

Jailed Black Fathers, Paternal Identity, and the Father-child Relationship

by

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Abstract

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of helping fathers maintain a father-child relationship during incarceration. Research has found that the effects of incarceration may diminish the father-child relationship. Using a sample of Black fathers (n=101), this study examined the association between the independent variables: father-child contact pre-jail, father-child contact during jail and the dependent variables: father's rating of paternal identity. The results indicated no significant effect of pre-jail and during jail father contact on either pre-jail or during jail paternal identity.

Keywords: incarceration, jails, father-child relationship, Black fathers, paternal identity

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Introduction

The largest population of incarcerated people in the world, residing in a single country, are in the United States (Alexander, 2012). Rates of incarceration are higher for Black men compared to their peers from other ethnic groups (Harrison & Beck, 2006; Katzen, 2011). Mass incarceration can have unintended consequences for children of Black fathers serving time in correctional facilities. The adverse effects of a father's incarceration on his children include poor academic performance and involvement in the criminal justice system (Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Aaron & Dellaire, 2010). In addition, Black children are more likely to reside in a household without their father present compared to their White and Latino peers (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Research indicates that the effects of incarceration may diminish the father-child relationship such as decreased attachment and changes in father involvement (Tripp, 2009).

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of helping fathers maintain a father-child relationship during incarceration (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Dyer, Pleck, & McBride, 2012; McDonald, Herman-Stahl, Lindquist, Bir, & McKay, 2009). Maruschak, Glaze, & Mumola (2010) reported that the majority of parents who are incarcerated are fathers. However, research on the parenting experiences of incarcerated fathers is scant (Dyer, Pleck, & McBride, 2012; Poehlman-Tynan, Brunson, Runion, & Weymouth, 2017).

Over the past few decades, research on fathers parenting experiences in prison has emerged as a new interest of study based on the increased effects of mass incarceration (Foster & Hagan, 2009). This is especially true for fathers who are serving their time in local jails. Most of the literature does not separate prison from jails when addressing fathers who are incarcerated. There are studies which address the father-child relationship in various types of correctional facilities such as halfway houses, prisons, and jails. Learning how the effects of mass

incarceration has shaped the father-child relationship over the years, lead to research studies that explored changes within the father-child relationship (Laquale, et.al., 2018; Swanson, Chang-Bae, Sansone, & Tatum, 2013; Turney & Wildeman, 2013; & Zealand, 1998). For example, early fatherhood scholars such as Hairston (1998) and Lanier (1993) suggested that negative outcomes to the father-child relationship that are attributed to a father's incarceration should be explored. There is a high likelihood of negative outcomes on the paternal identity and father-child relationship when fathers are jailed and have limited father-child visits that may include no contact.

The current literature on incarceration refers to confinement as being housed in a correctional facility such as a prison or jail. The term incarceration is often used in reference to prisons. Sturges and Al-Khattar (2009) suggested that the first contact children may have with the criminal justice system is through jail visits with a parent. In addition, some fathers may not be sent to a prison. For the purposes of this paper, a local jail was selected because these facilities tend to be in close proximity where fathers resided prior to being jailed. Prisons on the other hand are located more than 50-100 miles from where fathers resided (Mumola, 2000). In addition, the visitation policies of a jail differs from those of a prison. Compared to face-to-face visits of prisons, jails usually have no contact visitation procedures.

During jail visits, children usually communicate with their father via the use of a video monitor and an intercom device or stand behind Plexiglas and talk through a telephone receiver (Shlafer, Looper, & Schillmoeller, 2015; Tartaro & Levy, 2017). Visitation procedures during incarceration can impact the type of social interaction that occurs between fathers and their children. Visiting one's father through Plexiglas does not promote physical interaction or bonding. (Hairston, 1998; Johnston, 1995). This type of visitation environment can be hard on

children. The visitation rooms may have multiple visitors and be noisy (Jonston, 1995; Sturges, 2002). Poehlmann-Tynan and colleagues (2017) found that jail visits were not as conducive in promoting a family environment. For example, some children displayed avoidant-angry behaviors with their father (avoiding, whining, sad, angry), while some engaged in aggression and fear (hitting, pushing, and fearful) during their visit. These examples demonstrate that visitation policies and environments of jails present challenges to maintaining a father-child relationship.

