NEGOTIATING FAMILY AND PRISON BEHIND THE WALL:
INCARCERATED MEN’S ROLE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Negotiating Family and Prison Behind The Wall:
Incarcerated Men’s Role Management Strategies

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The more than two million incarcerated persons in U.S. prisons, jails, and other correctional facilities are not isolated individuals existing in a vacuum, but are embedded in larger intricate family systems nested within a macrosystem. Incarceration significantly transforms familial relationships by altering the function, formation, and organization of the family system. The institutions of prison and family require differing role obligations and adhere to disparate value orientations. Despite the requirements of correctional institutions, it is imperative for inmates to remain embedded in pro-social familial roles for myriad reasons, including: the family unit informs individuals of their expected role behaviors and obligations, the maintenance of inmate-family relationships is cited as facilitating positive in-prison behavior and successful reintegration, and prisoners are likely to rely on their families to provide support post-incarceration.

The dissertation research extends criminological works by uncovering the strategies utilized by prisoners to manage the simultaneous enactment and performance of prison and familial roles during visitation sessions when directly faced with conflicting role expectations, and throughout the prison sentence. The research draws on 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with male prisoners, 12 hours of observations at prison visitation sessions, and a prisoner focus group conducted at a New Jersey state male
prison. The qualitative study, guided by a grounded theory methodological approach, was informed using an integration of role strain and role transition theories. The data analysis revealed the emergence of four role negotiator categories – Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer – embedded in a typology labeled as the Incarcerated Role Negotiator (IRN). Participants were grouped into IRN categories based on the demonstrated form of negotiation implemented to manage the incompatible role sets. The defining features of Incarcerated Role Negotiators centered on (a) pre-prison investments in the family, (b) role performances and behaviors, (c) contact with role senders, and (d) self-identity. The identification of Incarcerated Role Negotiators begins to address the knowledge gap in research pertaining to prisoner-family relationships and gives voice to the often neglected marginalized group of incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, the findings have several practical and policy implications for local, state, and federal agencies that manage correctional populations.
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Mom, the Saturday morning visits to the library have finally paid off. I hope you are proud of me.
Dedication

To my beautiful angels,

Mom, Brenda Faye

Nana, Cressie Mae

My work is dedicated to your quiet determination and strength.

“All great achievements require time.”

Maya Angelou
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The more than two million incarcerated persons in U.S. prisons, jails, and other correctional facilities are not isolated individuals existing in a vacuum, but are embedded in larger intricate family systems nested within a macrosystem. Prisoners continue to relate to and affect their families, communities, and society at large. It is estimated that at least 95 percent of State prisoners will reenter into the community with 80 percent under parole supervision (Hughes & Wilson, 2003). Research on parole and prison release success demonstrates that nurture, support, and attachment to the family facilitates inmate community reintegration and reduces recidivism (Arditti, 2003; Hairston, 1988; Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Holt & Miller, 1972; LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). When prisoner-family relationships and communication patterns break down—the family, prisoner, correctional institution, and community face the possibility of irreparable damage. The family and inmate suffer loss in the following ways: 1) the deterioration of family ties places the family at risk of losing physical and emotional access to the incarcerated person and 2) the incarcerated person risks losing their remaining status within the family unit, a place difficult to regain after release. The view of offenders as isolated individuals, stripped of all social relations is a “useful fiction” that limits the full study of the social ramifications of criminal justice policy (Braman, 2004, p. 63; Smith, Grimshaw, Romeo, & Knapp, 2007). Incarcerated persons who maintain family contact not only fare better after release but are better behaved while incarcerated (Bales & Mears, 2008; Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Hairston 1988; Holt

1 At yearend 2009, 7,225,800 persons were under correctional supervision in the U.S. inclusive of probation and parole.
The Dilemma: Managing Prison and Familial Roles

Prisoners are physically and possibly psychologically separated from society but still exist within it through relationships, such as those with members of their families of origin and/or formation. Despite sustaining these relationships, family life and the expectations that accompany it remain in direct contrast to life within prison, a total institution. The total institution is “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman, 1961, p. xiii). Considering that families act as the primary agent of socialization and serve as symbolic resources through which norms and relationships develop and thrive, the maintenance of inmate-family relations during confinement in the total institution is cited as an important factor in minimizing recidivism (Bales & Mears, 2008; Braman, 2004; Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Hairston, 1988; Tripp, 1991).

Disorganization of the family system through incarceration can permanently alter the family’s social networks and structures and impacts the family’s social capital, which refers to the combined value of social networks and their tendency to provide a reciprocal pattern of mutual support (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Putnam, 2000). “Families are the central mechanism of informal social controls, bolstering the limited capacity of formal social controls to shape behavior” (Clear, 2007, p. 95). From the socialization perspective, the removal of a contributing family member can significantly impact future generations. Consequences include the breakdown of obtainable and positive role models,
as well as the lack of available support and supervision of youth within the family and throughout the community. From the institution’s perspective, terminating established family ties may create safety concerns within the prison. The institution risks an increase in disciplinary infractions, disruptions, and/or institutional violence; along with public safety concerns, the community is at risk of having available resources drained by the constant recycling of members in and out of their neighborhoods. Recognizing these assertions, it is also pertinent to consider the incarcerated person’s previous contribution to the family when examining the distribution of resources (Clemmer, 1958; Braman, 2004; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). Instead of being a potential asset to the family network with providing assistance in building and sustaining the system, the member may have depleted available family resources.

