (Koelsch, 2013; Harper & Cole, 2012). Reasoning for incorporating member checking can be to reduce “power dynamics” between researcher and participants, “verifying the accuracy of a participant’s words” and ensuring “researcher reflexivity” (Harper & Cole, 2012, p.4). Furthermore, “researchers have the power to represent informants in research reports and public presentations” (Gilgan, 2014, p.8). In adhering to a feminist framework, incorporating member checking was a strategy to ensure a level of transparency and inclusiveness in the research process by providing participants the opportunity to give input as well as being informed of how they are being represented in the research document. Furthermore, there are two types of validity that can be obtained from member checking. The first, transactional, is an “interactive process between the researcher, researched and collected data that is aimed at achieving a relatively higher level of accuracy and consensus” (Cho & Trent, 2006, p.321). The second type is transformative in which the interpretations from the data motivate participants to engage in some type of “mobilized action” (Koelsch, 2013, p. 2). For the purpose of this research study, transactional validation was implemented to ensure both accurate representations of the participants as well as objectivity of the researcher.

Additionally, several of the participants indicated this was the first or one of the few times they had spoken about their experience and they expressed an interest in



knowing the experiences of other participants. I determined it was also important to create a sense of empowerment, ownership and collaboration for participants through incorporating a member checking process. In a study by Harper and Cole (2012), they expressed member checking as being similar to group therapy, even if the participants never actually met, because of the normalization, validation and relief that accompanied “that they are not alone” in this experience (p.510). However, there are arguments supporting participants not reading the transcripts or conducting member checking of any type. Forbat and Henderson’s (2005) reasoning for this is: 1) There being a perception by the participants that there is a ‘specific truth’ if the researcher is requesting the participant to edit or change what they had previously reported 2) This can result in embarrassment and shame with the participant seeing their story on paper as well as it being written in an impersonal and academic format, and 3) van Manen (1997) claims that people are constantly changing and thus inquiring about a person’s experience at a different time point may elicit an altered response which negates the organic quality of the initial interview.

The resolution reached for this study was that the participants had the opportunity to give input on the summaries of their individual narrative, primarily to ensure they felt the standards of confidentiality were being met (See Appendix C). However, even though I was willing to convey the findings to the participants, the participants were not asked

for input or feedback because the interpretive process of the text rested with me (van Manen, 1997).

Seven participants responded to the email and were then contacted by me. There was not significant information provided to add to the study, but one of the participants did emphasize that she was concerned she might be identified based on her ethnicity in conjunction to her unique story. Therefore, the decision was made to generally note the ethnic demographics of the participants but not connect ethnicity to individual participant's narratives in order to protect their anonymity. Although the member checking for this study was not focused on participants having input on the findings or conducting the member check as a group, it still appeared to be helpful to participants given their responses to the study outcomes such as "Wow, I thought I was the only one that felt that way" and "That helps to know that other women struggle in relationships too because of this (paternal incarceration)". The participants who responded to the member check, for the most part, believed their narratives were accurately defined and did not feel any changes needed to be made, but appreciated the opportunity to review and give feedback on their narratives. Some of the participants desired to connect with other women who shared a similar experience of paternal incarceration. Therefore, I plan to invite all the participants to a coffee shop in the near future in which she will give each of them a copy of my dissertation and at that point create space for dialogue and discussion

around the experience of paternal incarceration as a woman, including my own experience. Participants who choose not to participate in the group discussion or who cannot attend will receive a summary of my dissertation via mail or email.

### **Degree of Risk or Harm**

Even though the nature of the topic being discussed was sensitive, the degree of risk to participants was thought to be minimal. Probing related to participants' responses was in terms of participant's perception regarding paternal incarceration and reflecting on the meaning of this in their life. No information outside of these themes was sought. Participants were instructed during the interviews that they should only share information they were comfortable with and could pass on any questions they did not want to answer. All interviews remained confidential and no identifying information was connected to the participants. Furthermore, the proposal for this study was reviewed and approved by a rigorous Internal Review Board at the University I am attending.

### **Steps to Minimize Risks or Harm and to Protect Participants' Welfare**

Before the actual interview began, I thoroughly reviewed the consent form for the study with participants and encouraged participants to excuse themselves from the interview if they felt uncomfortable, declined to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering or end the interview altogether without any consequences. I was

sensitive and empathetic throughout the process and did not push in areas that might be difficult for participants to discuss further.

As an additional precaution, participants were reminded to not use the interview time to deal with unresolved and/or painful issues. All participants were informed at the beginning of the interview of the parameters/purpose of the study and that this was not a context for individual therapy. If participants experienced discomfort or painful memories during or after the interview, they were asked to use the list of community referrals as an option to seek counseling/support. I provided a list of referrals for individual and family therapy psychiatrists and other emergency service agencies to each participant at the end of the interview.

### **Data Management and Security Provisions to Protect Data**

There were audiotapes used to record the words of participants and transcriptions were conducted after the interviews were complete. I transcribed the tapes so there was no other person who listened to the collected data. Transcripts were kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked room in my department at the University I am attending. Once the transcripts were completed, the audio was erased or destroyed. Any identifying information in the transcripts was either deleted or changed to protect the identity of the participants. Computers that were used to examine the transcripts were password protected and encrypted. The data is not available online in any form.

### **Process for Obtaining Consent from Participants**

I emphasized that the study was completely voluntary and this was further enhanced by the fact that the participant was still compensated with a \$25.00 gift card even if they decided to end the interview early, which none of the participants did. For participants who contacted me and stated they wanted to participate in the study, I informed them of the protocol of the study. At the first interview, I thoroughly went over the consent form and then asked if the participant had any questions regarding the consent form or the study. During this process they were asked questions such as "Do you understand what is being asked of you in this study?" I then asked participants if they understood there might be a possibility of negative emotions or upsetting memories occurring for them. Participants were also asked if they understood they could stop the study at any time or not answer particular questions. They were asked if they understood that their choice to withdraw would not affect their relationship with the University of Minnesota or have any other consequences to them. They were also asked if they understood that the session would be audiotaped, that all of their information would be kept confidential, and that no identifying information would be linked to any written projects or publications on this study.

I informed participants that they were participating in a study examining how paternal incarceration had influenced their lives and their relationship with their father.

The consent form was read to the participants prior to the interview occurring. After each section of the consent form, such as confidentiality and risks and benefits, participants were asked questions such as "can you explain to me what is expected of you in this study" to determine if they comprehended the material that was being read to them. The participants were asked at the end of the consent form if they had any questions about the consent form or the study and they were encouraged to ask questions during the interview. Participants were also provided a copy of the consent form they signed.

Although all the participants signed the consent form, any participant that did not sign the consent form would not have been allowed to participate in the study. Participants were informed that they did not have to participate and there were not consequences for choosing not to participate, deciding not to answer particular questions or to end the interview early.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

*It has been said, 'time heals all wounds.' I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens.*

*But it is never gone--Rose Kennedy*

Gilgun (2014) uses the term of creating “grab” in the findings section by eliciting meaningful quotes and emotional stories from participants to demonstrate a particular phenomenon. I was extremely mindful of the feminist paradigm of giving voice to women’s experiences by using the authentic language of women. Therefore, this section is heavily laden with the words that came directly from the participants in describing their experiences. Also, in adhering to the principles of Van Manen and Hermeneutic Phenomenology, there is the intricate dance between the “parts”, which are the individual narratives, and the “whole” that represents how the narratives parallel one another (1997). Feminism honors both woman and women, meaning that the individual voice of the woman is reflected in story as well as the collective voice of women to more fully understand feminine experiences (DeVault, 1990). Therefore, for each participant, a comprehensive vignette is provided to give individual testimony to that woman’s particular experience. Following the vignettes, the collective voice of women’s experiences is presented.

In addition, Sechrest and Sidani (1995) stated that, “qualitative researchers regularly use terms such as ‘many,’ ‘most,’ ‘frequently,’ ‘several,’ ‘never,’ and so on. These terms are fundamentally quantitative” (p.79). Thus, qualitative researchers can obtain more meaning by obtaining counts of words in addition to their narrative descriptions (Sandelowski, 2001). Counting themes assists in “identifying patterns more easily, verifying a hypothesis, enhancing the rigor of the analysis, and maintaining analytic integrity” (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wieling, 2014, para.1). Further, by counting words, “researchers can leave an audit trail, which is recommended by many qualitative researchers as a method of evaluating legitimation and/or increasing legitimation of the data” (Halpern, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007b; Wieling, 2014, para.1). Therefore, in capturing the strength of the themes across participants, words were weighted as follows: a) Few= 1-3 daughters, b) Some=4-6 daughters, c) Many=7-9 daughters, d) Most=10-12 daughters, e) All=13 daughters. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to ensure anonymity.

### **Narratives of the Participants**

#### ***Mandy’s Narrative***

Mandy was a 40 year old woman whose father was incarcerated early in her childhood for drug and weapons charges. Her father had been incarcerated three times over her lifetime, with the first being when she was five years old. Initially, the



incarceration was immersed in secrecy and lack of information given to her by her family. She pushed for information and her grandmother and mother told her the truth, although her mother was reluctant. Mandy was angry and bitter that her father had not contacted her and she struggled in questioning why he engaged in illegal behavior. She attempted to reconnect with him when he was released from prison, but he remarried and she felt like a third wheel. Mandy's father tended to talk to her when they went to the bar but he was often intoxicated or he would invite her sisters so they were not alone. This resulted in a lack of conversation about his time in prison or how it affected her. She believed he was not taking responsibility for his actions and blamed her for not staying connected to him while he was in prison. She was hesitant about her husband and children meeting her father due to his inconsistency in her own life. Their relationship continued to be strained even though she hoped they could reconcile before it was too late.

### ***Sarah's Narrative***

Sarah was a 64 year old woman who was currently married to her second husband and had an adult daughter. Her father was incarcerated for five years when she was seven for sexually abusing a neighbor girl. Prior to his incarceration, her father was extremely abusive and violent. Sarah felt significant shame and anger regarding her father's incarceration and no one talked about it in her family. Her father did not acknowledge

any type of responsibility for his crime and blamed his wife and children for being in prison. Sarah harbored resentment because she, her mother and siblings did not receive any support from family, the community and the criminal justice system while her father was in prison. Sarah's mother also blamed Sarah for not supporting her father throughout the court process. Sarah endured significant stigma and shame from the community due to her father being in prison and had to take on more adult-type responsibilities at a young age. Sarah could not forgive her father and avoided contact with him when he was released from prison. She visited him while he was dying but he continued to display animosity towards her. He never expressed any remorse and vocalized being victimized by the system. Sarah focused on developing her own personal growth around compassion and encouraged her daughter to make healthier choices than she did. Sarah did not have any positive male role models in her life and saw the dysfunction that was passed throughout her family as a cycle of learned behavior from previous generations.

### *Ann's Narrative*

Ann was a 28 year old woman who was currently not in a romantic relationship and was twelve when her father was incarcerated for two years for money laundering and insider trading. Ann had positive interactions with her father pre-incarceration, but her father also struggled with mental health and substance abuse issues. Her family was upper middle-class and lived in a prominent community. Ann had a difficult time

absorbing the shock of the incarceration due to being so young and the prolonged court process. Anne's parents also divorced while her father was awaiting trial. Her mother was protective of her, but Ann still experienced immense shame and embarrassment due to the incarceration and the "trauma" of being present when her father was arrested. Ann's mother and siblings did not talk about the incarceration outside of the family due to social stigma. Ann believed the incarceration was beneficial for her father in the sense that it forced him to quit using alcohol and drugs and stabilized his medication. They had a positive relationship post-incarceration and Ann was protective of and had empathy for her father. She continued to worry that her father will recidivate due to him not taking care of himself and she is afraid of being diagnosed with a mental illness like her father. Ann found solace through her work with children and continues to focus on enhancing compassion, personal growth and permission to grieve despite being in a "position of privilege". Ann also set boundaries with her father for her own safety and self-preservation, but she loved him and was grateful he lived near to her in proximity after being released from prison.

### ***Gail's Narrative***

Gail was a 52 year old with three adult sons and she was separated from their father. Gail's father was incarcerated when she was approximately twelve years old for gang related charges and then again when she was an adult for homicide. He was

currently serving a thirteen year sentence in a local correctional facility. Gail had a loving relationship with both parents and her stepfather. After Gail's parents divorced, her father continued to have regular contact with her, was proud of her and treated her like a "princess", but then his contact lessened over time. Gail internalized his behavior as him not loving her and when his contact ceased completely, she worried he was dead. When Gail was a young woman, her mother received a call that her father was in prison for murder. Gail was shocked and hurt and did not want to see him in prison because of the extensive grief, disbelief and broken trust she felt towards him and him serving a life sentence in which he would never be released from prison. Gail wrote her father a letter asking forgiveness for not coming to visit him and he responded with a letter stating he understood and didn't want her "to see him like that". Gail loved her father but he was not the man she knew when she was a child. Gail was angry and disappointed in losing her role model and that he was not present for her when she was raising her own sons. Although her father communicated he had been attempting to get out of criminal activity and simply "got caught up in the business", Gail doubted parts of his story. Her mother continued to have contact with her father in prison and her children are aware of their grandfather, but Gail had no further contact with him. She focused on her faith and seeing the positive attributes she remembered of her father in her adult sons.

### *Jennifer's Narrative*

Jennifer was a 21 year old female who was currently not in a relationship and whose father was incarcerated when she was four due to assault charges. He had been in prison twice during her childhood that totaled approximately thirteen years of imprisonment. Jennifer had a positive relationship with her father prior to incarceration, even though he was abusive to her mother. Her parents divorced and her mother married her stepfather when Jennifer was five and she had a close relationship with her stepfather. During that time, her father went to prison. Her mother died a few years later and her stepfather was unable to care for her which resulted in her entering foster care. Jennifer's father reached out to her when she was a young adult through the internet. She made the decision to reconnect with him so she could visit her paternal grandmother and know her paternal history for her own daughter. Jennifer didn't trust her father and was angry at him for his decision to engage in criminal behavior. She witnessed "two sides of her father", both positive and negative, and was protective of herself and her daughter despite fostering a decent relationship with her father as an adult. She experienced a lot of loss with her father being absent during her childhood and missing significant events in her life, including when she had a traumatic brain injury as a child in a car accident. Jennifer had significant trust issues with men, was embarrassed of her father being incarcerated, and didn't talk about his incarceration with anyone. She was also deeply ashamed of what he was convicted for given it was a sexual assault charge.

### *Rita's Narrative*

Rita was 31 years old who was married and her father had been incarcerated multiple times throughout her life on drug and possession of firearm charges with his lengthiest prison sentence being twelve years. The first time he was incarcerated during her childhood was when Rita was three years old. Rita had a good relationship with her father early in her life and her mother was supportive of this relationship. She also experienced support from her paternal grandparents, which assisted in her connection with her father. Rita's father tended to display his affection through financial support and materialism. He was involved in prostitution and drug use. Rita developed a strong relationship with her stepfather that continued throughout her life and she was often conflicted in viewing her stepfather as her "real" father rather than her biological father. Her family was overt with her about her father being incarcerated and although as a child it didn't appear to bother her, now as an adult and a parent she realized the incarceration did have an effect on her. Growing up, Rita had several peers who also had incarcerated parents and visiting her father in prison was simply part of her "normal routine". As an adult, the incarceration estranged her father even further from Rita due to there being a lack of quality time during her prison visits with her father and the visits were more obligatory than her actually wanting to go. Rita experienced a significant void of emotional connection towards her father which she believed was the result of coming in

second to his drug use and criminal activity that led to his incarceration. Her lack of awareness of what a healthy intimate relationship looked, as well as her disappointment in her father, contributed to her being an overachiever so she didn't have to be vulnerable with others by needing them in any way. Rita continued to focus on her own personal growth, her career and her children. She hoped for a better relationship with her father that would consist of him listening to her, calling her, and being available to obtain advice from him. However, as long as her father continued with his drug use and criminal behavior, Rita was pessimistic about this actually occurring.