Being incarcerated in a jail changes the dynamics of the father-child relationship. Fathers are limited to three methods of communication with their children. These include letter writing, phone calls, and visitation (e.g., video or Plexi glass). Thus, the level of father involvement while serving jail time may diminish particularly for fathers who resided with their children prior to incarceration. Prior to being in jail, father involvement with one's child may include physical contact such as hugs and spending time doing activities (e.g., sports, homework, chores). Incarcerated fathers are not able to take their children to school, help with homework daily, or provide financially to their children's well-being. Diminished father involvement may have a negative effect on the paternal identity of incarcerated fathers.

Fathers construct their paternal identity based on their ability to support their children's economic and social well-being. Paternal identity is also associated with being a role model to their children. For fathers to have a strong paternal identity, they must be able to maintain opportunities to parent their children while in jail. When fathers are incarcerated, they may have difficulty maintaining a connection to their children which can be defined as an interruption. Interruption theory postulates that one's present and past experiences have to be congruent for a self-identity to develop (Burke, 1991). Identity processes are hindered when reflected appraisals

are no longer confirming one's identity causing distress. Prior to being incarcerated, fathers' paternal identity is reinforced by children's affirmations such as *I love you, I enjoy spending time with you* and *You are the best dad*. During incarceration, fathers might have decreased affirmations from their children and may have decreased contact with their children. The interruption of incarceration for fathers might also cause a decrease in parenting opportunities affecting the quality of the relationship and how fathers view their fathering.

Tripp (2009) found that the lack of positive fathering opportunities are associated with a negative perception of paternal identity. Research findings such as this indicate that interruptions to the paternal identity can have negative outcomes for incarcerated fathers. Some incarcerated fathers may perceive their role as insignificant in their children's lives. The research of Tripp and other fatherhood scholars indicates that incarceration not only diminishes father involvement, but also weakens opportunities for father-child contact and negatively impacts paternal identity (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Tripp, 2001; Dyer, 2005; Kelly-Trombley, 2014; & Tripp, 2009). Most studies collected fathering information within prison populations. Whether these findings are similar to jailed fathers needs to be investigated.

In this study, the theoretical framework used was identity theory. The theory was used to conceptualize the paternal identity of Black fathers who are jailed in a Midwestern correctional facility. I examined the effects of pre-jail father involvement and father-child contact while in jail on the paternal identity of Black fathers. The premise of this paper was to highlight the effects of mass incarceration on Black fathers in a local jail. The paper provided a brief history of mass incarceration in the United States and its effects on Black fathers and their children.

Literature Review

Mass Incarceration

The United States has the world's highest rate of incarceration. Twenty-five percent of the world's prison population is housed in the United States (Alexander, 2012). Over the last three decades, scholars from across disciplines have found that Black men are incarcerated at a disproportionate rate compared to their peers and also have negative familial and economic outcomes that are associated with mass incarceration policies and practices (Alexander, 2012; Johnston, 1995; Mauer, 2006; Perry & Bright, 2012; Tonry, 1994; Tonry, 1995). According to the US Department of Justice's (2018) *Prisoners in 2016 Report*, 1.4 million men were incarcerated and of this estimate approximately 486,900 were Black. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2008) also highlighted that Blacks made up only 13% of the population, but comprised 40% of the prison population. Furthermore, those who are incarcerated tend to also be disproportionately young minorities who are poorly educated (Petersilia, 2003; Western, 2006). Mass incarceration may have negative effects on the life course of Black men such as the normalizing of imprisonment, loss of economic gains, and diminished familial bonds and opportunities to parent (Clayton & Moore, 2003; Perry & Bright, 2012; Pettit & Western, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Tripp, 2001).