For incarcerated individuals who held familial roles prior to incarceration and/or seek to regain status within the family structure during their confinement, continuing contact with family presents the dilemma of maintaining two or more roles that require various functions and may result in role strain. Role strain is defined as the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations (Goode, 1960). When role obligations contradict, conflict with time, place, or resources, and the demands of multiple roles create strain, individuals may decide to eliminate one or more of their roles. The incarcerated individual’s previously held familial roles such as father, husband, spouse, son, brother, or friend are at risk of being compromised during confinement. Each role is attached to a variety of obligations and responsibilities. Family members and inmates may attempt to preserve family ties through letter writing, phone calls, and prison visits. These various forms of contact may present imprisoned men, dependent on their pre-prison familial status and
level of engagement, with the opportunity to display the multiplicity and variation of their current roles and identities. In particular, visits from family members directly place incarcerated individuals in contradictory positions. Prisoners may attempt to enact multiple roles simultaneously while considering the physical and psychological limitations of being incarcerated.

For instance, social expectations of a father include, being accessible, engaged (caretaking duties, shared activities, contact), nurturing, provide protection, guidance, and discipline, and emotionally and economically committed and supportive of his partner and children (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Clarke, O’Brien, Day, Godwin, Connolly, Hemmings, Van Leeson, 2005; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987; Woldoff & Washington, 2008). Conversely, a prisoner is powerless and subordinate, lacks an identity, may receive discipline from prison authority figures, and earns a diminutive salary. Therefore, fatherhood becomes redefined during the context of prison. The correctional environment “provides its own norms for behavior within the fatherhood identity” (Dyer, 2005, p. 212). Researchers find that incarcerated fathers experience feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, shame, and feelings of disenfranchisement associated with being unable to fulfill their fathering functions (Arditti et al., 2005; Clarke et al., 2005; Loper, Carlson, Levitt, & Scheffel, 2009). These explicit role conflicts may result in increased role strain and lead to the prisoner abandoning his obligations in one or more of his roles. In particular, feelings of powerlessness in the decision-making process regarding their children (Clarke et al., 2005) may result in imprisonment being a “dormant period” of fatherhood (Arditti et al., 2005) or process of “hard timing” (Nurse, 2002). Dormant period is an inactive and uninvolved period of
fathering and, similarly, hard timing results when “inmates feel so overwhelmed by life in the institution that they cut off all ties to the outside world” (Arditti et al., 2005; Nurse, 2002, p. 49).

As a spouse or husband, in addition to being accessible, engaged, involved, provider of protection, and emotionally and economically committed and supportive of his partner, the role of spouse or husband includes companion and lover. Couples are unable to express these role behaviors in the visitation room due to numerous barriers, such as no touching, kissing, or sexual intercourse. Comfort’s (2008) ethnographic study of female visitors to San Quentin (CA) prison highlights how women connected to incarcerated men import everyday outside activities into the visiting room and vice versa (Comfort, 2008, 2002). The prison becomes a *domestic satellite* “as kinship gatherings, family celebrations, and romance are imported into the carceral environment” (Comfort, 2002, p. 470). Women recount prison weddings, receptions, and brief honeymoons, and elaborate meals shared with their partner. However, the transference of activities follows an interactive model. Within her interviews, Comfort found that women export activities that take place in the visitation room to their outside life (e.g. eating habits) resulting in the “secondary prisonization” of their family (Comfort, 2002). For example, inmates and visitors create a sense of connectedness and closeness by sharing meals; however, some visitors forego their regular diet in order to be able to share meals/snacks with the inmate or skimp on their own outside food budget in order to save money to buy snacks in the facility (Comfort, 2002). As a consequence of minimized prisoners’ familial roles and inmate-family activities, the importance and meaning of everyday or common activities are heavily weighted and redefined.
Although correctional institutions control most aspects of inmates’ lives, contact with family members “…challenges the exercise of prison authority and its organization of privilege and punishment…Family relationships cut across the boundary between the prison and the external world and thereby pose a constant challenge to the autonomy and isolation of the prison world” (Rosen, 2001, p. 67). Visits function as a direct portal for family members and inmates to continue their relationship with one another and represent an opportunity for family members to “bridge” the primary loss associated with incarceration (Arditti, 2003). Since prison lacks the amenities of life such as regular family contact (Sykes, 1958), when an inmate is presented with an opportunity to interact in a way besides as a prisoner, it may become increasingly difficult to manage dual role sets and may lead to one role superseding others (Dornbusch, 1955 as cited in Goffman, 1961).

**Purpose of the Research Study**

The dissertation research sought to uncover the strategies utilized by prisoners to manage the simultaneous enactment and performance of prison and familial roles behind the prison wall. The enactment of roles is the ability to play out the held role obligations and responsibilities. Specifically, the research explores how incarcerated men manage their role as prisoner and their familial roles within the environmental context of prison, during visitation sessions when directly faced with conflicting role expectations, and throughout the prison sentence. Because the carceral environment and role as prisoner has many restrictions, only limited aspects of their familial roles can be expressed. Prison visits consist of a face-to-face exchange in an assigned location in the correctional facility between an incarcerated person and visitor, lasting for a few hours.
Every individual operates within a role system. The system contains all of the acts, behaviors, and obligations and privileges of each role that a person possesses. In an attempt to swing the pendulum evenly among all roles within the system, a person may opt to fulfill certain behaviors of a role or “role bargaining” (Goode, 1960). This technique usually decreases the occurrence of role strain, however, when the behaviors of the roles conflict, role strain becomes intensified. The felt intensity of the role strain may push an individual to abort certain roles and/or cause psychological distress (Berry, 2003; Burr, 1972; Clemmer, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Moerings, 1983; Sykes, 1958). Because inmates are not able to detach themselves from the role of prisoner, most likely, their role within the family will suffer. If inmates maintain both roles, the continued role strain may lead to identity transformation and/or ambiguity, and psychological problems such as distress, shame, low self-esteem, guilt, regret, hopelessness, helplessness, self-doubt, and loss of initiative/agency (Arditti et al., 2005; Berry, 2003; Clarke et al., 2005; Dyer, 2005; Toch, 1992a). The current work uncovered the ways in which inmates preserve familial roles when faced with these imprisonment-related challenges.