### ***Casey's Narrative***

Casey was a 42 year old who identified as not being in a relationship. Her father was incarcerated twice for prostitution. His longest incarceration period was nine years and she was eleven years old when he first went to prison. Casey's father was abusive and there significant domestic violence by him prior to his going to prison. Casey had minimal contact with her father during her childhood because he was in and out of prison, which led to her resenting him and feeling like a misfit by not having a father in her life. Her mother was open and honest about her father. Casey desired a relationship with her father despite his criminal and violent history, but her father continued to be a negative influence on her, including supplying her with drugs. She had a supportive stepfather whom she viewed as being more of a father to her than her biological father. Casey

visited her father in jail once as an adult but had not had any physical contact with him since that visit. She blamed her father for losing contact with her paternal family and the loss of her paternal cultural identity. Her father pretended everything was normal when she saw him and they never discussed his incarceration. Her father did not take responsibility for his actions and viewed himself as a victim. There significant shame of her father and she was unsure if she wanted him to meet her children. She had been in abusive relationships, including with someone who had also been incarcerated, which led to a heightened awareness of the impact of her father's incarceration through experiencing the incarceration of her children's father. Casey didn't hate her father and was grateful for the difficult lessons she learned from him. She desired to have some type of current relationship with him given he was older and not intimidating to her anymore but she was adamant that her stepfather will always be her dad.

### *Pamela's Narrative*

Pamela was an 18 year old whose father was incarcerated twice on drug charges with his first incarceration being when she was five. Pamela's father was incarcerated the majority of her childhood and was unstable in her life due to drug use. Her mother was protective of her regarding contact with her father but did allow Pamela to talk with him on the phone. Pamela had a close relationship with her stepfather and viewed him as her father figure. She was upset with her father for a long time due to the lack of emotional



connection from him and him choosing to be being absent from her life. She often questioned her father's authenticity of wanting to be in her life and was angered that he seemed to be focused on how the incarceration affected him but not her. Pamela wondered if her father cared about her or thought about her at all. She struggled with why he chose drugs over her and she held him accountable for his poor decisions. She was currently single, but her father being incarcerated negatively affected her self-esteem and impacted intimate relationships where she described herself as "selfish" because she feared being abandoned by men and struggled with trust issues. This paralleled her resistance in having a close relationship with her father because she worried he would abandon her and return to prison due to his history of recidivism. Pamela desired a normal father-daughter relationship with her father but was hopeless this could happen.

### ***Brenda's Narrative***

Brenda described herself as a 48 year old, divorcee whose father was incarcerated approximately ten times throughout her life on assault, theft and drug charges, with the earliest being when she was seven years old. Brenda's father was violent prior to prison and she would stand up to her father when he was being abusive to her mother. He had anger issues, was inconsistent in his contact with her, and was in and out of prison her entire childhood. Pamela believed this behavior might be due to the historical trauma of slavery that was in her father's family history. Despite his criminal behavior, Brenda

idolized her father and she would visit him in jail. Brenda's mother and stepfather were protective of her when it came to her father and she had a positive and close relationship with her stepfather despite him having substance abuse issues. Brenda's father had such a bad reputation that her mother changed Brenda's last name so no one knew she was his daughter. Brenda was grateful, though, that her mother let her visit her father in prison so she could establish her own perception of her father. Brenda felt this was the best thing her mother could have done because Brenda was able to establish her own views of her father and see firsthand what type of person he was instead of being resentful towards her mother or "worshipped" her father if the visits had not occurred. Since Brenda's father was currently in a nursing home, she viewed him as being harmless now. Brenda allowed her children to meet him so they knew their ancestry but she stated she doesn't love her father. Her reconciliation with her father was grounded in being able to know her paternal history. Brenda was resilient, even after being in her own unhealthy relationship, and wanted to be a positive influence for her daughters. Having a strong support system and not allowing her father to define her as a person helped Brenda heal emotionally.

### *Christy's Narrative*

Christy was a 19 year old, single female whose father was incarcerated when she was age four for two years on drinking and driving charges. Christy's mother died by suicide when Christy was an infant and she lived with her father who cared for her until

he went to prison. He was addicted to drugs and Christy suspected it was actually drug-related charges as to why he was incarcerated, but her family was secretive and not forthcoming about his criminal history. She visited him in prison and was happy to see him, but observed sadness from him when she left. Christy lived with her maternal aunt and uncle after her father was incarcerated and her aunt was extremely negative about her father and did not support their relationship. Christy rejected her father once she lived with her aunt due to the lack of support to continue a relationship with him, even though her father attempted to maintain contact with her through phone calls and letters. As an adolescent, she visited him in the hospital after he was brain dead from a fall at work and recalled not caring if he died. As an adult, she experienced significant regret and loss about not connecting with her father and empathized more with him at this point in her life. Christy struggled with trying to understand why her father chose drugs over her and was ashamed of him being in prison. She had intense anger towards her aunt for promoting an estranged relationship between her and her father and wished her family had been honest with her about his time in prison. Christy attributed her father's incarceration to her caretaking in relationships with men, using marijuana earlier in her life to cope with her feelings, and engaging in reckless behavior. She feared what people would think of her if they knew her father had been in prison and she opted to not talk about this experience with others. Christy was also protective of her father in that she doesn't want people to think poorly of him. Her paternal family had been supportive to

her and her maternal uncle was a positive male role model in her life. Christy loved her father, wished she could have told him she was sorry, and hoped he would be proud of her if he was still alive.

### *Lisa's Narrative*

Lisa described herself as a single, 33 year old who was three when her father was arrested and went to prison for drunk driving for four years. Lisa's father raised her and her siblings after he was freed from prison and her mother then became more absent in their lives. Lisa's father went into prison when she was very young but he did call and write letters while he was there. Her parents had a good relationship and her mother continued to visit Lisa while her father was raising her. Lisa expressed anger, resentment and sadness about her father's incarceration but also love and gratefulness to him that he was there for her after he was released and was a positive, loving parent. It was awkward when her father initially came home from prison because there wasn't any type of preparation in transitioning him back into the family. Lisa went to counseling and talked to other friends and family members who had a parent in prison, which was helpful to her. Lisa's father did not engage in criminal activity after he got out of prison and was

also very supportive when Lisa experienced her own incarceration. Lisa better understood her father now that she was an adult and she was curious about his incarceration experience since they had never talked about it. Lisa acknowledged the incarceration affected her in being cautious with people, having shame, and being in abusive relationships with men. Lisa was more tolerant with dating men in prison due to that being part of her childhood experience with her own father. Lisa loved her father and was grateful for her father's presence in her life given the lack of other male support models.

### *Tara's Narrative*

Tara was a 19 year old, single female who stated her father went to prison for ten years for homicide when she was age one. Tara's earliest memories of her father were visiting him in prison and inconsistent phone call from him. Because she was so young, she thought this was a normal relationship, but realized now as an adult that it wasn't. Tara's father was pleasant, but it was unnerving visiting him because of the lack of shared experiences between them. Prison visits were also awkward because of the prison setting being un conducive to positive parent-child interactions. Tara's family was supportive of her relationship with her father; she lived with her paternal grandmother due to her mother committing suicide. Tara was close to her grandmother and her grandmother helped bridge the gap between Tara and her father when he returned home

from prison. Her father did not talk about his time in prison and Tara avoided addressing it because she was afraid of his reaction. Tara admits it was challenging, though, with her father pretending everything was normal. Tara and father have been slowly building their relationship since his release even though the relationship was still somewhat superficial. Tara feared telling people about her father being in prison due to the worry of being judged and thought poorly of by others. She believed people could not understand her experience unless they have been through it. Tara lacked trust in people, was depressed at times and experienced a lot of shame due to her father's incarceration. Tara felt the time lost between her and her father could not be remedied but she hoped they could still continue to create and maintain a good relationship. Tara was afraid of getting close to her father, even though she knew he was trying hard to do better and not recidivate. Tara believed she adequately dealt with the incarceration primarily because she was so young when it happened.

### ***Donna's Narrative***

Donna was a 20 year old whose father was incarcerated for three years when she was 17 due to sexual assault of a minor. Donna had a loving, supportive relationship with her father prior to his incarceration. Her father was a positive male role model to her and she was closer to her father than her mother. Donna was shocked when her mother told her about her father's arrest and she called her father to confirm the arrest because she

needed to hear it directly from him. After the incarceration, Donna rejected her father and there was a shift in family roles where Donna became more of a maternal figure to her younger brother and a confidant to her mother. Donna felt betrayed by her father and her trust was broken in him, even though he continued attempting to maintain contact with her and verbalized responsibility for his actions. Donna was able to forgive her father but acknowledged he must pay for what he did. Even though she was embarrassed of her father's incarceration, Donna established protective factors in her life such as a strong support system, school and work. Donna was more overt about the incarceration over time in conversations with others, mainly because she wanted people to know the truth about what happened. Donna regularly visited her father in prison and stayed connected to him through letters and phone calls, but there was still a lack of closeness due to the incarceration and broken trust. Donna's mother was supportive of her relationship with her father. Donna had a supportive boyfriend whom she told her experience to and allowed herself to grieve with another person instead of alone, but she still struggled with trust issues. She had a strong pride in her cultural roots and in being a woman who had overcome significant obstacles in her life. Donna aspired to be a role model for other girls experiencing paternal incarceration, particularly because she perceived her father's reasoning in committing this crime was his lack of respect for women. Donna had significant grief regarding the amount of time lost in her relationship with her father and her father missing important life events. Despite this, Donna had a desire to maintain a

relationship with her father in some capacity even though their relationship had been forever changed.

### **The Collective Voice of Women in this Study**

In examining the collective voice of women, the interviews yielded three categories in which the daughter's experiences paralleled one another's in relation to sharing the experience of having an incarcerated father. These categories consisted of: 1) daughter's perception of parental response, 2) effect on daughter's personal well-being, and 3) influence on daughter's interpersonal relationships. Themes and subthemes expanded on each of these categories and assisted in providing a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the experiences of daughter's with an incarcerated father while growing up. A visual depiction of the categories, themes and subthemes outlined in this chapter is displayed in Appendix D. There was also non-verbal communication displayed by the participants, such as laughter when they were discussing memories of their father as well as all of the participants becoming tearful at some point during the interview. In a few of the interviews, participants were crying so hard that they needed to take a short break to regain their composure when discussing how the incarceration of their father affected them. Three of the participants also showed me pictures of their father when discussing their recollections of him. Needless to say, this appeared to be a very moving



and emotional process for participants as they explored their relationship with their father.

### **Daughter's Perception of Parental Response**

*I mean it was like an elephant in the kitchen (Sarah)*

#### Father's commitment to repairing the relationship

##### *Acknowledgement of Criminal Behavior*

Participants communicated their desire for their father to take responsibility and acknowledge his involvement in criminal activity and committing to no longer participating in this type of lifestyle. Participants viewed their father's commitment to repairing the relationship being correlated with whether or not he held himself accountable for the choices he made that resulted in his incarceration. Some of the participants discussed their father processing the crime with them and appreciating this interchange of dialogue. Gail explained what her father shared with her about why he engaged criminal activity, "He said how he ended up in the syndicate... At that point he was thinking he was trying to make something good out of a bad situation and hoping he could get enough money so he could get out. So he was going along with the situation." Gail said she appreciated her father opening up about this to her. Donna also discussed her father being overt with her regarding his offense, "And he said if I have any question

he will answer them because he said I deserve to know...And I have asked him some questions and he has answered them and I mean I think he knows what he did and why he did it and I won't understand that ever." Donna expressed that even though she could not fully understand why her father made the choices he did, she was able to continue a relationship with him because she felt he was attempting to take responsibility and be honest with her. Christy also expressed being able to have respect and compassion for her father, despite him ending up in prison, due to him discussing why he ended up in the position he did, "I respect him for trying as hard as he did with being addicted to as much stuff as he was...so I try to understand what he was going through". Although these participants were still negatively affected by their father's incarceration, they determined they were able to stay connected with their father because they viewed him as being transparent and overt with them about his criminal activity.

Other participants perceived their father's attempts to rehabilitate, even if unsuccessful, still reflecting him trying to change and be a better father to them. Lisa stated, "He stopped doing whatever he went in for and he really changed his life around." She added that despite him being incarcerated for part of her early childhood, she was able to reconnect with her father. This reconnection was because Lisa felt her father accepted his mistakes and made more positive choices when he was released, including being a stable and supportive father. Tara described her father's awareness of the effect

incarceration had on his relationship with her and she realizes he is trying to improve, even though there was still tension in their relationship,

He knows it kind of wrecked what our relationship could have had because like when he came back he saw how distant I was and I could tell how upset he was about that and I mean I was scared (crying) so I couldn't get closer. I guess I think he is trying to be a better person I guess. Like he is really proud of me and when he talks to his friends he talks about me in college and what I am doing and so I guess he is proud that I am not like him.

Some of the participants acknowledged their father still embraced a 'street mentality' even though he was attempting to rehabilitate in some ways. They were relieved their father had not recidivated, but they also experienced constant fear that it was only a matter of time before he "got caught" and ended up back in prison. This fear and worry often led to having more of a superficial relationship with their father due to not wanting to be hurt again if he was incarcerated again. As Pamela stated, "he will probably just go back to jail so that's why I don't get close to him...I don't want to feel abandoned again."

Other participants described their father as often making excuses, minimizing, and/or outright denying his offense. For these women, it was more arduous to bond with their father due to feeling invalidated by him as well as dreading he might reoffend.

Several statements reflected this including, “It is always what people didn’t do for him and he was railroaded and why nobody helped him and why my mom didn’t accept my calls or why my mom kept you from me. It’s always those conversations (Mandy)”, “Him being him pretty much because he felt he never did any wrong and if he got in trouble for something it was never his fault. It was always somebody else’s fault (Casey)”, and “Just no accountability and always blaming someone else. But as far as any remorse, no. And I think he blamed us because he thinks he got sent to prison for something he didn’t do and he shouldn’t have been there (Sarah)”. These participants viewed their father as not taking responsibility for his actions as well as not acknowledging the impact it had on them, This concern was further enhanced by their father never talking about his offense with them. This experience is reflected in several quotes:

I mean we never talk about him being locked up and how he felt about it. We never talked about him being there or what it was like. (Mandy)

My dad didn’t talk about it anyhow or say he was sorry for what he did to our family. Yeah, it never I mean it was like an elephant in the kitchen. (Sarah)

He has never talked about what he did or anything about that time in our lives. (Jennifer)

I guess I think a lot about why it happened at all (crying). I mean we don't really talk about it. And I don't think I have ever talked about it with my dad and why he did what he did. Even why he was there. So that's a gap in our relationship I guess. (Tara)

Participants believed it was their father's responsibility to discuss the offense with them and initiate the conversation about why he made poor decisions as well as the effect the consequences of those decisions had on them. As Rita stated,

It's frustrating... I mean I guess I look at it if he wanted to know or cared about it enough he would ask. But he hasn't so I just go on and deal with things as they come and try not to focus too much on it...But I don't feel it's my place to tell him how it was for me. I think if he wanted to know and really cared about how it affected me he would have asked by now.