The Impact of Mass Incarceration on Black Men

In the U.S., mass incarceration was catalyzed by the War on Drugs from the Reagan Era which began during the mid-seventies to late nineties (Hudak, 2016; Mauer, 2006). Beginning in the 1970s, an increase of incarceration began to escalate in urban neighborhoods (Mauer, 2006). A political climate change ensued from criminal justice policies being enforced by the U.S. government that placed harsh sentences on minority groups such as Black men who committed nonviolent offenses (Katzen, 2011). The country administered punitive drug policies and harsh sentencing laws inadvertently affecting minority families of low socioeconomic status in inner

cities (Mauer, 2006). Hence, the War on Drugs primarily targeted minority communities and disproportionately imprisoned minority men, especially Black men (Tonry, 1994). This phenomenon translated into the mass incarceration of Black men, communities with limited male presences, and created a cycle of intergenerational incarceration (Bijleveld & Wijkman, 2009). The negative outcomes of mass incarceration for Black men have diminished their ability to progress in normal life trajectories such as graduating from high school, achieving higher education, starting families, and establishing careers (Mauer, 2006; Tonry, 1994). Pettit and Western (2004) described how the lack of job and educational opportunities in urban areas contributed to Black men being incarcerated. This study focused on how Black men who do not graduate high school or progress into higher education increase their chances of being incarcerated by 60 percent (Petit & Western, 2004).

Wildeman and Western (2010) reported that 1 in 5 Black men born between 1975 and 1979 were at risk of facing incarceration. Black men who were incarcerated faced obstacles such as a lack in educational attainment, addiction, homelessness, joblessness, mental illness, and limited to no father-child contact (Mauer, 2006; Tonry, 1994; Pettit & Western, 2004). Wildeman and Western (2010) also found that incarceration disparities from the 1970s to 2010 can have negative intergenerational effects for Black men and their children. Two studies indicated that negative outcomes for children of incarcerated men include engaging in delinquent behavior, not attending school regularly, being negatively influenced by peer groups, and early pregnancy (Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Aaron & Dellaire, 2010). Living in low socioeconomic communities further exacerbate these negative outcomes.

Families who reside in low socioeconomic communities may experience an increase in disruption and economic hardship (Mauer, 2006; Wildeman & Western, 2010). These families

may face poverty, education disadvantages, and high rates of crime. Fatherless households are also included among this type of family structure where fathers may be absent due to incarceration. One example of the effects of poverty and Black fatherless households was highlighted by Pawasarat and Quinn (2013) in their report on the mass incarceration of Black men. The mass incarceration of Black men has been expanded by the following: government policies that increased three-strike rules, mandatory minimum sentencing and limited judicial discretion, increased federal and state funding for drug enforcement and prison construction; concentrated policing in minority communities, and state incarceration for minor probation and supervision violations (Free, 1997; Mauer, 2006; Pawasarat & Quinn, 2013). These policies have not only affected Black men at a disproportionate rate, but have had unintended consequences on father-child relationships and child well-being.

Paternal Incarceration and the Parent-Child Relationship

Murphy and Cooper (2015) found that 1 in 9 Black children experienced parental incarceration, a much higher rate than white children (1 in 17). Moreover, the effects of incarceration on fathers can be illustrated when limited contact occurs between fathers and their children. Fifty-nine percent of fathers reported no personal visits from their children (Mauer, 2011). This can be attributed to 40.7% of parents being housed more than 100 miles away from their children while serving time in a state facility. For fathers who are housed in a federal facility, the distance between father and child can be more than 500 miles (Mumola, 2000). The long distance between fathers and their children may diminish the strength of the father-child relationship and decrease parenting opportunities for fathers.

Gellar and colleagues (2011) reported that incarcerated fathers usually have fewer opportunities to engage in fatherhood practices. Formerly incarcerated Black fathers have to

reestablish bonds with their children and their caretakers. When Black fathers experience strong familial bonds before and after incarceration, they have confidence in their abilities to be fathers to their children (Tripp, 2001; Arditti & Parkman, 2011; Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). These bonds allow fathers to have a support system that enhances their ability to be good fathers and utilize guidance from family members that aid in reconnecting to their children. Conversely, some research demonstrates that fathers who experience incarceration face a lack of engagement with their children that is associated with a problematic relationship with the child's mother. Turney and Wildeman (2013) postulate that a strong mother-father partnership needs to be in place to ensure that the reconnection process between fathers and their children is successful. A strained relationship can also arise when a father and his children experience feelings of shame and resentment. These feelings can lead to withdrawal for both father and child (Perry & Bright, 2012; Gellar, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011). These factors illustrate how strained relationships between Black fathers, their children, and the mother or caretaker can present the challenges of maintaining contact with their children while incarcerated.