The study’s sample is comprised of state prisoners incarcerated in one of eight male correctional facilities in New Jersey. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with prisoners at various stages of their sentence, as research suggests that inmate coping mechanisms change over a period of time, with time served and length of time remaining to be served of particular importance (Clemmer, 1958; Dhami, Ayton, & Loewenstein, 2007; Garabedian, 1963; see Moerings, 1983; Wheeler, 1961). Criminological work on the topic finds that inmates start to consider their roles outside of “prisoner” and shed the prison culture once the release date nears (Clemmer, 1958; Garabedian, 1963; Wheeler,
1961). Fixed-interval observations of visiting sessions highlight inmate-family interactions not described in scholarly literature (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002) and a focus group discussion confirmed and validated findings.

**Significance of the Research Study**

The United States’ extensive reliance on incarceration has had significant and long-lasting impacts on American society (Schirmer, Nellis, & Mauer, 2009). The nation leads the international community in the rate of incarcerating its citizens, with 1 in every 32 U.S. adults under correctional supervision (Glaze, 2010) and 502 per 100,000 U.S. residents imprisoned (West & Sabol, 2009). Equally, incarceration has been blamed for pulling apart the nation’s most vulnerable families (Braman, 2004). In particular, families of color are hard hit. For example, at yearend 2009, there were 3,119 black male state and federal prison inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents, compared to 1,193 Hispanic male prisoners per 100,000 residents, and 487 white male state and federal prison inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents indicating that minorities are immensely overrepresented in the correctional population (West, Sabol, & Greenman, 2010). With further investigation, the national statistics reveal that black males are incarcerated at a rate more than 6.4 times higher than white males and 2.6 times higher than Hispanic males (West, Sabol, & Greenman, 2010).

The number of women under the jurisdiction of state and federal prison authorities decreased .01 percent from 2008 to 2009, declining to 113,462 and the number of imprisoned men increased slightly (.3%), totaling 1,500,278 (West et al., 2010). Within these state and federal facilities, specifically, black females were incarcerated at a rate of 142 per 100,000, 74 Hispanic females per 100,000 U.S. residents
incarcerated, and a rate of 50 per 100,000 residents for white females (West et al., 2010). Furthermore, it has been estimated that incarceration affects 1.9 million minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Due to economic (and many other) disparities, the communities which these prisoners are removed from and returned to are plagued with poverty, substance abuse, violence, and entrenched with single parent households (Travis & Waul, 2003). Prison becomes a woven thread into the fabric of these communities affected by high rates of concentrated incarceration (Clear, 2007). Travis summates the multitude of consequences for families in these communities:

Imprisonment profoundly affects families in another, less tangible way. When young men and women are sent to prison, they are removed from the traditional rhythms of dating, courtship, marriage, and family formation. Because far more men than women are sent to prison each year, our criminal justice policies have created a “gender imbalance” (Braman, 2002), a disparity in the number of available single men and women in many communities…The results are an increase in female-headed households and narrowed roles for fathers in the lives of their children and men in the lives of women and families in general. As more young men grow up with fewer stable attachments to girlfriends, spouses, and intimate partners, the masculine identity is redefined (Travis, 2005, p. 120).

As a result, mass imprisonment policies further destabilize “at-risk” and the most “socially deprived” families; “the probability of imprisonment increases with increasing deprivation” (Houchin, 2005, p. 17). Included in the definition of “at-risk” families are future family structures; in neighborhoods with a high concentration of incarceration, less marriageable men are available, forcing female residents interested in forming a male-female relationship to lower their standards for prospective partners (Braman, 2004; Richie, 2002; Western & McLanahan, 2000). The children within these family systems may model their own family formation after behaviors displayed in the household,
community, and potentially in the visitation room. Communities endure damage to social networks and human and social capital.

To examine the collateral consequences of the exponential growth of the prison population, scholars have expanded research areas to include various facets of correctional supervision and the institution and begun to take innovative measures in capturing the full picture of visiting an incarcerated family member, from bus stop to the visiting room (Christian, 2005; Comfort, 2003). The U.S. Supreme Court has not explicitly stated that prisoners have the right to visitation, yet, most facilities offer family visitation in an effort to control inmate behavior. It is noted that, “prison officials are the absolute gatekeeper to visitation and are entitled to exclude any visitor on the grounds of security” (Rosen, 2001, p. 71). Corrections officials recognize that family contact encourages inmates to connect with social life outside of the facility, which may provide incarcerated individuals with a positive future outlook (Goffman, 1961). Based on paternalistic and punitive models, prisons shift accountability from the institution to the incarcerated individual and expect inmates to be active participants in their personal development despite their liminality (Crewe, 2007). Empirical evidence cites visitation as an important predictor of in-prison behavior, parole success, and desistance, yet, little investigation has been conducted to consider the full scope inmate-family contact has on behavior, roles, and relationships (Bales & Mears, 2008; Casey-Acevedo, Bakken & Karle, 2004; Mills & Codd, 2008; see Hairston, 1988; Holt & Miller, 1972; Jiang & Winfree, 2006).
Overview of Chapters

The following brief overview provides a guideline on the areas that will be covered in each remaining dissertation chapter. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of literature that examines prison culture and the deprivations of total institutions, prisoner roles, and the impact of deprivations and inmate-family contact on behavior. The chapter encompasses the following areas: 1) an examination of historical prison literature, 2) work exploring roles and adaptation strategies to deprivations, and 3) research identifying the impact of prison visitation or other forms of contact on perceived deprivations and family relationships. Gaps and limitations of the examined literature and works are highlighted.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework used to anchor and guide the methodological approach and develop the analytic frame. The chapter provides an argument supporting the integration of role strain and role transition theories as appropriate frameworks to apply to the dissertation research and addresses difficulties associated with the acquisition of incompatible roles.