Participants often described their father as selfish and uncaring of them, which resulted in determining he was not fully committed to repairing their relationship. Sarah expressed,

You never admitted any wrong doing. Did you know how much damage you did? I said you never said you were sorry and I can't forgive you right now and maybe

in time I can and you need to ask for forgiveness and God because you are going to leave this home a lonely bitter old man.

Rita also shared this frustration in stating,

I mean he doesn't really take any responsibility for it as far as it being something that affected me. I think he is aware of how it affected him in terms of not being able to do drugs or being on the streets and obviously his freedom was taken away but I don't think he really reflected on anything beyond that.

Participants also processed this lack of responsibility from their father as him creating a relationship with them that was 'fake' and disingenuous. Mandy expressed this by stating,

Sometimes I think my dad wants a relationship just for show... Why do you want us there? I ask him those basic questions to try to figure out if he is genuine in wanting a relationship or just wants to pretend we are this big happy family because we aren't and it's just show and tell... He turns it on when there is lots of people but when it is just us he isn't like that.

Participants described this interaction typically occurring with their father pretending nothing significant happened, which established a sense of falsehood in the father-daughter relationship.

He seemed like really fake almost. Because we were acting happy and I told him I was pregnant and he was really happy that was his first grandkid so we didn't talk about what he did or how long he was looking at. We didn't talk about it. Almost like he wasn't sitting on the other side of the glass. (Casey)

When he came back he tried to make it like everything was normal and he had never left. (Pamela)

And I mean he didn't even seem to be trying. It seemed like he thought he could just have a normal relationship with me and I was the one who was standoffish. (Tara)

This avoidance of his incarceration and criminal activity, as well as the belief he could simply resume his relationship with his daughter as if nothing ever happened, were sore spots for participants in their relationship with their father in that he was not accepting responsibility for his actions.

#### *Genuineness in Desire to Bond*

Participants' perceptions of the level of authenticity and genuineness their father exhibited in attempting to bond with them during and post-incarceration were essential in whether or not they joined with their father. The amount of consistent and continuous contact, both during incarceration and post-prison, by their father was verbalized as a

significant indicator for participants in terms of how committed their father was to repairing their relationship. Reconnecting with their daughter was another aspect in which participants believed it was their father's responsibility to initiate since it was his choices that resulted in his incarceration. Pamela discussed her frustration in wanting her father to be someone she could look to for support but felt he was never invested in being there for her,

It would be nice to know I can count on my biological dad but I can't because he has never shown me that I can count on him. He actually has always done the opposite by getting locked up and then not being there for me and I am really tired of going through that with him.

Mandy expressed her frustration with family members who encouraged her to contact her father stating, "Why can't he pursue the relationship? Why am I supposed to make that decision?" Casey also discussed her struggle in having a relationship with her father due to him neglecting her while he was in prison,

He wants to see me and he calls me all the time and is like 'when are you going to come and see me and when can I see you' and I just don't think I'm ready. And I mean his mom and his dad and his family they all tell me like you just can't push him out and close him out of your life and I was like well he just pushed me away



when he went to jail so I don't understand why I can't do it to him when he did it to me.

Gail described her father initially maintaining contact, but then being saddened when it did not continue,

When I got older around 15 I wasn't seeing too much of my father and would leave messages for him to call. So the time from the age of 17 my father had fell completely off as far as contacting me or doing anything with me. And I didn't know what was going on with him so I just came to the conclusion that he didn't love me anymore and just vanished out of my life.

This lack of contact resulted in Gail personalizing his disengagement, even though later he explained it was due to being arrested and incarcerated. Numerous participants discussed deliberating whether their father was invested in his relationship with them:

I will say 'I love you' and he will be like 'uh huh you know I do too' and he never says it back so I stopped saying it too so now I am just like "ok bye. Talk to you later. Take care'. (Mandy)

As far as the nurturing um it's not there. So I can feel the distance... it's probably been in the last five years or so where it's just really started bothering me the lack of relationship we have. A genuine relationship... I can't even tell you the last

time my dad called me on my birthday. And I brought that up to him and I made him tell me when my birthday was because I didn't even think he knew. (Rita)

And I mean I know it works two ways and I could call him too but every time I call he is busy or I get his voicemail and he doesn't call back...I also think that is just what I am telling myself that he is busy. I mean it's not that hard to just call your daughter and ask her how she is doing for five minutes. So yeah it's feels like he doesn't really care about me. (Pamela)

This lack of investment resulted in participants feeling angry, abandoned and disregarded by their father. Some participants also spoke about their father attempting to 'buy' their love and that providing gifts was deemed a replacement for quality time with his daughter.

He always provided for me so he would come by our house and bring me presents or whatever I needed such as money and he would take me to Dairy queen all the time...so it wasn't a really nurturing relationship. (Rita)

My dad wasn't around often. I remember he popped in like with a harmonica and he was like 'this is for you' and well he stole it so the next thing it was gone. So there was always gifts and then they were gone. (Brenda)

Participants described wanting a more substantial and profound relationship with their father, but because of what they perceived as a lack of desire on their father's part to enhance the relationship, participants viewed their father as more of a stranger in their life than a parental figure. Sarah explained this by stating that her father made a selfish choice, which resulted in him being incarcerated, and that as a child she was a victim in this because she had no choices. Therefore, the responsibility was on her father to maintain and nurture their relationship. When this did not occur, participants expressed how this affected them:

I mean I love him in the sense that he is my biological dad and if it weren't for him I wouldn't be here but there is no deep emotional connection with him.

(Pamela)

I mean I have a picture of him at my high school graduation so he's been around and it's just a matter of him not building a relationship with me. Yeah, I know that's my dad and we will converse but it doesn't feel complete. (Rita)

It was never anything with like substance you know. I mean the cards were signed 'love dad' and the letters were random and we never knew when he would call and then it would be really short calls. I mean I think it would have helped if he had been more consistent you know. I mean then we would know he was thinking of us all the time. I mean again it was good to hear from him and to know that we

crossed his mind but again it felt like that was more the exception than the norm.

(Casey)

I wouldn't say I really knew him even with them telling me about him because again it was like I would see him in prison and then I wouldn't see him for a while and so it was this constant coming and going in my life with him and then these random phone calls and I mean he was just sort of in and out all the time so I don't think I really got to know him. (Tara)

Participants explained that as the distance continued to expand in their relationship with their father, interactions with him became more of an obligation rather than a genuine desire on the participant's part to connect. Jennifer reflected on seeing her father in prison stating that, "it was more like something we had to do instead of something we wanted to do and when I left I didn't feel like I knew my father or was any closer to him than when I got there before the visit." She said her father primarily talked to her grandparents and not to her when she visited him and that he did not initiate any type of play or conversation with her. She described this resulting in her feeling like he didn't care if he had a relationship with her or not. Pamela stated that, "I guess I didn't really see him as my dad. I just kind of thought of him as this man that I had to talk to." Casey perception of her father also shifted due to his disengagement with a paternal role, "I called him my dad but and well I didn't hate him anymore but I didn't think of him as

my dad. I mean I called him dad but my dad was my stepdad who raised me. So it was more like he was an uncle or friend.”

Participants who had a father that appeared authentic in his effort to stay connected to them demonstrated greater efforts to also bond with their father. These participants were more positive in their description of their father and more hopeful in terms of establishing an ongoing relationship with him.

Now I mean as an adult we are closer than we were when I was littler but we probably would have been even closer if he hadn't been locked up. I mean I remember talking to him on the phone and not wanting to hang up but I mean you would get cut off so that was that. But he was good about calling I know that. And I mean he would send letters and well probably to my mom but he would put little things in there for me and my sister too like he loved us or ask how we were doing or draw little pictures or something... it's actually a good relationship...I can talk to him a lot about my problems and stuff like that. (Lisa)

So then when I would get home from school he would ask like how my day went and simple questions like that to start to build the relationship. And like he was really into construction so when he was working on a project he would ask me to help him and things like that so I feel like he's was trying. (Tara)

I send him letters for Christmas and his birthday and when I go to see him I go with my mom and my little brother and he calls all the time and we talk for a little bit. (Donna)

Christy experienced regret and sadness due to her father dying and never being able to express to him how grateful she was that he made a concerted effort to stay connected to her. She stated she may not have felt this loss if her father had not been so diligent in trying to communicate with her while he was incarcerated, despite the lack of support from her aunt and uncle towards her relationship with her father.

I mean I remember the few times I did talk to him he would sit on the phone and be like 'what's four plus four' and I think he could talk to me for hours (crying). So I mean he did try to be a dad in some ways but after he went to prison our relationship changed because I mean I was with my aunt and uncle then and he wasn't there...I wish we would have stayed connected and I feel like I would have valued the time I had with him more and I mean instead of thinking it was such a chore to talk to him or visit him or go to his funeral and all that.

Participants also craved words of affirmation from their father indicating that their father cared about them and recognized positive attributes in them. Participants described these positive verbalizations from their father as their father caring about them and making them aware of their importance in his life. Mandy described her father making a toast to

her at a family dinner after he was released from prison about how happy he was that she was there and how much he loved her. She described this as being one of her most cherished memories of her father because she felt acknowledged by him for the first time in a long time. Rita also discussed her father expressing how proud of her he was and how this resulted in her feeling closer to her father,

It's always nice to hear your parents say that and I think it's especially true for him because again when you don't have a close relationship with someone and you are always wanting that it's nice to know that that person is paying attention to you.

#### Maternal Response to Father's Incarceration

The maternal response was significant in how participants experienced their father being incarcerated. For the most part, participants described their mother being supportive of the relationship they had with their father. Rita described her mother ensuring she kept in touch with her father during the holidays and talk on the phone with him when he was in prison. Lisa, Gail and Donna expressed similar experiences with their mother encouraging contact both while their father was in prison and when he was out. Brenda discussed how, even though her father was abusive to her mother, her mother still was supportive of her having a relationship with him. Some of the other participants described their mother being supportive if they wanted a relationship with their father,

even though their mother may not have taken the initiative to encourage their contacting him. Ann, Pamela, and Tara discussed how this was helpful to them, particularly because it allowed them to make their own choices about whether or not they wanted a relationship with their father. Pamela stated,

She don't try to push me to do things and she will talk about it with me like about my dad coming to my graduation but in the end it was my decision and I am glad he didn't come now and I don't regret him not being there so I make the final choice in it. He thinks she pushed me into not letting him come but that's not true. I really feel like I made the final choice on that.

Participants also discussed how helpful it was that their mother allowed them to develop their own ideas about their father without being influenced by their mother. Brenda stated,

I don't know how my mom let us go do those visits in prison but it was the smartest things she ever did especially because I was 'daddy, daddy, daddy'. I was too headstrong and I was too in love with him where if she had let us not go I would have hated her and the fact that she let me find that out for my own was probably her greatest victory that she did that because I saw it for myself.



Many of the participants explained that any type of resistance they experienced from their mother regarding their father was their mother being protective of them rather than not being supportive of them having a relationship with their father. Mandy's mother didn't want to take her to the prison because she didn't want Mandy exposed to the prison setting. Pamela, Casey and Brenda processed their mothers' wariness about contact with their father because she was concerned he was still engaged in criminal activity and she didn't want her children exposed to that. Brenda went on to say that her mother even changed Brenda's last name to her stepfather's because she didn't want Brenda teased or ostracized by others in the small community they lived in. Brenda said she realized this was her mother protecting her so she didn't have to experience any more shame with carrying her father's last name.

Participants expressed it was helpful to be able to come to their mother and talk about their father, ask questions about him, and discuss what happened. Casey stated,

I know a lot of the time he wasn't there he was in prison and maybe he wasn't in prison that whole time but my mom didn't really tell me... If we had questions or wanted to know something she would tell us but she never sat us down and said this is what is going on with your dad or so and so said this about your dad.

However, Casey conveyed how constructive it was that her mother was open and honest with her when she did ask questions about her father. Mandy, Christy and Lisa discussed

initially being told their father was absent for reasons other than being incarcerated, such as being away for work. They expressed this not being helpful in their healing process and wishing their maternal figures had been forthcoming with the truth. Christy, who was raised by her aunt and uncle, said,

I think the truth would have been so much better even though it would have hurt too but at least it wouldn't have been a shock later on in life and you spent that whole time believing a lie. I think that makes it a lot worse actually. So yeah I wish they would have been more open about my dad and him being in prison and why he was there and all that because I think I could have dealt with it better...it's actually worse not being told."

Christy went on to explain how this resulted in a wedge being driven between her and her aunt,

I directed a lot of anger to my aunt a lot. I mean even if my dad was a fuck up and in prison he was still my dad and I should have been able to see him and know him. And I mean she took that away from me.

Finally, participants articulated that they witnessed what their mother went through with their father's incarceration and how they viewed this as often being a difficult process for her. Mandy stated "I think my mom was embarrassed because she

had a kid by a serial drug dealer and was probably like “wow, I can’t believe I got involved with that cat”, while Ann discussed the stigma her mother endured, “I guess there was a lot of social stigma against her...and she felt a lot of stigma of being a single mom and working mom and mom whose husband was in prison... I know my mom is very conscious of what people think and so the shame was a huge influence for her”. Sarah also observed the internal struggle of her mother about whether her mother should align herself with her husband or children because the children had been asked to testify against their father,

I think she felt she was caught between two loves where she would have to blame him to protect us or protect him and blame us so that’s what she did. And then she denied it because I confronted her with it years later of how he treated all of us and she denied it so I think she was in horrible denial.

Although Sarah experienced anger at her mother for this, she discussed understanding her mother was in a difficult position and had been abandoned by the community as well as few resources being available to woman in the 1950’s. Some of the participants discussed their father resenting their mother for the lack of contact between the participants and their father during or after incarceration. However, they also indicated their father did not understand what they and their mother had been through due to his choices.