To minimize strained relationships, fathers need to have some type of support system to help them establish and maintain a healthy father-child relationship. For example, when fathers receive social support from other incarcerated men, they are less likely to relinquish their fathering role. Roy and Dyson (2010) found that a positive reconnection process occurs when incarcerated fathers experience respect from others and parental support from other men who have experienced incarceration and similar hardships that impede father involvement. This type of social support increases fathers' self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards the reconnection process that includes feelings of increased confidence, determination, and optimism

(Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Kelly-Trombley, Bartels, & Wieling, 2014).

Roy and Dyson (2010) also described that establishing the parent-child relationship helped redefine fathers' roles. Incarcerated fathers can struggle with their paternal identity. A paternal identity is defined by how a man depicts himself in the role of a father. For Black fathers who were incarcerated, barriers to developing a positive paternal identity may include a lack of father figures as role models, insecurity in their ability to be a good father, and limited fatherhood experiences. Positive social support for Black fathers who are incarcerated and returning home from prison or jail is also imperative to developing a positive paternal identity. Social support from relatives and friends increases the paternal identity. Fathers also feel more competent in their ability to be good fathers (Roy & Dyson, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study to conceptualize the paternal identity of Black fathers who have been incarcerated is identity theory. The theory postulates that the environment reinforces perceptions on the aspects of one's identity (e.g., beliefs, parental role, and career). For this study, fatherhood is focused on the father-child connection as an aspect of paternal identity during incarceration within a local jail facility.

Research indicates that fatherhood has evolved into a dichotomous identity of either the *Good Dad or Bad Dad Complex* (Furstenberg, 1988; Cabrera et al, 2000; & Morman & Floyd, 2006). Fathers who experience incarceration may endure a change in their paternal identity, which can be described as an interruption in the identity process leading to a negative or ambiguous paternal identity. Research has demonstrated how incarcerated fathers endure negative interruptions in their paternal identity which might depict their fathering role as

insignificant in their children's lives; moreover, illustrating how these fathers may harbor feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, and ambivalence towards their role (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Tripp, 2001; Dyer, 2005; Kelly-Trombley, 2014; & Tripp, 2009).

For fathers who have experienced incarceration to develop a strong paternal identity, positive fatherhood behaviors need to be applicable, reinforced, and repeated for connection with their children to be impactful. Cabrera and colleagues (2000) found that fathers have a stronger paternal identity when they demonstrate the following traits: sensitivity, supportiveness, accessibility, responsibility, and gender role attitudes. They emphasized that fatherhood involves a "sense of commitment, caring, and attention to a child's developmental process" (Cabrera et al., 2000). Morman and Floyd (2006) also reported that a strong definition of fatherhood is crucial for the development of a paternal identity based on three positive fatherhood traits: love, availability, and being a good role model.

Interruption of the identity process can cause distress for most incarcerated fathers. Burke (1991) defined stress as the "relationship between external conditions and the current state of the person" (p. 836). Furthermore, identity interruption also provokes distress, the internal response to stress (Burke, 1991). Both stress and distress are key components of interruption theory. This theory holds that distress followed by stress indicates that the identity system needs attention (Burke, 1991). For incarcerated fathers, interruption to the paternal identity may lead to withdrawal from children or increased attention toward children. This response depends on whether or not the father can self-adjust to the disruption and his interpretation of the symbolism associated with reflective appraisal (i.e., "You're the best dad!"). For instance, a father may hold a strong paternal identity prior to incarceration. However, incarceration will limit a father's opportunities to parent (i.e., helping with homework, taking child to doctor, etc.). Over time, the

child may express frustration by the lack of physical opportunities with his or her father causing stress resulting in a decrease of positive reflective appraisals. With the lack of reflective appraisals, fathers may decide to withdraw from their children or put forth efforts to stay connected to their children while in jail.