The aim of Chapter 4 is to achieve a number of goals, including: explicate the research purpose, list the guiding research questions, and outline the research design and procedures for data analysis. Specifically, the chapter reviews the sample selection process, data collection procedures, discusses limitations and considerations, addresses reliability and validity concerns of qualitative research, and provides a description of the participants. Given that the research uncovers findings of a previously unexplored topic area from the perspective of inmates, the methodological approach, grounded theory, was utilized (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
Chapter 5 begins the presentation of the dissertation research findings, centering on the experience of visiting and the contact patterns and preferences of the participants. Readers will be introduced to mechanisms used by prisoners to manage role relationships and the simultaneous enactment and performance of familial roles during the visitation session and incarceration period. Findings were linked to propositions established in the theoretical frameworks of role strain and transition theories to establish the typology, Incarcerated Role Negotiator (IRN), and typological groups - Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer.

Chapter 6 examines the negotiation strategies of men typified as Sustainers. These prisoners demonstrated the ability to manage incompatible roles by reconstructing and redefining their role expectations to fit within their current liminality. The men restructure their familial role to include providing emotional support, limited financial assistance, mentorship, advice, and encouragement. Subsequently, Sustainers exchange their prior deposits into the family resource account preceding incarceration, and maintenance of engagement, activity, commitment, and consistency levels in his familial roles throughout the sentence for power, control, respect, and continued loyalty from the family.

Chapter 7 highlights the role management strategy used by Deserters. Due to their inability to manage incompatible roles simultaneously when undergoing an acute process of normative change and ambiguous pre-prison identities, the men execute a “hard timing” approach throughout their sentence. In such an approach, Deserters eliminate pre-prison obligations, even those deemed culturally unacceptable to terminate and allocate resources exclusively to the performance of prisoner.
Chapter 8 explores the role of Dependents in their familial systems. Dependents perceive that they lack the capacity and capability to personally manage their incompatible roles simultaneously due to the liminality associated with incarceration. Therefore, the prisoners delegate others to adopt their roles, without thoroughly assessing the impact of the role transfer.

Chapter 9 reviews the last of the Incarcerated Role Negotiators, Restorers. Prisoners representative of this set previously implemented the “hard timing” approach to manage their disparate roles in the prison and family, however encountered a catalyst, such as situational urgency of a crisis, role expansion, receipt of intrinsic gratification, or dissociation of role obligations that prompted the resurrection of their familial role behaviors and expectations.
CHAPTER 2
Factors and Deprivations Affecting the Prison Experience

Many recent concerns explored by 21st century social scientists were visited more than 50 years prior. The field of study that examines aspects of prison life and inmate-family relationships has gradual advancements with few practical direct policy implications. Prison sociology research and other works examining consequences connected to incarceration have many limitations, such as small sample size and the lack of supporting theories guiding the research. The research does not incorporate data collected from multiple sources, relying primarily on family members’ views or those of the institution (e.g. correctional officers, administrative staff) nor conduct rigorous statistical analyses. In particular, Haney (2006) finds that empirical studies that examine the effects of imprisonment on prisoners have been limited by the lack of meaningful measurement techniques, research does not assess the full extent of psychological changes (i.e. disregarding changes that may become apparent after release), and there exists an excessive focus on standardizing and quantifying the psychological outcome of individual prisoners. As researchers have found, “...the pains of imprisonment and the suffering of individual prisoners are not uniform or constant” (Johnson & Toch, 1988, p. 18), requiring the use of diverse and unconventional research methodologies (Braman, 2004; Christian, 2005; Comfort, 2008).

Existing criminological literature on prisoner-family visitation can be categorized into two areas: 1) descriptive information about visitation, including inmate visitors, their visiting patterns and concerns (Arditti, 2003; Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002; Christian, 2005; Comfort, 2008, 2002, 2003; Fuller,
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1993; Hairston, 1991; Jackson, Templer, & LeBaron, 1997; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Schafer, 1978, 1994; Sturges, 1999) and 2) examination of the effects of visitation on inmate performance during incarceration and after release (Casey-Acevedo et al., 2004; see Hairston, 1988; Holt & Miller, 1972). Scholars Bales and Mears (2008, p. 294) pose the following summation of existing literature:

Interestingly, the few studies on a visitation-recidivism link have almost invariably focused on male inmates and the influence of receiving family, especially spousal, visitation (Adams & Fischer, 1976). By contrast, studies that contribute to visitation and of the experience of visitation have focused primarily on female inmates, especially those with children (Casey-Acevedo, Bakken, & Karle, 2004; Hobler, 2001; Houck & Loper, 2002; Howser et al, 1984; Hughes & Harrison-Thompson, 2002; Moses, 1995; Tewksbury & DeMichele, 2005).