## Effect on Daughter's Personal Well-Being

*I have been looking at patterns and this overarching belief that love beats everything*

*(Ann)*

### Grief and Loss

#### *Disillusionment of father's character*

Participants said that one of the most difficult and painful components of having an incarcerated father was initially believing their father was a particular type of person, such as honorable and devoted to his family, and then discovering he had committed a crime. Participants discussed this incongruence in their perception of him to be 'devastating' as several of the participants described good or decent relationships with their father prior to incarceration. Participants experienced a spectrum of emotions when they learned of their father's arrest and imprisonment including shame, anger, shock, disbelief, denial and confusion:

I think it was the drug charges that really made me sad because thinking as a young girl knowing he was doing that when I was in the car with him... I had this little rabbit hat and mittens when I was little and I never thought about where it came from just that my dad could buy it and him giving my mom

money but it's hard knowing that was where the money was coming from looking back on it now because it was dirty money. (Mandy)

I could go see him and I told my mother it's taking everything in me to not go see him but I want to remember him as the man I knew and loved and I don't want to see him that way... I mean I never thought he would end up in something like that because I mean he was my idol. I looked at him as another God. I looked at him as someone I could believe in (crying). I said I would always love him and I hope he understands because the father I knew and loved and I still love you now but that man I knew would never have gotten himself in jail. And I know things happen but I never expected this to happen to my dad where he is in prison the rest of his life. And I mean I can't go there and see him and see him behind bars and know that when he leaves there it will be in a box. And I mean I can't imagine seeing my father in prison. I can't live with that...come to find out he was clowning and doing all this illegal stuff that landed him in prison for murder. That was like a punch to the gut...The father I knew didn't even smoke a cigarette. He believed in right and wrong and doing the right thing for the right reasons...I mean I don't know this person who crossed over to the other side of the tracks...my father may not have always

been the man I thought he was or wondering if this stuff was going on when I was looking up to him. (Gail)

I was crying a lot and saying that my dad didn't care about me because if he did he wouldn't have done this and wouldn't be away from me. So it was really hard. I think I was really angry with him...I didn't think he would do something like that. (Jennifer)

But yeah it bothers me because it is hard to think he would be capable of doing something like that so it is kind of like there are these two sides to my dad in my mind with one being the person I know as my dad and then the person that was convicted of this awful thing and wondering how these two people could be the same person. So I struggled with that for a long time trying to make some sense out of it but I don't think you can really make sense out of something like this. (Lisa)

I couldn't believe it...I was just in shock. I mean I couldn't believe it so I had to see it to believe it and it wasn't until I talked to him on the phone and he was in jail and I called and managed to get ahold of him and I asked him if it was true and if he was there for that reason of sexual abuse because I needed to hear it straight from him and he said yes he was there for that reason so I had to hear it from him to finally believe it. (Donna)

Although participants conveyed the difficulty of this internal discrepancy, or what Gail jokingly labeled the ‘Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde phenomenon’, of their father being their parent but also being a criminal, what appeared to be just as significant was participants deeming their father as choosing criminal activity over his relationship with them. Christy, Rita, and Pamela believed their father chose drugs over them and their family. Pamela elaborated by saying she wasn’t good enough or had done something wrong for her father to make that choice. Many of the participants personalized their father’s criminal behavior and questioned his feelings for them. Mandy described her disbelief in stating, “I used to spend the night and here it was the house that was raided so I just got mad at him because it was like how could you love me when you were dealing drugs there?” Pamela questioned if her father even cared about her at all, “I would always ask her (mom) ‘do you think my dad thinks about me?’ I was always worrying if he thought about me or if he even cared.” Lisa and Jennifer disclosed feeling intense anger when discussing their belief that their father chose criminal activity over them:

I mean I don’t think you can help being mad and all that when your parent is in prison because I mean they did stuff they shouldn’t have to be there and that really sucks for the kids ...I think just knowing your dad was in prison I mean that is hard. And I mean it’s like why did you end up there and make those choices? I mean I think that always affects you no matter what because obviously

I mean they weren't doing what they should have been doing and taking care of their kids you know? (Lisa)

I was crying a lot and saying that my dad didn't care about me because if he did he wouldn't have done this and wouldn't be away from me. So it was really hard.

I think I was really angry with him. (Jennifer)

Inevitably what occurred for the participants regarding their father's choice to engage in criminal activity was feeling betrayed by their father. Participants revealed never being able to trust their father again and his choices permanently damaging the relationship he once had with them. Ann said that, even though she was empathetic towards her father due to his struggles with mental illness and addiction, she still felt a 'deep sense of betrayal' with her father's incarceration. She went on to state that,

It really came down to is feeling lied to and betrayed. And I mean when you are little you are like 'oh this is my dad and he's great' and then he gets arrested and goes to jail and it's like 'wow this is my parent. And you are supposed to be showing me right from wrong and not going to jail' so I think the work I am doing now is going back and trying to heal that sense of betrayal.

Other participants echoed similar statements, such as Donna, who stated that,



I trusted him and so my trust was completely broken in him because it was like everything you taught me not to do you were doing and you proved to me you were doing the opposite of that...I don't trust my dad like that anymore. I don't talk to him about things and we aren't close like we used to be.

### *Loss of Time with Father*

Participants also experienced grief of the time lost with their father and how this affected damaged their relationship with him. Tara responded with, "it was a long time (in prison) and I mean you can't get that back. Neither one of us can." Participants particularly focused on special events their father missed either because of his incarceration or he continued to be absent in their life post-prison. Jennifer reported that father's day was particularly difficult for her,

It was hard especially on father's day because in school they always did something for father's day where we would make something and give it to our father's and being in foster care I was there from 11 to 16 so during that time in school they always did father's day parties and dances and I didn't have a father to bring.

Mandy verbalized her anger and bitterness for her father missing her wedding and the birth of her children,

He didn't even come to my wedding when I got married. When I had my kids he didn't come. And it just really built a wall up again, another wall, another level of a wall and distance between me and him... because I felt at this point I am just bitter towards him and feel like I didn't even like him anymore for the fact that he couldn't be there for important parts of my life and he should still have been there. He should have walked me down the aisle you know what I'm saying. My kids haven't even met my dad.

Pamela also discussed her sadness in her father missing her prom and knowing he will not be the one to walk her down the aisle for her wedding,

At prom and stuff they always have where your dad can come and you can dance a dance with him so my stepdad did that and it was great but I think it would have been great if my biological dad had been there... And I already know on my wedding day my stepdad will be the one to walk me down the aisle. My dad will be invited to my wedding but he will be in the back with everyone else but he will not be in the front row because that is for my parents (crying hard). And as much as I wish it weren't like that he screwed that up for himself.

Participants acknowledged that their father choosing to be absent at important events in their life or missing out on watching them grow and develop reinforced the belief that they were not important to their father. Participants discussed this resulting in

yet another loss for them because even though their father may no longer be incarcerated, he was still opting to not be a part of their life. For Donna, who had a father that was still incarcerated, she expressed grief in knowing that events that were yet to come in her life will be missed by her father,

I think he is sad in not being able to see my accomplishments and he has told me that that he is sad he can't be there but I think he is taking time to realize everything he has lost and the time he has to spend with me and my brother and especially since we are growing and learning things he is missing all that and he is supposed to be incarcerated for eight more years so by the time he is out I will probably have a stable job and graduated college so that is time he can't get back so I think he is sad because of that because he can't spend that with me or my brother. And that is a loss for me too and I think that is what makes me sad the most because there are a lot of things I wish he would have experienced with me like my high school graduation and soccer games and he wasn't there to support me and those are the things that hurt.

### *Gap in Next Generation*

For the eight participants who were mothers, this was a significant area of loss for them in terms of their relationship with their father. Participants communicated sadness

in their children not knowing their father, often due to them protecting their children from their father due to his criminal activity. Mandy stated,

I want my kids to know who their grandfather is but I am afraid of the outcome. They know my stepdad as grandpa and he loves them every day but I do want them to know him too. I want him to know his grandchildren but they will not experience what I have experienced with him. I need to protect them too so I want them to know him but they will probably never have the same relationship with him like they do my stepdad and I know that is something that my dad has to live with because of his choices.

She went on to explain how this gap creates ambiguity in language as well in terms of how both she and her children refer to her father,

And I didn't introduce him as grandpa. And even with my husband I introduced them by first names. And he was like "Oh ok, ain't I your dad?" and I was like 'I don't know what to call you', what do I call you?

Sarah and Jennifer refused to allow their children to meet their father due to his offense being sexual in nature. They felt that protecting their own daughters was more important than their daughters having a relationship with their grandfather. Jennifer stated she maintained a relationship with her father simply to obtain important family medical

information for her daughter, but that her father will never meet her daughter. Brenda decided to introduce her children to her father when she determined him to be safe when he was in a nursing home,

Now that he is completely harmless I will take them to go see him. And I mean the genes you can see how I look like him. So now my son has these legs that are like him my dad and um now that I know more of the ancestry I think they should see him.

A few of the participants discussed seeing the positive attributes of their father in their own children and finding comfort in this despite the loss of a relationship between their children and their father,

And I am so proud of them. And that is where I still see my father is how good they are as fathers. That is how my father was. So I can still see him through them even though they don't have a relationship with him. And I mean it took me a long time to get to that point and I was able to tell my boys good things about my dad and I also had to tell them about him being on the inside and how painful it... So yeah I do remember the good things about my dad but then of course I remember when my mom got that phone call (about father being in prison). And I mean my oldest son I would always say 'you know you got a lot of your

granddaddy in you' with his smile and how smart he is and so there was a lot of good in my dad and it was good to see that in my son. (Gail)

### Resilience and Personal Growth

Participants processed what they viewed as positive life lessons that were born out of the experience of having an incarcerated father during childhood. They spoke about obtaining a unique sense of strength in the face of adversity, becoming more resilient and wise, and reaching a place of resolve with their father.

### *Attentiveness to Self-Preservation*

Participants learned to be independent and resourceful from this experience and resist leaning too heavily on another person for support or care. Sarah stated,

I learned that I don't think I have ever been that dependent on anyone. Even married you know I have always taken care of myself financially... Because I am not afraid to be on my own and I always put myself first and I will never become so co-dependent on someone that I can't leave a relationship that I can no longer stand.

Sarah reflected on her mother staying with her father because she viewed her mother as being dependent on her father and therefore was limited in options to leave the

marriage. Sarah vowed never to put herself in the same position as her mother. Mandy also said she was less tolerant of men who reflected the choices her father made, “So I have no tolerance for that. None at all... I can’t be with someone who is living that lifestyle because that is what it *is* is a lifestyle.” She discussed feeling she deserved better in a relationship and would not rely on someone as a partner who might not be there for her because he was conducting illegal activity. Brenda also reflected on this by stating,

Wherever I was my kids came. And I mean I finally got a car and housing even though that took a while. So as much as I didn’t know and as much as I bought into him (ex-husband) belittling me, my kids see me as a strong force and indestructible and hopefully that is influencing them. So again it was pulling myself out of this bad place because there was just no other options in my mind. And it was the same of being a daughter of a man who was constantly in prison because it was do or die so I just needed to pull myself up and move forward and now I don’t want to be like my mom where I stayed in a bad situation for several years. I want my daughters to be strong and not depend on a man.

Gail, Rita, Mandy, and Christy talked about how they had focused more on their own children because of this experience and that it made them want to be better and more involved parents for their children. As Christy said, “it just makes me want to be a better mom and show my children love no matter what”. Participants also discussed the joy of

discovering their voice as grown women and obtaining the courage to talk about their experiences with others in their life, such as their children, partners, friends and family, even though they endured tremendous feelings of shame, embarrassment and anger around the incarceration. Many of the participants also discussed talking with women in particular, such as their sisters, mothers, aunts and grandmothers, and finding strength in their relationships with other women. A couple of participants talked about an aspect of self-preservation being reclaiming the story of bearing witness to the incarceration because they knew the truth while other people may be misinformed or only know bits and pieces of the story,

I feel like if people have questions I would be the one to answer them. I don't like when people talk about it and people that don't know I mean people still talk and say negative things but they don't know the whole story. So if people ask me I let them know what happened and tell them the truth because I know what happened. And that's what I want is for people to know the truth so that is why I am more open about it now. (Donna)

Participants also discussed how this experience shaped them into more resilient people by learning how to manage stress more effectively, develop compassion for themselves, and not hold themselves accountable for their father's actions. Ann described working with traumatized children as a way to connect with her own wounded inner child



and that in practicing spiritual growth she has grown immensely from her experience with her father,

I was in a very supportive work environment and working with kids let me have more compassion with myself and letting go of some of my shame struggling as a kid...I actually go to meditation meetings and think about Buddhism a lot and am working on compassion where you see someone make mistakes or you make mistakes and it helps you improve your ability to have compassion.

Two participants discussed the need to refocus the responsibility of the incarceration back onto their father, “you can’t hold yourself accountable for that because you will go insane (Gail)”, and “I just realized like that people have to save themselves and you can’t save them. You can only save yourself (Christy)”. Participants also believed they had evolved into more capable and successful women because of surviving their father’s incarceration,

I realized I might have to deal with this now or sacrifice now but I never saw bad points in my life as being long term. And I just keep building, building, building and I mean having a dad like that did have an impact but I didn’t let it stop me and I didn’t identify as that of being a daughter of a dad like that. So I formed my own identity that was successful and where I am accomplishing things. I think it’s actually given me a lot of strength actually to get through tough times. I was never

satisfied of being at the bottom. So I think this experience actually motivated me to not be a statistic and not be looked at as just the daughter of a father who was constantly in prison for drugs and whatever else he was doing. I didn't want to be associated with that. So I think I went the other way where it was constantly proving to myself and everybody else that I was ok and I was strong and that my father didn't define who I am. (Brenda)

With my education I feel like I have moved past all that and I want to be a positive influence and show that things are possible and that you can come out in better place from something like that. And so I want to show others and have them look up to me and say yeah I can do this too. That we can get past hard things and that is where I am right now where I feel I can overcome this. There is always a way to get past everything but not all people find that but I did. (Donna)

### *Resolution with Father*

Participants acknowledged part of their healing process was also coming to a place of resolution in their relationship with their father. For Mandy, it was simply to know the truth of what happened with her father to alleviate the unanswered questions she had,

So I am glad I know the good and bad of my dad because it helps puts things in context of how and why stuff happened. And it helps me fill in the gaps in my own life too because it's hard having all these unanswered questions or the wrong information. Even though I am angry with my dad for the decisions he made, I am still glad I know the truth now so I can have more genuine thoughts and feelings about the situation rather than only pieces of information or lies (Mandy)

Pamela echoed these sentiments by discussing that part of her reconnecting with her father was to know more about his ancestry and perhaps then understanding why he made the choices he did. This, in turn, helped her in her own journey of forgiveness and recovery. As she stated, "I wanted to know that history and part of that is my dad. I can't ignore that."

Many participants focused on the lessons they learned from this experience as a way to create meaning from it. Participants determined that resolution with their father often resulted from the lessons learned in experiencing the pain and turmoil of the incarceration and that although these lessons were difficult, it helped them cope in other situations in their lives:

It's also made me more understanding of people's situations and if people do stuff it doesn't mean they are necessarily a bad person but it might be that they just are having a hard time and do bad things. (Christy)

I have a big capacity to love and I know that has been part of that process... And I think also just leaving my most recent relationship it was hard for me to realize it was ok to let go of someone who was hurting you. And I think that's something that it's not a coincidence that I am going through this with my father now. I mean I know I get to say I love someone but I also have control over how someone treats me. (Ann)

I feel there is a cost in going through something like this whether it's a rape or abusive relationship because you are surviving and you are doing what you have to do to get through that time without losing it but there is a price. You don't come out squeaky clean and there is damage and that's part of you and you need to own it and realize it's ok. You know, it happened, it affected me, I couldn't change it and that's ok. You know I see that damage even with being in an abusive relationship I am damaged and that's the cost and there was a cost having a father who was in prison and in some ways I am better and in some ways I am worse but that's reality. That's part of my story. (Sarah)

I have sobered up and come to a place where I can love myself um you know I feel good about myself and I know what I deserve and that I don't deserve to be treated shitty. And I mean I have gotten to a place where I don't hate him and I'm not even mad because there is a part of me that is grateful that I am here and I

have even gotten to a place where this dad loves me, and he taught me things and I learned so much from him in a positive way so I can look at the experiences from my other dad as lessons in terms of what I don't want. (Casey)

For other participants, personal growth was the comprehension that their father may never change, they needed to accept him as he was even though he might never have a conversation with them about the incarceration, and that they needed to take care of themselves in their interactions with him,

I don't tell him about my life and I don't ask him about his. So I know that I am here for him and care about him in a way that is safe for me but I am also learning how to let go of feeling like I need to be there when he is acting in ways that make me feel unsafe and that are unstable. And I am ok with that. I mean the emotional piece is where I need to be careful because I don't want to be yelled at or taken advantage of by him. (Ann)

He was getting high and basically he proceeded to tell us (participant and siblings) that this is what he loves to do. And yeah it's an addiction but it's more by choice. At that point I sort of let it go so if that's what he wants to do then let him do it. (Rita)

I don't talk to my dad about it so it's probably just something I have to live with.