The effects of incarceration can develop repeated negative interruptions, which can deter fathers from developing and solidifying a strong paternal identity affecting how fathers connect to their children. Negative interruptions while incarcerated include: a lack of physical presence and limited guidance of how to connect with children.

A lack of physical presence in the home due to incarceration may disrupt the paternal identity and impede fathers from maintaining or re-establishing relationships with their children while incarcerated and post-incarceration. Two studies described how the lack of presence in the home made some fathers feel “impotent” or “powerless” when they could not be disciplinarians or provide guidance and protection for their children (Tripp, 2005; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005). Furstenberg (1988) identified how familial desertion happens most often among the economically disadvantaged, which will, many times include, incarcerated fathers. Researchers have documented that familial desertion among these fathers occurs in the form of paternal role abandonment (Kelly-Trombley, 2015; Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005). Comparatively, Arditti and colleagues (2005) identified examples of paternal role abandonment which included fathers refusing to contact their children while incarcerated out of guilt and shame. These feelings might cause a father to question his fathering abilities and role which influences the interruption phases. Burke (1991) identified the following interruption phases: a broken loop; interference of other identities; an over-controlled identity system; or episodic identities. In order for fathers to reach a solidified paternal identity, they may need to go through a process of disidentification to

adjust to the effects of incarceration. Becker and Tausch (2014) defined disidentification as a process that allows one to dissociate from aspects of his or her identity that are no longer useful.

Becker and Tausch (2014) emphasize that the process of disidentification occurs in three steps. *Step one* is detachment from the previous paternal identity schema that was developed while incarcerated. During incarceration, fathers have been involved in the lives of their children through letter writing, phone calls, and limited father-child visits. Infrequent opportunities to parent can create negative self-appraisal within the paternal identity. Incarcerated fathers have to redefine and rebuild their paternal identity and learn to parent their children. *Step two* is dissatisfaction with parenting practices within a correctional facility. Arditto and colleagues (2005) found that fathers felt like prison constrains their abilities to be fathers. Therefore, fathers are faced with developing new parenting practices and positive self-appraisals. *Step three* includes becoming dissimilar to previous aspects of their paternal identity while incarcerated. Fathers have to redefine and create a cohesive paternal identity with positive self-appraisals. Self-appraisals function as a reflective appraisal meter that allows fathers to assess their paternal identity.

Fox and Bruce (2001) suggested that structural sources of disadvantage are associated with Black fathers' self-appraisal of their paternal role and parenting behaviors. Thus, some fathers may retreat from their children when their self-appraisals yields a negative assessment of their paternal identity and incarceration has limited their parental involvement (Dyer, 2005). On the other hand, fathers who want to enhance their father involvement and reconnect with their children may build resiliency through developing a positive parenting identity and attitude towards parenting. Fathers who have a positive parenting identity and strive to reconnect to their children utilize resilient sources such as social and spiritual support (Fagan, Palkovitz, Roy,

& Farrie, 2009; Tripp, 2009; & Zuckerman & Wright, 2010). Positive self-appraisals help to develop resiliency and maintain a positive fatherhood identity. Notter and colleagues (2008) found the following protective factors to be helpful: establishing mentors and surrogate parents; creating and maintaining healthy relationships; establishing a source of faith; and distancing from non-supportive relationships.

Protective factors can be maintained when fathers disidentify with old patterns of parenting and navigating the challenges of residing within a correctional facility. In the context of correctional facilities, most fathers in jails will reside with other fathers who share the same fears and insecurities related to their abilities to be an effective parent while lacking the means to maintain positive connections with their children. Phone calls, visits, and letter writing can be effective, but is also limited in how fathers can maintain the quality of being a present father for their children. For these protective factors to be maintained, incarcerated fathers need to cease contact with antisocial peers and develop prosocial behaviors and support (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008; Ullrich & Coid, 2011; de Vogel, de Ruiter, Bouman, & de Vries Robbé, 2007). Moreover, fathers need to establish a strong social support system to enhance their paternal identity and develop positive and realistic life goals.