This chapter’s purpose is to connect prison social research of life inside the correctional institution to social research examining life outside. Historical prison research exposed the conditions of life in male U.S. prisons (Clemmer, 1958; Sykes, 1958). Researchers were embedded in the culture and their works highlighted inmate social life as a central medium through which prison is governed (Simon, 2000). Largely, contemporary works examine the inmate social order because scholars have difficulty in gaining the same privileged access granted to previous sociologists (i.e. Clemmer and Sykes). As a result, current studies center on signal events occurring in prisons (i.e. riots) and/or rely on secondary data collected by government or other administrative agencies (Simon, 2000).

A Historical Glimpse at Prison Culture Research

Historically, correctional institutions have been utilized as a method of coercive social control in the United States. Throughout decades in which other American traditions and customs have been challenged, and reforms made, correctional facilities
have not been quick to evolve with the zeitgeist despite several prison reform
movements. Clemmer (1958) effectively describes the stagnant nature of prisons in his
work “The Prison Community”:

In spite of these dynamic characteristics, however, the controls which
guide the conduct of the prisoners, and the behavior of the officials have
changed little from year to year. Forty years ago the flippant or irascible
prisoner was punished by solitary confinement and sometimes beaten just
as he is now, and forty years ago the prisoners held physical courage,
gambling skill, or clever thieving techniques in high esteem as they do
now, yet forty years ago it was a considerably different prison population
in terms of personality make-up which arose in the morning formed the
bucket brigade went to breakfast and to work. There are variations, but the
patterns are essentially the same. This tendency toward the establishment
of controls and values which continue year after year in spite of great
social change is in the nature of a paradox. (Clemmer, 1958, p. 84)

Nevertheless, the unchanging face of these institutions may be a result of the faces inside
of the cells. The “residents” of jails and prisons are persons charged with committing a
criminal act. Fifty years ago, the general consensus was that these persons were
considered outcasts and viewed as incapable of leading a productive life in society.
However, as in the past, incarcerated individuals are not only persons charged with
committing a crime and considered outcasts, but they are overwhelmingly from minority
and low-income groups, with approximately 65 percent of prisoners held in state or
federal prison or local jails of Black or Hispanic racial backgrounds (West & Sabol,
2009).

Prison is a total institution where individuals are disconnected from society for a
period of time and lead enclosed, formally administered lives (Goffman, 1961; Sykes,
1958). A barrier is placed between the “criminal” and society, marking “the first
curtailment of self” (Goffman, 1961, p. 14). Most total institutions have physical barriers
such as visible gates and barbwire that separate the facility from the rest of the
community. Others lack devices of division, but the separation between society and the institution is apparent through factors such as the remote location of facilities, identification of inmates as numbers, the presence of correctional officers, the stringent schedules, and the uniformity of the inmate attire. Moerings (1983, p. 156) outlines the limitations of a total institution as follows,

…from morning bell to lights-out, is strictly regulated, with exact times for washing, eating, working, recreation, etc. There is hardly any room for individual initiative. Characteristic of a total institution is the complete dependence of the individual on the (prison) system. All the important functions take place within it: sleeping, eating, working, recreation (insofar as one can speak of recreation in a prison), all take place within a single community and under the continental surveillance of wardens or other prison functionaries. Furthermore, these activities are not separated from each other: A prisoner who has misbehaved in the workshop in the morning may still be reproached for it in the evening through the spy-hole cell (Moerings, 1983, p. 156).

Clemmer examined the prison as a community, and within the community there exists a culture and social organization. However, he cited that “prison culture is not distinct or even greatly different from the culture in free society” (Clemmer, 1958, p. 86). Within his explication, Clemmer presented an examination of prison primary groups. Before incarcerated, individuals were members of a primary group, such as their family, where they held familial roles. Cooley (1909) defines a primary group as follows:

The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities into a common whole, so that one’s very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group. Perhaps the simplest way of describing this wholeness is by saying that it is a “we”; it involves the sort of sympathy and mutual identification for which “we” is the natural expression….It is not to be supposed that the unity of the primary group is one of mere harmony and love. It is always a differentiated and usually competitive unity, admitting of self-assertion, and various appropriate passions…” (Cooley, 1909, p. 23-27 as cited in Clemmer, 1958, p. 112)
Prison primary group is defined as

A primary prison group is a collectivity of prisoners who possess a common body of knowledge and interest sufficient to produce an understanding and solidarity which is characterized by a we-feeling, sentimental attachment, and unanimity, and which allows, at the same time, elements of competition and resistance among members only to the extent that cohesion is not disrupted. (Clemmer, 1958, p. 115)

Once incarcerated, inmates transfer their primary group affiliation from within their families or with friends to within the prison. The new group affiliation may result in the prisoner disidentifying with familial roles. For example, Clemmer (1958) found from surveys, observations, and interviews that 40 percent of the 190 incarcerated men interviewed were considered to be a member of *semi-primary* group, 17 percent were identified as being a *full member* of a prison primary group, and 41 percent were considered to be “ungrouped.” The men that were members of prison primary groups tended to be younger, smarter, and “more criminalistic” than prisoners who were semi- or un-grouped. In support of this finding, Bartollas and colleagues (1976, see Johnson & Toch, 1988, p. 19) have found that “younger inmates live in a prison world characterized by exaggerated concern for peer acceptance and a marked preoccupation with toughness.” As a result of less life experience outside of prison, these younger inmates may be more likely to internalize the prison culture and reject maintaining ties with family members.

Sykes (1958) identified the “pains of imprisonment,” the deprivations and frustrations as expressed by male inmates. He states that, “These deprivations of frustrations of the modern prison may indeed be the acceptable or unavoidable implications of imprisonment, but we must recognize the fact that they can be just as painful as the physical maltreatment which they have replaced” (Sykes, 1958, p. 64).
Sykes (1958) examined the prison as a total social structure, concentrating on the affect of living in a system of presumed complete social control on the personality of prisoners and correctional staff. Through his examination of New Jersey State Prison, a maximum-security facility, he found that prison pushed inmates further into deviant acts by removing inmate-family contact and heterosexual relationships (Sykes, 1958).