(Tara)

Well I mean I still love him but I don't understand how he got from point A to point B on such a negative note but see I learned when things are out of your control you can't do anything about it and you have to just leave it to God. (Gail)

Some participants chose to forgive their father for what he did and remember the good side of their father,

I said maybe you should let go because mother is waiting for you. And I felt good about that, I really did. I mean people talk about being compassionate and empathetic all the time and you really don't know what that means until you can face someone that is dirty and full of shit or who is really nasty and treat them with kindness even though you don't feel it. (Sarah)

I could go see him and I told my mother it's taking everything in me to not go see him but I want to remember him as the man I knew and loved and I don't want to see him that way...and I forgave him in a letter I wrote to him and he said he understood why I couldn't see him... And where I still see my father is how good they are as fathers (her own children). That is how my father was...I tell them I want you to know that your granddaddy has always been good to me when he was

in my life and that is what I remember and now having those thoughts about where he is now I have to go back to those thoughts of how he was when he treated me like a princess. (Gail)

I did forgive him because I knew it wasn't going to help him or me and I mean he has always been a good father to me and he has never hurt me or harmed me in any way so I gave him a chance to talk to me and open up and talk about the issue. I mean he was the one who was hurting the most I guess but I think it was just needed time and then I thought to myself he has never really harmed me or my brother so I felt I owed him that at least. I mean I don't trust him but I did forgive him. So it came down to I didn't want that strained relationship with him because it wasn't going to help me. (Donna)

Although participants communicated the importance of finding some type of resolve with their father to be able to move forward with their own life, they also emphasized that it was a resolution based on their needs, not their father. Some of the participants indicated they did not feel they needed to forgive their father for what he did because they felt it was something that could not be forgiven due to how it affected their life. For the participants who did forgive, they were clear that the forgiveness was critical for their own ability to let go and move forward with their life and that this did not mean

they were reconciling with their father. They emphasized that mending their relationship with their father was directly linked to their own need for internal resolution.

### **Influence on Daughter's Interpersonal Relationships**

*I think to this day it has affected how I view men and how I view the world (Sarah)*

#### Significance of Male Role Models

The greatest amount of agreement amongst participants was the importance of having male role models in their lives. For the most part, this consisted of stepfathers, but for a few of the women it also was grandfathers, uncles, foster fathers and biological fathers. Participants processed how this relationship was critical in enhancing their support system that consisted of a male figure to fill in the void left behind by their father, particularly during the time of his incarceration. This support ranged from these men attending sporting events and dances, to discussing boys/relationships, to being loving and nurturing to the participants. Participants conveyed being 'lucky' to have these particular individuals in their lives,

And I really got a second blessing. And when my mother and father divorced she ended up with another great man who became my stepfather and he couldn't have been better than my real father. I mean he was like a real father and I didn't look at him any different so I felt I was a lucky little girl with two fathers. (Gail)



I mean he is there for me and for my daughter. I know he would help me out any way he could. Yeah, so that is nice to have someone like that that is family...

Because even if you don't have a dad you can still do father's day. And I mean I was lucky because I had a great stepdad and he was really supportive and I needed to hear that from a guy. (Jennifer)

Participants discussed this individual 'being there' for them and taking on a father-figure role in their life. Some viewed these individuals as more of their 'father' than their actual biological father. Mandy, Jennifer, Rita, Casey, Pamela, and Brenda acknowledged they call and think of their stepfather as 'dad' and their biological father as more of an acquaintance. Christy and Tara stated they felt this way about their uncle while Pamela and Rita said their grandfather was a significant male role model as well. Mandy, Pamela and Brenda were closer to their stepfather's family than their biological father's family. Mandy, Rita, and Brenda were also explicit in stating that their children call their stepfather 'grandpa' instead of their biological father. As Brenda stated, "he (biological father) isn't grandpa because my stepdad is grandpa. He earned that."

Participants discussed the importance of having a male role model in their life and how this softened the impact of their father's incarceration,

I don't think it wasn't as bad for me because when he wasn't incarcerated he provided for me and when he was incarcerated my grandfather just took over. And as far as the nurturing aspect my stepdad was there. (Rita)

I called him dad but my dad was my stepdad who raised me. So it was more like he was an uncle or friend. And I mean I felt kind of guilty for that for a while because I mean I didn't really respect him or feel as strong emotionally towards him as I did my stepdad. I mean my stepdad was really the main male role model in my life and a father figure to me so yeah my biological dad wasn't really a father per se because of his behavior. (Casey)

My grandpa was a father figure in my life until my stepdad came around and I think always having a father-figure in my life really helped me with my dad being in prison because I always had my grandpa or my stepdad. So yeah I think that made a big difference for me in being able to have men that were there for me and good to me because if all I had was my biological dad to go off of I don't think I would have good relationships with men at all or I think I might have turned out a lot worse. (Pamela)

I have my uncle and he has been there for me since I was four and he has always been there for me and that helped having a man in my life that I could trust and count on...I can talk to him about boys and he is there for me and if I need

something like if my car breaks down or something like that he is right there for me to help me out. I mean, it's not the same as my actual dad but I think it really did help growing up with a man there and having that positive relationship with him. (Christy)

I had a pretty strong bond with my uncle so that really helped. I mean he was pretty involved in my life and he would show me how to do things or just be there when I needed him and it was good to have a male role model around that I could learn from and kind of see how he was with me. (Tara)

Lisa described her father continuing to be a positive male role model in her life. She said this was due to him completely disengaging from criminal activity when he returned home and was an involved and loving father throughout the rest of her childhood,

I mean like I said we have a good relationship now and it's nice to have him in my life because I mean there weren't really any other men in my life like family or anything besides him so it's good to have a dad that's involved with me and with my kids. (Lisa)

Sarah discussed her sadness in not having any type of male role model when she was growing up and how she experiences this as a significant loss,

I think because I never had a role model or a relationship to judge my own on and I mean watching Beaver Cleaver that's not reality either. And I mean some of my friends their dad's weren't incarcerated but they weren't great either.

Sarah went on to say that the only example she had of male-female interaction was between her parents and that the only male she had to compare other males to in her life was her father, whom she described as abusive and neglectful.

### Trepidation with Others

Participants discussed the experience of having an incarcerated father as fostering fear and hesitation in connecting with others. They felt they could not talk about this experience due to believing no one would understand them and they would be judged. For all of the women, this was one of the first or very few times they had discussed their experience was during the interview. This was reflected in Sarah stating, "I don't think it's normal. I don't think most people have fathers who were in prison. I think people are surprised. I mean I don't broadcast it. I mean there are people I've known my whole life and have no idea. I mean this is probably the first time I have really talked about my father being in prison." Participants voiced being ashamed and embarrassed about their father being in prison and expressed significant anxiety in discussing the event with others for fear of being rejected or misunderstood,

I am afraid that they will think differently of me. Because even though it isn't me they might think that because he was in there. There is something wrong with me or our family. So I guess it has caused me not to open up as much because I am worried people will judge me over something I had nothing to do with and was just a baby but people make up their mind about you over things like this and I don't want to be labeled or thought of badly because of my father...I mean it is hard to think about and trying to make people understand how I feel when they never can. I mean you know it's something you have to experience yourself and if you don't then you can't understand... most people don't (get it) so again I think I get afraid that people will judge me or think bad of me and I am always scared of that. (Tara)

I think people have negative connotations of that like I am trashy or something but that's not the case...it's painful and I don't think people will understand and I don't understand it myself really. I mean I think about it a lot and its hard too because there are so many pieces of it that are missing or I don't know the whole truth about so I am still trying to make sense of it all too so I don't think anyone else can understand unless they have been through it too. (Christy)

Participants explained how this experience directly affected their ability to trust others.

Jennifer stated that, "I don't really talk about it unless I know the person really well

because I have trust issues and I am always scared because I don't want people to know this." Tara supported this by stating that, "I think it's with everyone. I mean I just don't trust people." Participants communicated how this trepidation with others affected them,

I feel like because I don't openly tell people about it I feel like that's kind of not trusting people and then knowing he was there and someone could do something like that. I mean someone who seems nice can do something like that even if it's unintentional. So I mean I know I have my guard up and it takes a while for people to earn my trust but I think I am always wondering what they are capable of or if they will let me down. (Tara)

I wouldn't say I've struggled but I think I am an overachiever. Um, and then I guess going back to the relationship aspect of me not being able to let anybody completely in and I tend to be the strong dominant figure in whatever relationship I'm in. And I definitely come across as 'I don't need anybody'. I think I just don't want to be let down again or lean on someone and then they leave. So it's easier on me to just do it myself ... I am sure he (father) is a huge contributor to that. (Rita)

I mean I think I have a hard time bonding because I don't have that trust and at any time I may leave and I mean I've had a lot of good jobs. I've never been fired. I had a lot of good jobs but I easily get bored and I don't like to stay long because

I think you feel like at any minute it's going to be taken away and in some ways you do see yourself as the victim of something I can't control. In some ways I am a real control freak. If I can't control something it scares me but at the same time you know I don't put the effort in because then I am not as hurt when it doesn't work out. (Sarah)

### Poor Intimate Relationships

Another commonality amongst participants was involvement in unhealthy and sometimes abusive intimate relationships. Participants said this often stems from their world beliefs about men that resulted from their experience with their father. Shelly stated, "I think to this day it has affected how I view men and how I view the world...I don't expect things from him (father) so I have low expectations." Rita also discussed her father's absence due to incarceration affecting her lack of understanding of how men should treat women,

I guess just from the stand point of not knowing how a man is supposed to treat you. I've never been in any type of abusive relationship where it's been physical but I think I have struggled in relationships because I don't know the male and female role. Even though my mom was married the relationship wasn't always the healthiest.

Jennifer spoke about not trusting men due to her father committing a heinous crime against another woman and this influencing how she viewed all men,

That person he assaulted was alone when he did it and so I mean I knew about that and so I think that really affected me because I think about her sometimes and think that she trusted my dad too and then he did this so maybe one of these guys would do that to me.

Participants discussed how these experiences and beliefs negatively affected their relationships with significant others and how it created barriers in establishing healthy boundaries and communication patterns,

I think the work I am doing now is going back and trying to heal that sense of betrayal (from father) but it certainly has been present with other relationships, most notably with my sister and my last romantic relationship. (Ann)

Well, it did for sure because I always had a wall up with other men. I still do. I mean I am always like ‘is he lying to me?’ and does he have another woman on the side and what is he doing that I don’t know about? So yeah it really affected me with other men and I guess talking about it now makes me realize how much it did impact me in a bad way because it really destroyed any trust I had with men. I mean for a long time I didn’t want to be bothered with any men. But you know I



had to kind of change my mind around that because I had my sons and so I had to be there for them and teach them to be good men so I opened my heart up to them for sure but I think I am still really guarded with men and don't trust them. (Gail)

I didn't have trust in anyone especially a male and he is my first relationship so the only relationship I've had with a man is my dad and to have a relationship with my current boyfriend it was very hard to trust him. (Donna)

Participants also recognized their own unhealthy interactions in relationships, which they felt stemmed from a lack of a positive relationship with their father,

I always feel like my boyfriend now I think how can I get his attention and everything has to revolve around me and I know I am acting ridiculous but I can't seem to help it so yeah it really affected me with guys. ..I think I am just clingy like I am so worried they will leave me or abandon me like he did (father) and I guess that has affected my trust with guys that they will choose other things over me like my dad did. (Pamela)

But I do feel like there is a hole and I do have a hard time with guys. I think I try to save guys and they don't care about me...I kind of go after guys who have problems themselves and I try to fix it so we are so focused on their issues that I don't have to think about mine. And for some reason I feel like well like I am

helping by taking care of them and their needs so I don't really think about my own needs. (Christy)

Some participants were in relationships in which domestic violence was present and they viewed this as being influenced by their relationship with their father,

I was set up to be with someone just like him. My first husband was very abusive and very promiscuous... I was really set up to be with that type of man who is very selfish, self-centered and abusive in some way physically or psychologically. I didn't expect a lot. I think the biggest thing was trust... I think it has really hurt male and female relationships for me definitely. I think a lot of times I pick men who are a lot like my father because it's comfortable and it's familiar... I do think I was attracted to bad boys, you know, and a lot of men who were like my dad. They were selfish and very self-centered. (Sarah)

I think also just leaving my most recent relationship it was hard for me to realize it was ok to let go of someone who was hurting you. And I think that's something that it's not a coincidence that I am going through this with my father now. I mean I know I get to say I love someone but I also have control over how someone treats me. (Ann)

I mean before this point in my life I didn't feel a lot of self-worth or that I deserved to be treated ok. And I mean just ok, not even good. Just to be treated ok. And I mean I put up with a lot of stuff and abuse and...not just that I was ending up with shitty guys but they were also abusive and I never saw a problem with it. The only time I saw a problem is when it affected the kids. (Casey)

I have been in some domestic violence relationships in my past and I had to put a restraining order on some of them for that and some of them have been incarcerated a lot so yeah it affects me...but I mean yeah I think I didn't think a lot of them being in prison or anything like that because my dad was so I mean I guess I thought it was ok to date them even though they obviously were abusive. (Lisa)

Interestingly, Lisa went on to say she believed that because her father was incarcerated, he was less likely to intervene when she was in an abusive relationship because he felt hypocritical given his own history,

I mean I think most dads would probably be like hell no if they knew their daughter was dating someone who had been in prison but I suppose my dad couldn't really say anything because he had been in prison too so I mean I wish he would have said something but I think that has a lot to do with it with why he didn't.

### Hopes for Relationship with Father

In summarizing the findings from this study, the participants ended their interviews revealing their hopes for their relationship with their father given they had went through the experience of paternal incarceration together. For the most part, participants verbalized caring about their father and wanting him to be in their life in some capacity. Ann discussed loving her father despite his struggles and being grateful he stayed in close proximity to her upon release from prison so they could maintain a relationship,

But I do love him and I will always love him and there are many things I am grateful for that he stayed here, that he wanted to be part of my life, that he was affectionate, that he has helped take care of me, that he has been fun. You know there are a lot of things that I love him for (crying). You know a part of me is probably like he would have been easier for him to move to another community where he wasn't known and people didn't know so I am grateful he didn't move.

Another of the participants, Lisa, discussed the realization her father isn't a bad person and that she was grateful they had a solid relationship and hoped this continued throughout their lives,

I love him and I am just glad he is in my life still and that we have this bond together and I am glad that he raised me after I was six or seven until I was grown up... I mean like I said we have a good relationship now and it's nice to have him in my life.

Some of the participants were hopeful they could have some type of relationship with their father, even if it was not substantial,

I just pray to God that we can have some type of connection. Even just spending weekends together getting to know each other better. I just pray that before we go he can say 'I love you' before he goes. That is all I ask. Just to hear him say 'I love you'. I guess that is what I want and all I want to hear. Just for us to put all our garbage into the past and just be a father and daughter. I long for my father and I love my father, I do. I know who he is better now but it's just amazing that I am 40 years old and he can't say 'I love you'. He will say 'oh you know I love you' but I just want him to say 'oh, I love you so much'. That is what I am hoping for. That is what I want. (Mandy)

To get advice from him. Just to be able to call him on a daily basis for whatever reason and then if something does come up then he can actually listen (crying).