Current Study

More studies are needed to examine the parenting experiences of Black fathers trying to maintain a connection to their children while incarcerated in local jails. A sample of Black fathers was selected because mass incarceration has negatively affected the family life of Black men (Clayton & Moore, 2003; Perry & Bright, 2012; Pettit & Western, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Tripp, 2001). Furthermore, these fathers may have interruptions to their paternal identity while incarcerated in a jail. For jailed fathers, these interruptions will either lead to withdrawal from

their children or increased contact with their children (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Perry & Bright, 2012; Gellar, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011). This paper will examine the association between the independent variables: *father-child contact pre-jail*, *father-child contact during jail* and the dependent variables: *father's rating of paternal identity*. I hypothesize that father-child contact pre-jail and father-child contact during jail are associated with father's rating of paternal identity (see Figure 1). The association among the independent and dependent variables are influenced by past behaviors of parenting such as taking a child to school and doing activities together and the type of father-child contact that occurs during jail (e.g., visits, phone calls, and letter writing). The reader should bear in mind that the sample was taken from a larger study and the analysis was conducted using secondary data. Due to these constraints, the paper cannot account for the association between the study variables and important variables such as mother or caretaker support of child visits and jail environment characteristics.

Methodology

Aims

The aims of this study were to (a) determine the effects of father-child contact before jail and father-child contact during jail on fathers' paternal identity and (b) to explore the relationship between incarceration and the father-child relationship on paternal identity.

Sample

The data was obtained from 101 Black fathers who were housed in a mid-western county jail. To participate in the study, fathers had to meet the following criteria: a.) be a Black father, b) speak the English language well, and c) be a non-violent offender. The participants received a \$5 stipend which was added to their jail account. The age range was from 18 through 61

years old. Fathers reported their pre-jail employment status as employed (68%), unemployed (26%), student (2%), and retired (1%).

Measurements

Father-child contact pre-jail was measured using a survey instrument that assessed how often fathers engaged with child before jail (Dyer, Day, & Wiley, 2018). Sample indicators include: Thinking about the focal child; how often did you...read stories to child; talk to child about your family; or clean the house together. The variable was measured based on the following scale: 1 = rarely or never, 2 = once a month, 3 = once a week, 4 = 2–3 times per week, 5 = daily. This variable was categorized by age group for the focal child. The age groups were divided as: child is less than 2 years old; child is 2-4 years old, child is 5-10 years old, and child is 11-17 years old. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .51.

Father-child contact during jail was measured using a survey instrument that assessed how often fathers engaged with the focal child during jail (Dyer, Day, & Wiley, 2018). Sample indicators include: thinking about the focal child; since you have been in jail, how often do you...talk to focal child on the phone; get a letter from focal child; or write to focal child. The variable was measured based on the following scale: 1 = rarely or never, 2 = once a month, 3 = once a week, 4 = 2–3 times per week, 5 = daily. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .81.

Father rating of paternal identity was measured using a survey instrument that assessed each father's perceptions of their ability to be a father using five indicators. The indicators included: Before you came to jail would you say that you were...Since being in jail would you say that you are... Compared to other others here in jail, would you say that...How do you think (focal child) would rate you as a father.... How do you think (caregiver) would rate you as a father (Dyer, Day, & Wiley, 2018)? Each indicator was measured using a Likert scale ranging

from 1 to 10. Response options included: not very good at being a father (1 to 4), an average father (5 to 9), and a very good father (10). Sample items includes: Before you came to jail would you say that you were. The variable was developed to measure paternal identity because it contains several components of identity theory: surrounding perception for feedback; self-perception; and past perception. For the purposes of this study, we focused only on the scale items referencing before and during jail. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .73.

Analysis

Simple linear regression models were analyzed to test the association between the independent variables: *father-child contact pre-jail*, *father-child contact during jail* and the dependent variables: *father's self-rating of paternal identity pre-jail* and *father's self-rating of paternal identity during jail*. Statistical Package for Social Sciences 23 (SPSS) was used to conduct the analysis (George & Mallery, 2016).

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted to calculate the ranges, means, and standard deviation, and skewness statistics of all study variables. Table 1 summarizes the demographic variables which included: *age*, *education*, *income*, *jail length*, *number of children*, and *visitation*. Table 2 summarizes the regression analyses results examining the relationship between the independent variables pre-jail contact and during jail contact and the dependent variables paternal identity before and during jail.