Many total institutions, such as prison and mental hospitals, withhold visitation from inmates to ensure “a deep initial break with past roles and appreciation of role dispossession” (Goffman, 1961, p. 14). Prisoners find themselves “shifting to an ambiguous role without definition” (Arditti et al., 2005, p. 276) and family members find themselves in a struggle to “include and exclude the prisoner” (Hannon, Martin, & Martin, 1984, p. 255). With incarceration widening to include a diverse group of inmates (i.e. increasing number of female prisoners), more families will adversely feel the impact. Goffman (1961, p. 12) predicted in his research of total institutions that the “formation of households provides a structural guarantee that total institutions will not be without resistance.” Although, correctional facilities substantially regulate and redefine familial roles (Roy, 2003) the operation of the prison will be challenged by another agent of social control—the family. Legally, prison officials have “absolute discretion” on the manner in which they implement visitation programs and are only required to consider their legal obligation to prisoners opposed to moral duties (Rosen, 2001, p. 71). In the case of visitation, managerial needs of the prisons upstage the commitment to their moral duties.
Sykes’s seminal work (1958) identified pains that inmates suffer as including deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security. With the loss of liberty, inmates’ ties are severed from family, relatives, and friends. Inmates within the institution Sykes (1958) studied (New Jersey State Prison) stated that their outside connections weakened as the months and years passed. For example, 41 percent of the prisoners received no visits in a one-year period. The lack of outside contact may result in feelings of deprivation, frustration, loneliness, and boredom (Sykes, 1958). The loss of material goods and intimate heterosexual relationships makes it increasingly difficult for inmates to define themselves. The loss of material goods and services represents the loss of self. Stripping an inmate of his material possessions removes his individuality. Material deprivation is equated with personal inadequacy (Sykes, 1958). The imprisoned man is unable to interact with those individuals and goods that inform and give his social role meaning (Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958). In order to manage the deprivations caused by imprisonment Sykes (1958) found that inmates adapted to prison life by acquiring various roles specific to the prison in an “attempt to reduce the rigors of prison life at the expense of fellow prisoners and the individual pursues his own interests, his own needs, without regard for the needs, rights, and opinions of others” (Sykes, 1958, p. 107). Adaptation strategies centered on physical escape, psychological withdrawal, rebellion, or innovation.

Goffman (1961) also submits adaptation strategies that present a manner to handle tension between the inmate’s previous home world and institutional life. While incarcerated, inmates experience “disculturation,” a process that includes the “untraining
of the inmates, making him temporarily incapable of managing certain features of daily life on the outside, if and when he returns” (Goffman, 1961, p. 13). The five modes of adaptation identified by Goffman (1961) include: situational withdrawal, intransigent line, colonization, conversion, and playing it cool. Incarcerated individuals that experience situational withdrawal, divert their attention from everything except events within their immediate surroundings, signifying a form of regression. Inmates that follow the intransigent line intentionally challenge the institution by flagrantly refusing to cooperate with staff. Colonization is an example of when a prisoner uses an experience outside of the facility as a point of reference to demonstrate the desirability of prison life (Goffman, 1961). Conversion occurs when an inmate appears to take over the official or staff view of him and acts out the role of the perfect inmate. Lastly, inmates who “play it cool,” keep out of trouble, volunteer without incentives, and “may learn to cut their ties to the outside world just enough to give cultural reality to the world outside but not enough to lead to colonization” (Goffman, 1961, p. 65).

The aforementioned research on the prison culture set the framework for the many contemporary works of Toch (1975, 1992, 1992a; Johnson & Toch, 1988). In his research, he points out that his research on the prison culture strived to understand how incarcerated men appraised, interpreted and found meaning in the prison experience, not how an observer or social scientist interpreted the meaning of the experience. As opposed to focusing on the pains of imprisonment experienced by a majority of inmates, Toch concentrated on the environmental context of prison as being a stressor, with particular attention paid to the minority of inmates that undergo extreme crisis situations considered dysfunctional even for prisons. Toch (1977; Johnson & Toch, 1988) recognized that
prisons are a dwelling space for diverse populations and the complexity of the interaction between the prisoner and the prison environment generates stress and difficulties adapting. Throughout his research, Toch and colleagues (1992) conducted interviews with random samples of prison inmates (n=700) and correctional staff (n=200) in five New York maximum-security institutions. From the interviews, researchers constructed seven environmental concerns of inmates, which included: privacy, safety, structure, support, emotional feedback, activity, and freedom. In relation to the dissertation research, it is important to highlight that a prisoner with a high-emotional feedback orientation, meaning being loved and cared for “prizes his links with other persons, particularly the links that are intensive, intimate, and nurturing” (Toch, 1992, p. 70). For these men, writing and receiving letters is a significant aspect of their daily life, but as Toch (1992) finds “becomes the weather vane to their mood, disposition, or ability to cope. Outside communication is an impinging force to which the remainder of life can be inextricably subservient” (Toch, 1992, p. 70). Also, the highest-ranking theme for men in the high satisfaction group was emotional feedback and it was a “primary concern for one of four married prisoners,” but not a primary concern for that of unattached or single men (Toch, 1992, p. 173).