(Rita)

Now going to college I don't think we will get closer but I hope to at least keep what we have now... I am glad we can talk and he knows what's going on with me as far as school and everything. (Tara)

I know he is getting older and I mean in prison he got beat really severely and it affected his muscles and even his brain some and even when I went to go see him when he was out like a year ago he isn't such a scary man anymore... I know that I do want to see what kind of relationship we might have. (Casey)

Some participants hoped for a relationship with their father but realized that it might never transpire due to either him still engaging in criminal activity or his lack of investment in a relationship with the them,

That he would stop using drugs because it's his daily think of getting high for the day and then I think he would be or we would be able to have a relationship and do the normal father daughter type things. (Rita)

I hope it actually develops into a father daughter relationship because I would like to have that but I don't think it will...well like me going there for Christmas or thanksgiving or even him calling me on my birthday. Like he hasn't called me on my birthday since he's been in jail. Just spending time together... or like my mom like she may live a half hour away but she calls me and sees how I am doing

every day but my dad only calls once a month...I guess he has proved a lot for not getting in drugs again but I think he has a long ways to go before we have a better relationship. I guess I am not very hopeful. (Pamela)

Jennifer also talked about not having any personal hopes for her relationship with her father and taking it on a day to day basis. She was able to contact her father if she needed to, but her priority in connecting with him was to obtain medical information for her daughter regarding his family history.

For three of the daughters, there was ambiguity in their hopes for a future with their father. Brenda discussed her father suffering from dementia and being in a nursing home. She expressed that, "I don't think there is any (hope). I mean he has no memory and he didn't remember I was there after I left." She stated she does visit him, though, and that she feels safe doing this now that he is completely harmless. Donna and Gail both had fathers who were still incarcerated. For Gail, she made the difficult choice to not visit her father and rather remember him how he was prior to incarceration,

I mean I still love him whole heartedly but it's just the man he turned in to. I mean that's just being his daughter. I mean I will wake up in the middle of the night where I actually went there to the prison where I tell him he broke my heart with being in jail the rest of the night and I would wake up in the middle of the night with a cold sweat crying. Because I miss the man I knew and loved. The

father who called me his princess. And I remember telling my mom because she said you know you can always change your mind and go see him and I said I know but I think it will make things worse...I just can't handle seeing my dad behind bars. I mean it's been years and that hasn't changed for me.

Donna discussed still visiting her father and maintaining contact but trying not to look too far into the future because it is uncertain,

I always try to stay in the present because the future is too scary. I mean I always see us being in contact with each other but I don't think we will be close like we used to and we probably never will be again...I don't want to lose complete contact with him because he is my father and always will be so I don't want to lose that. The thing that is really important is to be ok with him. That doesn't mean I have to be really close to him but that we are at least in contact and that we talk to each other and are there for one another.

The fathers of Sarah and Christy were deceased. Sarah came to terms with her father's death while still harboring a lot of anger and resentment towards him for the choices he made in life. She spoke about focusing on her daughter now and trying to be a better parent than her parents were. For Christy, she voiced tremendous grief in not being able to establish a relationship with her father while he was alive,



I wish I could tell him that I did love him and I am thankful he tried so hard and I hope I make him proud. And how sorry I am (crying)...I wish I could remember him more. I guess when he died I got all his possessions which was just one bag like with a watch and a wallet. I just wish I cared more about him back then when he was alive. I really regret that because I can't get that time back.

Christy desired to at least obtain the stories of her father from those that were closest to him so she could know him vicariously through others. She stated she hoped she was strong enough to gather these stories so she can share them with her own children someday.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

*Women's childhood relationships with their fathers are important to them all their lives. Regardless of age or status, women who seem clearest about their goals and most satisfied with their lives and personal and family relationships usually remember that their fathers enjoyed them and were actively interested in their development-- Stella*

*Chess*

The focus of this study was to explore the experiences of women who had incarcerated fathers during their childhood. The discussion chapter reflected the process of determining what unique contributions the current study provided to existing knowledge, weaving points from prior literature into the interpretations explored in the findings section, and building on current theoretical frameworks to enhance understanding in the area of paternal incarceration (Daly, 2007; Gilgun, 2012). This was established by specifically examining: 1) perception of parental response, 2) effect on personal well-being and 3) influence on interpersonal relationships. Exceptions to participants' stories were also noted along with a summarization of predominant relational needs from their fathers during and post incarceration. Limitations were addressed and implications for future research and clinical practice were explored.

## **Perception of Parental Response**

A significant finding that emerged was the influence paternal incarceration had on participants' views of and interactions with parental figures in their life. This outcome yielded informative and enlightening insight into the cognitive and emotional processes of participants regarding these parental figures when paternal incarceration has been present, which has not been significantly explored in previous research. The themes that emerged in this category helped provide awareness into the experiences these women had, particularly with their father and mother. This section is divided into two categories: 1) participants' response to their father and 2) to their mother or maternal caretaker.

### Paternal Response

Participants described frustration and disappointment when their father did not acknowledge his crime or attempted to minimize his criminal involvement. They reported this as a sense of injustice and invalidation of their own experiences. They believed that part of the healing process in their relationship was their father taking responsibility for his actions and conveying that to his daughter. Furthermore, the lack of openness and dialogue about the incarceration was expressed as particularly stifling and painful for daughters. Participants discussed their desire for their father to communicate with them about his time in prison, to express curiosity about how his incarceration affected them, and to demonstrate a genuine desire to have a relationship with them. There was also the

belief that it was their father's responsibility to initiate these conversations. When this did not occur or when there was significant denial or minimization of the father's involvement in criminal activity and his time in prison, this often resulted in participant's feeling more angry and distant from their fathers. This anger appeared to erupt from the belief that 'parents have choices and children don't' which was verbalized multiple times in the interviews. Participants deemed themselves powerless and helpless when it came to their father's incarceration and that they were 'done to'. They described that part of their healing process was the need for validation from their father about what happened and the pain that it caused them and their family. Without this resolution, women felt like the relationship with their father tended to be superficial and was often described as 'fake'. These experiences reflect the findings of Newell's study in which girls with incarcerated fathers expressed feeling disappointment about their father's incarceration and being observant of their father not discussing his incarceration with her (2012). Therefore, the emotional turmoil, as well as the lack of conversation about it with their father, appears to be one of the casualties created by paternal incarceration for girls and women.

Participants also elaborated on their feelings of awkwardness and confusion if their father attempted to resume life as normal. Participants described this as the 'elephant in the living room' and that there was this significant void in their relationship in which their relational history during the incarceration was never made overt or

processed. Other studies have explored this phenomenon of fathers often having unrealistic perceptions of returning home expecting everything to be as it was prior to incarceration (Day et al., 2005; Tripp, 2009; Yocum & Nath, 2011). Participants felt abandoned emotionally by their father when their father refused to acknowledge or validate the pain and grief he caused them. Lisa, whose father returned home after prison and became a loving, involved father and withdrew from any type of criminal involvement entirely, said she was able to look past this conversation not occurring because of the effort her father was making to mend their relationship. However, even though she stated they currently have a solid relationship, Lisa admitted still being curious about that time in her father's life and wondered if he ever thinks about how it affected her. In prior studies, women also expressed their curiosity about their father's incarceration and the lack of communication with her about this time in his life (Newell, 2012; Yocum & Nath, 2011).

Participants asserted that, because of these types of responses from their father, they personalized the events of the incarceration as being an indicator of their father not caring about them. They often wondered if their father thought about them, thinking their father chose drugs and/or criminal behavior over them and believing their father only cared when it somehow personally benefited him. This is in alignment with the findings in the previous study on incarcerated fathers and their experiences with their daughters in

which men appeared to struggle with questions pertaining to how the incarceration may have affected their daughter (Newell, 2012; Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014). This struggle may be a result of men not being encouraged to reflect on women's experiences or how his incarceration experience affected others. Although all prisons differ in their policies and practices, imprisonment is a challenge for most individuals (Adams, 1992). Attempting to maintain family connection when a primary focus of punishment is disconnecting someone from the comforts of their former life, which includes their family and community, is difficult. Furthermore, research has shown that men who are incarcerated often resort to survival mode, which may appear as isolation or dissociating to exist in that type of hostile environment (Haney, 2006.). Therefore, fathers may negate their daughter's experience when they are struggling to resolve the impact incarceration had on their own lives. This may also be due to men generally not being encouraged to reflect on their impact in the lives of women or how women interpret the world (Silverstein, 1996). Thus, men may view their daughters' experience as detached from their own, as well as prison life being separate from parenting life. However, this can result in daughters feeling rejected by their father which ultimately damages their relationship (East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006).

One unique topic that emerged was participants reasoning for being observant of their father's commitment to not recidivating. Although other studies have noted that

children are concerned about their father recidivating, there was no further exploration of the beliefs surrounding this fear (Nielsen, 2012; Yocum & Nath, 2011). In the current study, if participants viewed their father as continuing in criminal activity or substance use, they believed they were not important to their father and they could not have a close relationship with him because the likelihood of him returning to prison was high. This distinctive finding deepened with participants who had children elaborating on their reluctance to introduce their father to his grandchildren. Although they could not protect themselves from their father's actions, they could safeguard their own children. Therefore, many of the participants did not encourage or initiate relationships between their own children and their father due to their concern that their father would be a negative influence and that he may return to prison which then would become a loss for her children. Participants experienced grief surrounding this disconnect between their father and their children for multiple reasons including loss of shared experiences between their father and children and a gap in their children's family narrative. An example of this is Brenda, who discussed slavery as being a part of her father's family history and how she realized that a portion of her father's hardship may be connected to historical trauma (Brave Heart, 2010). She wanted to explore his ancestry more and recognized this as important for her children, but the loss of a relationship with her father has made this difficult to have any type of productive dialogue about his familial

narrative. She expressed this is not only her story, but her children's story, and she hoped she could obtain as many of those stories as possible prior to her father passing.

Rarely found in the literature is another obstacle participants discussed regarding language and grappling with what to call their father, especially if they were close to their stepfather, whom they often referred to as dad, and/or if they did not feel they had a father-daughter relationship with their biological father. Language is an important component of identifying who is in and who is out in the family because language assists family members in defining their roles and the expectations that are attached to the titles given to each family member such as mother, father, middle child, and sibling (Biehal, 2014; Hayley, 2011b; Imber-Black, Roberts & Whiting, 2003; McGoldrick, Carter, & Carcia-Preto, 2010; Mason & Tipper, 2008; Visher & Visher, 1999). When a daughter perceives her father as not upholding his role as a parental figure in her life or being absent, this may result in her experiencing difficulty in incorporating verbiage that has emotional connotation or meaning such as "dad". Furthermore, if a stepfather or another male figure performs the role of what is expected of the biological father in her life, it may be deemed more natural for a daughter to ascribe the title of "dad" or "father" to this person. This shift in language appeared to become even more difficult for participants if their father attempted to resume a relationship with them post-incarceration because then they had to determine how to negotiate these paternal relationships in their life.



Another factor that may contribute to the ambivalence in language is from a study by Hayley (2012a) who examined the importance of face-to-face contact for children, which enhanced their development and affinity with familial relationships. There is limited or non-existent face-to-face contact when a father is in prison that may further contribute to the estrangement of the father-daughter connection. The lack of close physical contact may create dissonance for a daughter when considering the designation she gives to her father that is indicative of the role he plays in her life. This ambivalence was further exacerbated for participants with concern about and confusion for their children regarding what their children would call their stepdad/grandpa as compared to their biological dad, especially if their father had not been involved. This ambiguity in language was often stressful and confusing for participants as they struggled in an attempt to identify their father as their biological father, but also reflect the accurate meaning they attributed to this relationship.

### Maternal Response

Overall mothers or maternal figures were supportive of participants having a relationship with their father or left it up to the participant to decide what they wanted to do. This is supported by the Yocum and Nath (2011) study where mothers indicated they encouraged a relationship between their daughter and her father and contradicted studies where fathers believed mothers were not supportive of their relationship with their

children (Arditti et al., 2005; Geller, 2013; Roy & Dyson, 2005; Swanson, Lee, Sansone, & Tatum, 2013; Swisher & Waller, 2008). The perception of fathers on the occurrence of maternal gatekeeping may be attributed to the fathers being physically removed from the family and not being privy to the internal dynamics of the family system during their absence resulting in their forming assumptions that may not be accurate.

This finding also refutes previous studies that interviewed incarcerated fathers where they believed mother were maliciously withholding children (Arditti et al., 2005; Geller, 2013; Roy & Dyson, 2005; Swanson, et al, 2013; Swisher & Waller, 2008). However, there may have been considerably greater maternal gatekeeping for these particular participants in the previous studies or the father's perception of the mother withholding his children was actually her being protective and concerned for her children because of his criminal actions. Since there was a small sample in the current study, it is also possible that if more women had been interviewed, there may have been a greater range of experiences pertaining to maternal support. There is also the possibility that a few of the mothers in this study were not keen on talking about the father, although they would answer questions the participant had about him. This resistance was perceived by participants as their mother's own humiliation and embarrassment of being intimately involved with someone who was now incarcerated. Participants also articulated compassion for their mother in regards to social stigma, increased responsibility and

internalized shame they witnessed in their mother because of their father's incarceration. This is a component fathers did not bear witness to so there might be a lack of understanding from men regarding women's experiences on the effect of incarceration on the participants' mother (Silverstein, 1996).

Participants spoke about the need to talk about the incarceration and indicated that silence, secrecy and shame in the family around that may have prohibited constructive conversation that they described as emotionally damaging. They emphasized the need to know the truth about their father and said this knowledge often helped them cope better with the situation. Knowing was better than being told lies or bits and pieces of the story (Bockneck, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009; Clopton & East, 2008; Foster & Hagan, 2009; Kampfner, 1995; Miller, 2006; Phillips & Gates, 2011; Raeder, 2012). Participants processed how destructive it was when they found out the truth, which often resulted in their trust being deeply affected towards those whom they had faith in. Participants also attempted to inaccurately fill in voids regarding the absence of their father in which they perceived themselves as somehow at fault for their fathers' incarceration. Secrecy and silence may also negatively affect women by lessening their incentive to obtain the help they need to work through and process these issues in a constructive way (Murray & Murray, 2010).

### **Effect on Personal Well-Being**

This section depicted aspects of loss and resolution for participants with respect to their relationship with their father. Participants verbalized a range of emotions when it came to the incarceration of and subsequent relationship with their father including anger, shame, sadness, embarrassment, disappointment, disbelief and shock. One of the primary emotions, however, was grief. Participants discussed this in the context of ambiguous loss in which their fathers were “there” but “not there” in terms of physically being absent due to incarceration but still having a significant psychological impact on them as women. Pauline Boss (2000) presents ambiguous loss as a person being psychologically present but physically absent, such as with incarceration, or physically present but psychologically absent, such as Alzheimer’s, in which there is no closure or ritualistic grieving process around the loss. Other studies have examined ambiguous loss from the perspective of the incarcerated father (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Arditti, 2003; Arditti, 2005; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Roy & Dyson, 2005), but this study suggests that children of incarcerated parents also experience this type of loss. This loss was also evident if their father was still considerably absent from their life post-incarceration, which created ambivalence for participants because of their perception that their father was not invested in their life.

Participants specifically noted feeling grief and loss in believing their father was a certain type of person, such as trustworthy, honest and virtuous, then realizing there was another side to him that was contradictory to those beliefs in which he engaged in criminal behavior. They discussed this disillusionment being like a “slap in the face” and experiencing a tremendous sense of betrayal by their father. The result was trust being broken with their father that was often irreversible and questioning their judgment about other relationships, particularly with men.