Results

The first model regressing pre-jail paternal identity on pre-jail and during jail father contact produced $R^2 = .032$, $F(2, 100) = 1.62$, $p < .203$. Fathers' pre-jail contact was expected to be positively related to pre-jail paternal identity, however the regression coefficient was not

significant ($b = -.07$, $t(100) = -1.67$, $p = .097$). Hypothesis 1 was not supported. The second model regressing during jail paternal identity on pre-jail and during jail father contact produced $R^2 = .005$, $F(2, 100) = 2.43$, $p < .785$. Fathers' during jail contact was expected to be positively related to during jail paternal identity, however the regression coefficient was not significant ($b = -.01$, $t(100) = .61$, $p = .85$, 95%). Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Contact before and during jail was not related to parental identity. Pre-jail paternal identity was regressed on pre-jail contact; however, the regression coefficient was not significant, $b = -.07$, $t(100) = -1.67$, $p = .097$. Paternal identity during jail was regressed on pre-jail contact; however, the coefficient was not significant, $b = .12$, $t(100) = 1.64$, $p = .104$. Paternal identity pre-jail was regressed on father contact during jail; however, the coefficient was not significant, $b = -.01$, $t(100) = -0.187$, $p = .852$. Paternal identity during jail was regressed on father contact during jail; however, the coefficient was not significant, $b = .06$, $t(100) = 0.610$, $p = .543$.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine whether father contact before and during jail predicted father paternal identity. Earlier research studies suggest that fathers who maintain contact during incarceration may experience a more positive identity in their fathering (Arditti, Smock, and Parkman, 2005; Tripp, 2009). The results from this study revealed no significant effect of father-child contact before and during jail on either pre-jail or in jail paternal identity.

The first hypothesized relationship is *father-child contact pre-jail* and *father-child contact during-jail* predict *paternal identity pre-jail*. The second hypothesized relationship is *father-child contact pre-jail* and *father-child contact during-jail* predict paternal identity during

jail. Neither of these hypotheses were supported based on the findings assessed from the analyses. The lack of support could be attributed to the length of time incarcerated, the extent of their past fathering experiences, visitation rules and practices of the jail facility.

Black fathers in this study were housed in the local jail from 50-60 days. This relatively short jail term may contribute to the results. Black fathers who are incarcerated for longer periods of time might show a stronger association between contact and paternal identity. The visitation practices and policies of the jails may have affected the results. A total of 63.3% of fathers reported they rarely or never saw their child while in jail. Research studies on prisons have found that fathers will often request that their families not to visit them while incarcerated (Hairston, 2007; Mumola, 2000; Beckmeyer & Arditti, 2014). Comparatively, the fathers in this study may have requested for their families not to visit them even being located in a local jail. Arditti and colleagues (2005) expressed how fathers experience feelings of ambivalence and shame when their children view them in a setting which does not represent or enhance positive fathering ideals (i.e., being responsible, following rules). This finding can also attribute to how policies have changed for some correctional institutions in how often fathers can have visits (Swanson, 2013). Comparatively, 43.6% of fathers reported they rarely or never talk to their child on the phone and 51.5% of fathers reported they rarely or never write letters to their child while in jail. This finding indicates fathers rarely have contact with their children. Moreover, this finding addresses the gap in the literature by quantifying father-child contact among jailed fathers.

Regarding paternal identity, research suggests that paternal identity is affected by the relationship the father maintains with his children (Boudin, 2011; Datchi, 2017; Dyer, 2005; Swanson, 2013). Interestingly, fathers have a moderate level of paternal identity during

incarceration in jail, despite the lack of communication with their children. A total of 42.5% of fathers rated themselves as average or very good fathers since being in jail. This finding is consistent with Tripp's (2009) findings and illustrates how a majority of fathers who are incarcerated still maintain a positive paternal identity despite the lack of communication with their child.