In Toch’s (1992) study of male inmates in New York a typology emerged with three dominant themes: 1) coping (self and the environment) relating to difficulties adjusting to the environment; 2) self-perception (self and others) refers to “crises in which doubts about personal or social adequacy seem to be the principal issue” (Toch, 1992a, p. 34); and 3) impulse management (self to self/self regulation), which are the “difficulties arising out of struggles with feelings or impulses” (Toch, 1992a, p. 34). In
furthering the research, Toch identified a relationship between breakdowns and the inmate’s ethnic background. Latino men have a difficult time adapting to prison because the environment lacks the nurturance, warmth, and comrade of their families. However, Toch’s (1992a, p. 225) investigation finds that Black men seem to be “resilient to the stresses of prison.” These inmates are considered to be accustomed to the cold, “controlled, peer-centered world” of the prison (Toch, 1992a, p. 225). Most important to the current research, Toch (1992a) reports that the most salient finding was the perceived failure of support systems outside the walls. “Fully half the sample reported problems having to do with abandonment, betrayal, doubts, jealousy, or grief relating to significant others outside the walls” (Toch, 1992a, p. 379).

Unlike previously described works, Irwin and Cressey (1962, p. 143) suggest that inmates bring a culture with them into prison, specifically stating, “men bring patterns of behavior with them when they enter prison, and use them in prison.” The researchers find that the “prison code” such as projecting a tough demeanor is part of a larger pre-existing “criminal code.” The incarcerated bring these behaviors that were practiced prior to their imprisonment inside the facility. Although Irwin and Cressey (1962) suggest that the prison culture is not foreign to incoming prisoners, they do imply that an inmate society that acts as a response to problems of imprisonment is present. According to the authors, most inmates can be categorized into three groups—thief, convict, and legitimate (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). Thieves are inmates oriented to the criminal subculture and seek status in the broader criminal world. These inmates do not betray each other to the police, should be reliable, trustworthy, cleverly devious, and cool headed (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). Prisoners identified as convicts subscribe to the prison subculture and their central value
is utilitarianism. These men want to gain positions of influence inside the prison. Lastly, the legitimate inmates reject the convict and prison subcultures, cause few problems, and take prison life as it comes (Irwin & Cressey, 1962).

Similar to the prominent works of Sykes (1958) and Goffman (1961), Haney (2006) examines the effects of incarceration and coping strategies of inmates. Haney applied a modern psychological lens in his synthesis of classic and recent research. Also, Haney (2006) places a great emphasis on how the pains of imprisonment may impact the prisoner upon release and reentry back into his community. Incarcerated persons become overly obsessed with personal safety, project a tough demeanor to avoid victimization, suppress outward signs of emotions, become distrustful of others, and face prisonization (Clemmer, 1958; Haney, 2006); however, a recent study of federal state prisoners held on the West coast finds that inmates rarely think about in-prison violence, such as being attacked or beaten (Dhami et al., 2007). Inmates use hypervigilance as a defense against victimization. They become skilled at calculating how their behavior might be interpreted and the possible outcomes, and some develop a “prison mask” “that is unrevealing and impenetrable” and risk alienating themselves and others (Haney, 2006, p. 173). Inmates may become emotionally flat which affects their social interaction and personal relationships. Others practice social invisibility and become inconspicuous and unobtrusive, disconnecting completely from others. The idleness and inactivity that prisoners experience may result in a loss of personal initiative and dependency on prison to organize and regulate most behavior.

Total institutions, such as correctional facilities, are total and all-encompassing entities that create a barrier between inmates and the greater society to engage in
interaction (Goffman, 1961). Because a sharp disjuncture exists between society and prison, inmates may experience a process of prisonization, by which prisoners become alienated from conventional life and the larger society (Clark, 2001; Thomas & Petersen, 1977) and participate in the “the taking on in greater or less degree of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary,” which includes acceptance of an inferior role, accumulation of facts concerning the organization of the prison, the development of somewhat new habits of eating, dressing, working, sleeping, the adoption of local language, the recognition that nothing is owed to the environment for the supplying of needs, and the eventual desire for a good job…(Clemmer, 1958, p. 299-300)

The process of prisonization suggests that inmates abandon their pre-prison familial roles to embrace the subordinate role that the prison structure places on them (Allen & Simonsen, 1992). Immersion in the prison culture may “reduce the amount of pain they experience on a day-to-day basis during their confinement” (Haney, 2006, p. 13). Society holds great expectations of prisoners to accept the position of prison and adapt to the accompanying deprivations, navigate the in-prison primary groups, and import pre-prison familial roles inside the institution. The discussed works inform the shape of the dissertation study by identifying and describing the deprivations and adaptation strategies associated with imprisonment, highlights the in-prison roles individuals may accept behind the wall, and demonstrates the clear disjuncture between the two worlds of prison and family.

Deprivations & Family Transformations

The public character of contact with the outside world within the prison contaminates inmate-family relationships. Personal mail is opened and examined, phone
calls monitored, and visits, whether contact or non-contact, are impersonal and held in an open setting. The prison environment does not foster or warrant comfortable and relaxed communication between incarcerated individuals and family members. Families are unable to discuss serious problems, keeping them concealed until after the member’s release (Mills & Codd, 2008). “Not only are there relations between persons in prison, but the individuals within the prison communicate and have relations with persons beyond the walls” (Clemmer, 1958, p. 83). Relationships with members outside the prison and inside with other prisoners face exposure. Imprisonment is a “disruption of the usual relationship between the individual actor and his acts” (Goffman, 1961, p. 35).