Participants connected paternal incarceration to other losses in their life such as parental divorce, having to move due to loss of family income, being disconnected from their father’s family, and their father missing significant events in their life. Participants elaborated on the disappointment of their father not being present for significant life events such as graduations, their wedding and the birth of her children. Previous literature supports daughters expressing the need and desire to have their father involved in their lives, whether it be for significant events or simply engaging in more conversation, and experienced extreme loss with absence of their father’s when this did not occur (Guzzo, 2011; Lin & McLanahan, 2007; McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider; Newell, 2012; Shlafater & Poehlmann, 2010; Way & Gilman, 2000; Williams, 2005). Participants explained that the loss of time could never be regained and they lamented over this fact, which often led

to in anger and resentment towards their father since they attributed this loss to the poor decisions he made.

These emotions appeared to estrange daughters further from their father and created more dissension in their relationship. This parallels previous research in which incarcerated fathers expressed negative attitudes from their children being a barrier to having a positive relationship with their children (Swanson et al, 2013). Thus, it may be that the hurt and betrayal fathers' children experienced due to the choices they made that resulted in the separation from their children as to the reason why children responded to them in that way. Participants also linked feelings of loss and betrayal to a lack of self-esteem and self-worth, including experiencing depression, from the internalized response to stressors in their life relating to paternal incarceration (Cowan et al, 1994; Cummings, Davies & Campbell, 2000; Thompson & Berenbaun, 2009; Videon, 2005).

For the most part, participants experienced a heightened level of self-awareness because of this experience and the realization of the need for self-preservation due to not being able to depend on their fathers to change or "step up". Participants described redemption as their capacity to accept their father where he is, forgive him if need be, and come to terms that there may never be answers to all of their questions regarding their father. This was particularly difficult for Sarah and Christy whose fathers were deceased. Given the lack of opportunity to achieve a relational resolution with their father, their

unresolved grief continues to go beyond the deathbed. Research coming out of the divorce arena supports the conclusion that daughters tend to experience dissatisfaction in their relationship with their father and are less proactive to attempt to improve the relationship, particularly if they view any type of disengagement from their father (Ahrns, 2007; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Stamps, Booth & King, 2009). This passivity may more accurately reflect self-preservation for daughters rather than complacency and lack of investment in the father-daughter relationship due to daughters surrendering to the notion that they cannot change their father, but they can change themselves and their response to him.

Participants also wanted to be role models for other women, giving themselves permission to grieve and be angry with their father, and engaging in purposeful living for themselves and their children. Donna also expressed the need to tell her story out of a social justice lens in which she discussed being the one to bear witness to her father's incarceration and the aftermath and thus she should be the one to tell the story because she knows the truth. I remember her smiling at me at the end of the interview and saying, "You know, the truth sets you free".

### **Influence on Interpersonal Relationships**

The last category involved participants' views on their interactions with others in their life, including male role models and intimate relationships. Participants were

concerned they would be judged, ridiculed and misunderstood due to being the daughter of a man who was in prison. This resulted in trepidation of being open with others or talking about their experience. The fear of being stigmatized often created emotional cut-offs for participants where they did not process their feelings, hid these experiences from others in their life, and rejected help as confirmed in prior research that produced similar findings (Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2009; Foster & Hagan, 2009; Geller et al., 2009; Johnson & Easterling, 2012; Kampfner, 1995; Miller, 2006; Phillips & Gates, 2011). Participants also noted how this specifically influenced their intimate relationships in which they lacked trust with their partner and became involved with partner who was abusive or unstable. They discussed concern over their own children now experiencing unhealthy paternal relationships and thus continuing the cycle of disparaging family relationships into the next generation.

Prior research suggests that women struggle more in intimate relationships when their relationship is unhealthy with their father (Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Johnson, 2013; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002; West-Smith, 2007). However, in this study, participants who described their relationship as being decent with their father also became involved in destructive relationships with significant others. This is contrary to other studies, such as Schaick and Stolberg (2001), in which women had satisfying relationships with men if they had a positive relationship with their father post-divorce.



Therefore, it appears that events such as divorce, even though it can be a stressful transition for fathers and daughters, may not produce similar outcomes for daughters within intimate relationships as paternal incarceration does.

This research demonstrated the significant importance of male role models in a woman's life, particularly when her father is incarcerated. Participants discussed these men establishing paternal-type roles with them. Other research has suggested the importance of positive male role models, or social fathers, for girls, but this study revealed the particular necessity when paternal incarceration is present (Bzostek, 2008; Doucet, 2006; Hodgetts, 2005; Myles, 2007). Interestingly, stepfathers and stepdaughters have been reported to experience somewhat hostile and detached relationships (Clingempeel, Ievoli & Brand, 1984; Dunn, O'Connor, & Cheng, 2005; Jensen & Shafter, 2013; Lutz, 1983; Marsiglio, 2004; Silverman, 2001). Yet, in this study, several of the participants reported having close, supportive relationships with stepfathers, as well as uncles and grandfathers. For participants who were close to their stepfathers, they also felt close to and connected with their stepfather's side of the family. Participants discussed how the relationships with these men contributed to their resiliency by having a loving, positive male as a role model in their life and experiencing how a man should treat a woman. However, participants also noted that their positive relationships, particularly with their stepfathers, often resulted in a sense of loss and an internal struggle

of not having the same type of relationship with their biological father. Rita talked about having a close relationship with her stepfather but still wanting to know her father because of feeling like she was missing a piece of herself, that she was a misfit, that there was a loss of her paternal family and cultural identity, and that she felt guilt with being closer to her stepfather than her own father. This was the same for other participants, such as Jennifer, who stated that her uncle was helpful in being a positive male role model but it was not the same as having her father in her life. This internal struggle appears to be common as depicted in the literature in which guilt and loss are experienced by girls towards their stepfather out of loyalty and idolization of their biological father (Gold & Adeyemi, 2013; Kinniburgh-White, Cartwright, & Seymour, 2010; Pettigrew, 2013; Silverman, 2001). What is important for this study, though, is that participants did express the importance of having a positive male role model, particularly when their father was in prison and/or if he did not reconnect with them after release.

Participants also processed coming full circle with their father, attempting to find solace in their current relationship with him, and their hopes for the future. The majority of participants discussed wanting their father in their life in some capacity, although the degree to his involvement varied amongst participants. Some desired a close, loving relationship with their father while others were satisfied with a more casual relationship and limited contact. The reasoning also varied for participants regarding their father

being in their life. These reasons included: 1) identity issues in which knowing herself was also knowing him since he was a part of her, 2) wanting to build a relationship with him so that her own children could connect with him at some point, and 3) simply wanting the experience of having her father be a presence in her life. Participants also hoped their father coming to terms with his own shame and guilt would be the catalyst for him being there for them as a parental figure that would encourage, protect and support them.

Participants also explained that granting forgiveness to their father was grounded in having some type of closure in the relationship rather than forgiving all that he did to them. Many of the participants continued to wrestle with the yearning of wanting a relationship with their father due to the fear he might recidivate, doubting they were not a priority in his life, and feeling emotional discord with him. Other studies also support children's trepidation of having a close relationship with their father because of similar reasoning (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Schlafter & Poehlmann, 2010; Yocum & Nath, 2011). Being able to forgive their father, however, appeared to provide some vindication and empowerment for participants in a situation where they initially felt helpless. Therefore, participants described the trajectory of resolution actually evolving into reconciliation with themselves rather than their father and being a more resilient and stronger woman because of what they endured. Some of the women also adamant that

even though they may have forgiven their father, it did not mean they wanted to reconcile or that reconciliation was feasible.

This distinction between the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation is presented in other research where one can exist without the other based on the needs and perceptions of the person (s) who were wronged (Freedman, 2011; Moon, 2006; Smeads, 2007; Umbreit, 2013; Umbreit & Armour, 2011). Moon (2006) explained that for reconciliation to be feasible, there needed to be a commitment by the persons involved to: 1) be responsible for their actions, 2) have a responsibility to put themselves in the other person's place, 3) the other person is always worthy of respect, and 4) there are no excuses for harming others (para. 5). Whereas Howes (2013) described forgiveness as, "an internal process where you work through the hurt, gain an understanding of what happened, rebuild a sense of safety, and let go of the grudge. The offending party is not necessarily a part of this process" (para. 6). These definitions align with the description from participants in that if they viewed their father as not accepting responsibility for his actions, making excuses for his behavior, and not empathizing with how the incarceration affected them, then reconciliation would be difficult for them. However, since forgiveness is an personal process with the goal being to heal one's self and let go of insidious hurt without needing the offender to be involved, this aligns with participants desire for peace, serenity and moving on in a healthy, productive way in their life.

### **Exceptions in Women's Stories**

Given that hermeneutical phenomenology, as well as feminism, honors the individual voice as well as the collective, I deemed it important to acknowledge significant components of women's individual stories even though it was not enough to form a specific category or theme. This included Tara and Rita emphasizing their dislike of the prison system due to it not being kid-friendly and not being conducive to promoting the father-child relationship. This was vocalized through statements about not being able to touch their father, having to go through security, and the correctional staff/guards not being friendly. Other research has also noted these challenges in the visitation process for children (Arditti, 2003; Clopton & East, 2008, Dyer, 2005; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010; Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014). These participants determined that these conditions created greater complications in their relationship with their father because of it resulted in not wanting to visit him.

Ann and Donna also immersed themselves into more of a maternal or caretaking role due to their father's absence. This included caretaking for younger siblings, being more of a co-parent rather than a child to their mother, and performing household responsibilities such as paying the bills. They discussed having to 'grow up' quicker than anticipated and sometimes feeling like they had lost parts of their childhood because of this experience. Ann processed witnessing her older sisters in this role of taking care of

her due to her mother having to work additional hours to make up for the lost income of her father. Ann discussed feeling guilty about this while other participants who took on more of the caregiving role expressed being resentful at times. This supports prior research on children caretaking in a family or assuming parental responsibilities given the shift in family dynamics because of their father being incarcerated (Mazza, 2013; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

Ann also processed witnessing the arrest of her father. She stated this was so traumatic to her that she blocked it out of her mind and did not recall the incident until her sister brought it up years later. Ann described this event as being painful due to observing the police drawing guns on her father, yelling at him and handcuffing him in front of her. She perceived this to be excessive on the part of law enforcement due to her father being arrested for a white collar crime and not having a criminal history. She witnessed the court process and how difficult it was to see her father in that position. Donna also discussed how painful it was to be in court for the sentencing of her father and observed him being led away in handcuffs. Both Donna and Ann described these events as being particularly difficult for them in attempting to heal from the experience of paternal incarceration. This is concurrent with existing literature that acknowledges the abandonment, fear and trauma that may result from children witnessing these types of incidents with the criminal justice system (Bocknek, Sanderson, & Preston; Dallaire &

Wilson, 2010; Dannerbeck, 2005; Mazza, 2002; Murray & Murray, 2010; Van De Rakt, Murray, & Nieuwbeerta, 2012).

Jennifer and Pamela also stressed how critical the human/animal bond was in regards for promoting emotional healing. They discussed having dogs and that this unconditional love from their furry companions helped create stability for them during a very turbulent time in their life in that they could tell their dogs anything and not be judged or rejected. Jennifer discussed crying in her dog's fur at night because she felt she could not grieve anywhere else in her life and to have a living, breathing being be there for her during those moments was comforting. Other studies have also explored the importance of the human-animal bond, particularly with traumatized children, and how effective this can be in helping children cope with painful events in their life (Jalongo, 2004; Melson, 2009; Reichert, 1998).

### **A Message to Fathers from their Daughters**

There was one last section I was inspired to write which was a summarization of the consensus from participants about what they needed from their father and informing fathers about how to help their daughters have more positive outcomes when incarceration is or has been present. This supports a feminist stance in creating social change through the words and experiences of women in which their needs and wants are recognized and honored (DeValut, 1990; Silverstein, 1996).

- First, participants wanted their father to be honest with them about his criminal activity and why he chose involvement in illegal behavior. Participants expressed that honesty from their father helped build trust with them and allowed them to fill in the gaps of the story of his incarceration.
- Participants acknowledged the desire for their father to take responsibility for his actions, take the initiative in discussing his decision to commit criminal activity with them, and be curious and compassionate about how this experience affected them.
- Participants discussed wanting consistent contact from their father, either in prison or when he was released, to demonstrate he was thinking of them and wanting to be a part of their life. Examples given of this were regular phone calls and letters from him, acknowledging important dates such as their birthday, and asking about their daily life.
- Participants processed the need for space and time to adjust to their father's release and for their father to not expect things will immediately return to normal post-incarceration. This allowed them to reconnect with their father in a way that was more natural and fluid rather than forced and superficial.



- Participants also verbalized their hope of witnessing their father sincerely trying to prevent recidivism and make positive changes in his life to assist in the reduction of their fear of him returning to prison.
- Finally, participants discussed wanting their father, for the most part, to be there for significant events in their life if possible and to demonstrate a desire to want to be involved in all aspects of their life.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Given this this study was only focused on the experiences of daughters and that incarceration is really a systemic issue, there appears to be a need for studies that obtain multiple perspectives from several family members. By obtaining narratives from members of the same family system, it may provide a more accurate and holistic understanding of how the family as a whole can be supported during this turbulent time. As far as this particular area of study, interviewing father-daughter dyads appears to be the next step in understanding this phenomenon more comprehensively. Also interviewing people who are caregivers for children of incarcerated parents that are not the biological parents, such as stepparents and grandparents, may assist in creating a more detailed picture of this phenomenon. Interviewing siblings may also be enlightening as brother and sisters may experience paternal incarceration differently. This emphasizes the need to interview sons of incarcerated fathers to further explore potential gender

differences of children with incarcerated parents. Also, interviewing the daughter's children, who may not have directly experienced their grandfather's incarceration, but determine how and if it affected them and how the legacy of incarceration is transferred through generations.

There also is a developmental aspect to incarceration in which there appears to be a need to have a better understanding of what happens at the different stages of incarceration for family members. This study was from a retrospective point of view that may not be entirely accurate. Therefore, incorporating longitudinal research for families in which interviews occur at multiple time points throughout the transitions of the incarceration and re-entry process may give a fuller and more precise understanding of what families are experiencing. Observational research may also be beneficial in capturing non-verbal signals and lived, family interactions with one another throughout this timespan (Chesla, 1995). This is important because context appears to be significant in how daughters described their relationship with their father such as how their relationship was prior to incarceration, if they were told about the incarceration, what type of contact they had during incarceration, their age when he was incarcerated and how supportive the mother was. Furthermore, as participants age their response may vary so a daughter who was interviewed at the age of 25 may respond differently to how the incarceration affected her compared to when she is age 50 since there is the presumption

she has more wisdom and life experience later in life. Similarly, the era participants grew up in may also have an impact, such as the support women received at that particular time. This was evident for Sarah who grew up in the 1950's where there were limited resources or support for women. This made it more difficult for her mother to leave an abusive marriage as well as it feeling like a 'good ole boys' club when her father went through the court system.