Father-child contact pre-jail was measured based on physical contact, saying expressions of endearment, and engaging in fun activities. A total of 47.5% of fathers reported they hug or show physical affection to their child daily pre-jail. A total of 29.7% of fathers reported they spent time with their child daily pre-jail. A total of 46.5% of fathers reported they told their child they loved them daily pre-jail. Though these qualities do not capture the full scope of fathering and the parent-child relationship, they do provide insights to how fathers engaged in contact with their children prior to incarceration. Most of the fathers engaged with their children daily based on the fathers reporting of their pre-jail contact. These findings may be attributed to their paternal identity being solidified while incarcerated; therefore, aiding fathers in maintaining positive reflective appraisals. As discussed, identity theory postulates that a positive paternal identity is maintained when fathers have more positive reflective appraisals than negative appraisals. The results suggest that despite interruption to the paternal identity during, fathers in this study still viewed themselves as good fathers and maintained a positive paternal identity.

A direction for future studies would be to examine how contact via letters, phone, and visitation affects black fathers in jails with longer sentences for 6 months to 12 months. This study was conducted with fathers who were housed in a jail between 50-60 days. It may be that the short amount of time fathers were incarcerated affected the lack of significance for the results. Future research should also assess what factors may attribute to solidifying paternal

identity during incarceration such as contact, length of time incarcerated, sentencing, and type of crime committed. Moreover, researchers should also invest in how the culture of the correctional institution has a role in a father's paternal identity, such as if there are programs enhancing fathers parenting skills. Future studies should attempt to include data collection about other important variables suggested by literature such mother's perspectives of father' co-parenting behaviors prior to jail and during jail.

Limitations

Although there were 101 African American/Black participants, about a fourth of the data was missing for each variable used. The missing data may have been attributed to the fathers feeling ambivalent about providing information concerning how they view themselves as good or bad fathers. This issue contributes to the likelihood of a Type II error where the insignificant results of the study may actually be significant (Nayak, 2010).

Another limitation of the study would be that the researchers in the pilot study also created their own measurement instruments. The Cronbach alphas for study variables included *father-child contact pre-jail* ($\alpha = 0.507$), *father-child contact during jail* ($\alpha = 0.807$), and *paternal identity* ($\alpha = 0.726$). Morera and Stokes (2016) asserted that Cronbach alpha's which surpass 0.70 suggests that the instrument displays an acceptable internal consistency. Father-child contact pre-jail had unacceptable internal consistency levels. Most items from father-child contact pre-jail included over 10 items. However, Vaske, Beaman, and Sponarski (2017) asserted that some items should be deleted to form a more consistent internal validity. Future studies should follow these recommendations.

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Appendix

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | N=101 |
| Age | | M= 29.81 years 18-61 years |
| Education | Did not finish high school | 31 |
| | High school completion | 30 |
| | GED | 17 |
| | Some college | 21 |
| | Associate's degree | 2 |
| Employment | Working, employed by someone else | 62 |
| | Self-employed | 7 |
| | Temporarily laid-off | 1 |
| | Unemployed | 8 |
| | Unemployed, looking for work | 18 |
| | Retired | 1 |
| | Student, not working | 2 |
| Number of Children | | M= 2.43 |
| Visitation | <i>(Where you can touch child)</i> | |
| | Rarely/Never | 64 |
| | Once a month | 1 |
| | <i>(Where you cannot touch child)</i> | |
| | Rarely/Never | 64 |
| | Once a month | 7 |
| | Once a week | 4 |
| 2-3 times per week | 5 | |
| Jail Length | | M= 51.06 days |

Table 2

Fit and Test Statics

| Father Contact Pre-Jail | | | | |
|--|-----------|--------|-------|-----------------|
| | $\beta 1$ | t | p | 95% CI |
| Model 1- Paternal Identity Pre-Jail | -0.073 | -1.67 | 0.097 | [-0.160, 0.014] |
| Model 2- Paternal Identity During Jail | 0.122 | 1.64 | 0.104 | [-0.025, 0.270] |
| Father Contact During Jail | | | | |
| Model 3- Paternal Identity Pre-Jail | -0.011 | -0.187 | 0.852 | [-0.130, 0.108] |
| Model 4- Paternal Identity During Jail | 0.062 | 0.61 | 0.543 | [-0.140, 0.265] |

Figure 1. Pre-Jail and During Jail Father-Child Contact Affecting Paternal Identity