Future research needs to also focus on paradigms about women as experienced by men. This may be particularly important in interviewing men who are incarcerated to obtain knowledge on how they view women in general, the messages they grew up with regarding women, and how they perceive this has impacted their relationships with women in their lives. Given that men are stakeholders in male-female relationships, it seems important that they be invited to the table to obtain a better understanding of their beliefs around women. Participants said that their fathers sometimes appeased them with 'stuff', such as material gifts, and they believed this behavior stemmed from their father believing this is what they needed/wanted from him. Participants stated this actually created more distance between them and their father because they felt he was appeasing them with material gifts rather than investing in an emotional connection. Furthermore, some participants described their father as treating them and their mother more favorably compared to other women. This behavior was described as viewing their father

compartmentalizing women in which some women, such as the participant, were worthy of his affection and other women, such as his victim, were not. This is in alignment with the findings from the previous study that interviewed fathers in which fathers appeared to have a difficult time empathizing with the experience of their daughters' pertaining to their incarceration as well as fathers acknowledging that they often had negative views of women and treated women poorly prior to the birth of their daughter (Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014). Some participants also described their father as being abusive to their mother and Sarah also described her father being physically abusive to her. Participants discussed feeling like their father did not respect women overall and they attributed this to their father not respecting himself. They were also curious about their father's beliefs about women and how these may have affected his relationship with them.

Research that filters out or takes into consideration co-morbidity related to incarceration may be useful. For example, Ann discussed her father having mental health and substance abuse issues, which she believed contributed to his incarceration. She expressed it being impossible to untangle the incarceration from those other struggles her father was experiencing. Therefore, being aware in future research to account for and control for these variables, such as with quantitative or mixed methods, may be beneficial to create a more intricate understanding of how the complexity of co-morbid disorders influences paternal incarceration.

Furthermore, creating a more homogenous sample around certain aspects of incarceration may be helpful. This includes the length of sentence for the father (years versus life) as this may affect reconciliation or repair opportunities for fathers and daughters. The type of crime the father was convicted for, such as sexual assault or homicide compared to drugs or white collar crime, potentially has various implications for how the daughter experiences paternal incarceration. Separating out fathers who have been incarcerated multiple times compared to those who have been incarcerated once may render dissimilar findings in the father-daughter relationship. This continuous loss due to recidivism may be more disruptive to the relationship create more fear for the daughter with trusting or connecting to her father. Also, women who were very young when their father was incarcerated may experience paternal incarceration differently than those who had a relationship with their father prior to incarceration. For instance, Tara's first memories of her father were when he was in prison compared to other participants that had some conception of their father before incarceration. Tara stated this may have contributed to her apprehensiveness in forming a relationship with her father upon his release because of there being no relational foundation prior to his incarceration.

Given the interest of participants to be privy to the experiences of other participants who had incarcerated fathers growing up, incorporating focus groups to peel away another layer of understanding of the collective experiences of women may be

beneficial. This also contributed to the necessity for my own transparency by informing the participants that I was also the daughter of an incarcerated father during my childhood. Several of the participants stated they decided to be part of the study because they believed I would not judge them, understand and empathize with their experience, and represent their stories with integrity in the written manuscript because I had “been there”.

### **Implications for Clinical Practice**

The outcome of this study suggests certain clinical implications that might be helpful for daughters who have experienced paternal incarceration. It is noteworthy that half of the participants in this study obtained some type of counseling either immediately after or later in life regarding their relationship with their father. These participants expressed as counseling being helpful in obtaining normalization, validation and a space to shed their emotional baggage surrounding this event. The consensus was that “talking about it helps”. Additionally, having support groups for women and children who have experienced paternal incarceration so there can be a sharing of experiences, coping mechanisms and a lessening of the stigma and isolation that often comes from this experience may be beneficial. Incorporating the whole family into counseling could be valuable in enhancing support and understanding throughout the entire family system, including extended family and stepparents, is recommended.

Participants conveyed that they thought about their father's incarceration very differently as an adult than they did as a child. Even if a daughter received counseling early on in childhood, she may consider revisiting it again later in life, particularly when she becomes involved in intimate relationships or has her own children. Also, working through the grief process with daughters regarding the loss of their father, stigma and shame, and family changes due to incarceration may be beneficial. Working through unresolved grief, particularly when the father is deceased, is important. Addressing issues of complex trauma in therapy may be essential as well, such as if the daughter witnessed her father's arrest or she knew the victim of her father, such as in the case of Sarah whose father sexual violated a neighbor friend of hers.

Participants also noted how they were influenced by other women and how women played a significant role in how they dealt with their father's incarceration. This was evident in participant stories about their mothers, aunts, sisters and grandmothers who were instrumental in influencing how the participant coped with the incarceration. For example, Tara was raised primarily by her grandmother when her father was incarcerated. She described her grandmother being, not only a source of support for her, but also an empathetic mediator between her and her father when her father returned home from prison. Ann, Lisa and Mandy discussed the incarceration with their sisters because they knew their sisters would understand. Sarah stated she talked with her own

adult daughter about both her and her daughter's father and processing the parallels in those two relationships to gain insight and awareness. For other participants, such as Gail and Donna, they talked with their mothers consistently regarding their father's incarceration and supported each another. This desire for women to process, dialogue and support one another reflects feminist thought in women being able to find solace, validation and strength from other women during these challenging times and the need to create and encourage therapeutic spaces for this to happen more frequently.

Finally, incorporating a supportive community involvement for the daughter and family where there are wraparound services to help stabilize the family during this difficult time is critical. One of the participants discussed her mother informing her teachers of her father's arrest and that the warm, positive response from her teachers was helpful in her being able to continue being successful in school. In contrast, Sarah described being shunned by her community when her father was incarcerated, which made this experience even more difficult for her and her family. Changing the way society views and interacts with children of incarcerated parents is instrumental so these children can grow up to be successful, nurturing adults that are not embedded in shame and secrecy.



### **Limitations of this Study**

Although the current study contributes to existing literature on paternal incarceration, there are multiple limitations in this study. The recollection of participants is retrospective and therefore memories, feelings and perceptions can be skewed. Van Manen (2007) argues that people are constantly changing and therefore how participants respond at one time point may change at other time points in their lives. Furthermore, culture and socioeconomic status were not taken into consideration in this study. As previous research suggests, because of racial disparity in the criminal justice system, the cycle of imprisonment among large numbers of individuals, mostly minority men, is increasingly concentrated in poor, urban communities already encountering enormous social and economic disadvantages (Hunt, 1996; King, 1993). These factors of oppression, limited opportunities, and poverty may also contribute to the breakdown in family relationships as well.

There are only thirteen participants in this study which is a very limited sample, particularly given all the variances that may be applicable to individual narratives. This study focused on only one family member, the daughter, so other family members, such as the father or mother, may have different perspectives on the experience of paternal incarceration. Finally, the sample was not homogenous in regard to the crime the father committed, the length of time he was incarcerated, the age of the participant when he

went to prison, or those participants who described the incarceration as being a one-time occurrence versus multiple incarcerations. In conjunction, this study did not determine if the participant had a positive or negative relationship prior to incarceration with her father as those with more positive relationships may have made a greater attempt to stay connected.

### **Transformation of the Lead Investigator**

#### *Everything will be ok in the end. If it's not ok, it's not the end--Anonymous*

In honoring my own experience with paternal incarceration as a daughter and a woman, I wanted to summarize my personal reflections on this study. In a prior study in which I interviewed previously incarcerated fathers, fathers processed their grief and regret on how their incarceration affected their daughter, even though for many of them it was the first time they had thought about how difficult that experience might have been for her (Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014). Fathers also verbalized the desire to reconnect with their daughter, but were apprehensive in how to form this relationship

during reentry and were worried their daughter might reject them. Fathers discussed wanting to be a “good father” to their daughter. They described fulfilling this aspiration by believing they were keeping their criminal and family life separate, protecting their daughter from the ugliness in the world, refusing to allow her to come to the prison and transitional housing to visit him because it was not safe due to other inmates being there, and lying about being in prison so she would not be ashamed of them. However, fathers also acknowledged and vocalized that their decisions were detrimental to their daughter, including missing events in her life, causing her significant sorrow and resentment, and tarnishing his relationship with her.

The findings from the study on fathers were ironic to me in the sense that, in contemplating the findings in the current study, there appeared to be a parallel process between fathers and daughters in which there was a desire to reach out to one another and be present in each other’s life, yet there was an ongoing struggle to do so with the realization that paternal incarceration will always have an impact on their relationship. Therefore, the crux of the challenge is grounded in learning how to accept that both fathers and daughters have been forever changed by incarceration and yet can still be committed to learn how to be in a relationship with one another with this experience as part of their history.

In some ways this discourse disheartens me, but in other ways it creates hope that by allowing space for these conversations to take place between fathers and daughters and promoting further understanding of this unique relationship, the influence of paternal incarceration will be less prominent than if the dialogue never occurred at all. In conducting these two studies on this special and unique dyad, I feel I am honoring my relationship with my own father in recognizing the tremendous pain his incarceration caused me but also being grateful for the love and dedication we had to one another to stay connected.

Although I never spoke with my father about that time in our lives, I believe our story is reflected in the voices of both the fathers and daughters whom I interviewed and being able to bring awareness to this important subject provides me with a much-needed peace surrounding an issue that I have been ashamed of for most of my life. Hearing these stories continues to promote my personal healing and acceptance of my father's incarceration and the impact it had on our relationship and allows me to be joined with him in a unique way that we never had while he was alive. I believe he is working with me and through me in this process and together we are ensuring that other fathers and daughters who endure paternal incarceration are better equipped, more understood, and have greater support to enhance the likelihood of a positive outcome for their relationship.

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## **Appendix A:**

### **Consent Form**

You are invited to be in a research study examining your experiences as a daughter to a father who was incarcerated during your childhood and how these lived experiences influenced your relationship with your father. You will be asked to reflect on links between incarceration and your relationship with your father. You were selected as a possible participant because of your experience with these specific issues. I will read this form to you and please ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

I am conducting this study and I am doctoral candidate in the Family Social Science Department at the University of Minnesota.

#### Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine and understand the experiences of women who had incarcerated fathers during their childhood and how this has influenced the father-daughter relationship as well as other possible dimensions of her life.

#### Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask that you do the following things: We will meet at location that is convenient for you and I will be using an audiotape to record your statements. You and I will be the only people in the room during the interview. Each interview will last approximately 90 minutes. You will be asked to fill out an information intake form prior to the start of the interview. This intake form will ask questions about your background, you and your family members' involvement in the criminal justice system, and your history with relationship abuse and substance abuse. You are free to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. Examples of questions that will be asked during the study include “What are your attitudes/perceptions of your father”, “describe the qualities of your relationships with your father while he was incarcerated” and “describe examples of how the incarceration has affected other areas of your life.”

#### Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

This study has several possible risks: First, you might find answering some of the questions unsettling or upsetting because some of the questions ask about incarceration and about the impact this had on you and your relationship with your father. Secondly, you may find yourself becoming emotional at times due to the nature of the questions being asked regarding particular experiences you have endured. If this should happen, you may choose to skip those questions or discontinue the interview at any time. Also, I will provide you with a list of community resources for counseling and support to help you manage this potential pain.

Potential benefits to participation are:

There are no direct benefits to subjects participating in this study.

Compensation:

Participants will receive a \$25.00 Target gift card at the end of their interviews for their participation in this study, even if they should choose to withdraw at any point during the study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Your real name will not be used in any written projects or publications on this study. You and any other persons, places or identifying information will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all written reports so that you cannot be identified. A pseudonym is a fake name or identity given to a person to hide their true identity. An example of this would be if your real name is Mary and you were from Monticello. I will change these identifiers to Joan and that you were from a small mid-western town. This makes it significantly more difficult to identify you since the reader does not know your real name or where you live. I am the only person who will know your real name and identifying information about you. The information collected from your audiotaped interview will not be used for any other purpose than to conduct this study. If you give permission for follow up questions/clarifications, this information will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office in the Family Social Science Department at the University of Minnesota and will be destroyed at the end of the study. At the end of this study, the tapes will either be erased or destroyed. Research



records and tapes will be stored securely in the Family Social Science Department at the University of Minnesota and I will be the only person to have access to the records.

Limitations to Confidentiality for this Study:

Although I will make every effort to keep information about you confidential from third parties, under Minnesota law, I am mandated reporter, which means I am legally required to report certain information when she encounters any of the following situations:

- Instances of neglect or physical or sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult
- Behavior indicating or one verbalizing a threat to one's life, such as seriously contemplating suicide
- If there are specific threats of serious harm to another specific person or the public

If any of these instances should occur, I will need to report this to the proper authorities to ensure the safety of you and others. The obligation to report includes alleged or probable abuse as well as known abuse within the last three years.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. In addition, the University will not be made aware of your participation in this study. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without any type of consequence. You will receive a final version of any written documents that are produced from this study so that you have the opportunity to make suggested changes or comments to the researcher if necessary prior to publication.

Contacts and Questions:

The researchers conducting this study are: Holli Trombley (612-625-1900, htromble@umn.edu) is being advised by Professor Elizabeth Wieling (612-625-8106, lwieling@umn.edu) of the Family Social Science Department. If you have any questions now or in the future, you are encouraged to contact them. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the

researchers, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, MN 55455, (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in this study including being audiotaped.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B:**

### **Interview Protocol**

This study is exploring what it means to be the adult daughter of a father who was incarcerated during her childhood. I am curious how incarceration has influenced your relationship with your father as well as how this phenomenon may have affected other dimensions of your life such as with interpersonal relationships. So let's start with the first question, which is:

What was your relationship like with your father prior to incarceration? Describe the nature of your relationship with your father.

Probes:

How did you feel about him?

Select an experience or memory you have with him prior to incarceration

What was your experience of learning that your father was arrested?

Probes:

How do you remember this happening?

What did it mean to be a daughter of a man who was arrested?

What is your experience of your relationship with your father while he was/is in prison?

Probes:

What was the nature of your relationship with your father?

How was this relationship the same or different from when he was not in prison?

What were your perceptions/beliefs about your relationship with your father during this time? Did those change over time? In what ways?

Select an experience you had with your father during incarceration? Are there other experiences you have had with him during this time?

Describe the qualities of your relationship during this time

What did/does it mean to you to be the daughter of a father who was incarcerated? What were your thoughts/beliefs about yourself during this time?

What was your experience of how others were to you as the daughter of an incarcerated father?

If your father was released from prison, what has been your experience of re-entry with the relationship with your father?

Probes:

Discuss your perceptions of this process in regards to your relationship with your father

Describe examples of the interactions with your father since release from prison

Describe the quality of your relationship with your father now

How has the experience of having an incarcerated father changed you? What are your perceptions/beliefs/feelings of how this has impacted your father?

Probes:

What does this mean for you as a daughter? Woman?

In your perception, what may this experience mean for your relationship with your father in the future? What are your hopes for this relationship?

**Appendix C:**  
**Member Checking Correspondence**

Hello PARTICIPANT NAME,

This is a follow up email regarding my interview with you on DATE for the research study exploring the experiences of adult daughters who had fathers that were incarcerated during their childhood. As you may remember from the consent form and interview process, you agreed to a brief follow up conversation after all the data had been collected. I have just a few questions that I would like you to think about and I would like to set up a time that is convenient for you via phone to discuss your thoughts on these questions. It is important to me that I am accurately representing you in this study and therefore your feedback is extremely helpful to ensure you feel the summary of your case is precise and to see if there is anything else you want to add from our last interview. My hope is to complete these follow-up interviews prior to May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014 so if you could let me know some days and times that work for you between now and then for me to contact you, I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

**PARTICIPANT SUMMARY INSERTED HERE**

Questions

1. Is the above summary an accurate depiction of your life experience with having an incarcerated father?
2. Is there anything that you would add, change or delete from the summary?
3. Are there any concerns regarding the information in the summary leading to someone identifying who you are?
4. Has anything come up for you since the interview that you would like to share?

Thank you!

**Appendix D:**

**Model of Categories, Themes and Sub-Themes Regarding Paternal Incarceration**