Incarceration interrupts current family structures and undermines future family formations. Prisons create and sustain tension among inmates and society to strategically manage inmates (Goffman, 1961, p. 13). According to Comfort’s (2008) research, female visitors to San Quentin prison force family life upon the prison system. She states,

A curious inversion of the premise that frequent visitation facilities societal reintegration results: as kinship gatherings, family celebrations, and romance are imported into the carceral environment, the penitentiary becomes a domestic satellite, an alternative site for the performance of “private” life, which, in addition to investing the prisoner more firmly in his outside connections, simultaneously absorbs his relations within the boundaries of “papa’s house” (Comfort, 2008, p. 103).

Relationships with outsiders are strained. Incarcerated individuals are suspicious of their partners’ actions since they are unable to fulfill any held prior roles (LeBlanc, 2003; Moerings, 1983, 1992). Being unable to contribute fully financially or emotionally may create feelings of uselessness and emasculation. Inmates constantly concern themselves with the person that may have stepped into their shoes. In their examination of the impact of incarceration on intimate relationships, Harman, Smith, and Egan (2007) find that
throughout the male partner’s sentence he controlled the actions of his female partner by proxy.

Women were afraid to socialize or seek support because they felt as if they were under constant surveillance from family, friends, and their communities. This surveillance enforced their male partner’s control within their relationship, despite his absence. The fear that infidelity rumors would lead back to their partners seemed to be the strongest form of control in these relationships (Harman et al., 2007, p. 7).

Female partners revealed that their incarcerated boyfriends/husbands become upset if they were unavailable to accept their phone calls. Incarcerated family members may become distressed with thoughts of who has assumed their familial position and function.

Not only is the incarcerated person’s relationship with other family members transformed, but family members on the outside experience changes in their day-to-day exchanges. The prisoner’s immediate kin may find that relationships with extended family networks disappear because members no longer want to be involved with the prisoner’s revolving door cycle of imprisonment. Family members may come to resent each other, questioning the effort that some members do or do not put forward in supporting the inmate. In other circumstances, children may grow to resent their outside parent. LeBlanc (2003) illustrates this point when she captures a daughter writing her father in prison asking, “Mommy’s boyfriend got locked up, and she bailed him out. I want to know why she didn’t bail you out.” Incarceration forces the non-incarcerated parent to single-handedly perform multiple roles and tasks if the imprisoned family member previously contributed to the household, materially and socially. The extra responsibility, may result in the outside parent’s inability to spend quality time with their

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1 Personal communication with “Exploring family members’ connections to prisoners” research participant.
child(ren) because resources (monetary, time, energy) must be dedicated elsewhere (Arditti et al., 2003). It is cited that incarceration of a male partner increases the feelings of role strain for the female partner and increases the likelihood of dysfunctional parenting among newly single mothers (Taylor, Roberts, & Jacobson, 1997). The “normal” family life is interrupted and the incarcerated person and family members on the outside must swiftly adapt to the change.

Incarceration disrupts role obligations and responsibilities, such as parenthood, affecting pre-established parent-child bonds and engagement patterns (Woldoff & Washington, 2008). Many incarcerated parents have valid concerns about their child’s well-being, health, and safety (Hairston, 1990, 1998; Henriques, 1982). Imprisoned fathers often feel powerless in their role as parents and identify discipline, lack of guidance or supervision, and the possibility that their children might “get in trouble” as their greatest concerns (Johnston & Gabel, 1995). In a recent study, Woldoff and Washington (2008) use Fragile Families survey data, a longitudinal survey of new parents in urban areas, to examine whether contact with the criminal justice system (i.e. stopped, arrested, booked, convicted, incarcerated) affects father-child relationships, specifically father engagement, and determine whether the impact differs among racial-ethnic groups. The analysis indicates that fathers who have been incarcerated or have experienced other minor forms of contact with the criminal justice system (i.e. being charged, but not convicted for a crime) are less engaged with their children than those fathers that have not encountered law enforcement (Woldoff & Washington, 2008). The authors suggest that even minor forms of contact with the criminal justice system may produce difficulties with work and family, and contribute to labeling. In furthering their
analysis, it is revealed that Black fathers that have been charged with a crime or incarcerated reported the lowest levels of father-child engagement when compared to Latino and white fathers. Modecki and Wilson (2009) find in their examination of the parenting practices of 50 incarcerated Black fathers that increased time spent in prison is a predictor of restrictive parenting practices (i.e. parental expression of high demand and control and low warmth and responsiveness) and not that of the preferred responsive practices (i.e. warmth, affection, and firm control). The two prominent life identities - prisoner and parent- may conflict because of practical, physical, and symbolic issues which limit an incarcerated parent’s ability to fully participate in both roles (Dyer, 2005; Modecki & Wilson, 2009).

The Function of Prison Visitation on Deprivations and Family Relationships

When considering the possibilities for maintaining meaningful relationships with family members, face-to-face visitation is critical (Sturges, 2002). Though visitation provides inmates with a “link into the outside world” (Lochhead, 1993, p. viii) it can be a period defined with an “ambiguous nature of loss for families,” where the incarcerated member is physically present by psychologically absent (Arditti, 2005, p. 254). Empirical research on prisoner-family visits remains scant with results mixed. Schafer (1994) speculates in her research that examines visitation programs, visitors, and the relationship between visits and parole success that visits may serve as a reminder of the world outside the prison, permit role continuance and role practice, and ease the transition from prison to the community. Visitors of two state male prisons, one located in an urban area and the other in a rural community were surveyed. Researchers collected information on visitor demographics, the relationship between the inmates and visitor, visiting frequency, and
factors that influence visiting patterns. As the majority of studies confirm, females constituted the largest group of visitors (Schafer, 1994). Generally, each prison possesses its own visitation rules and regulations and visits can be contact or non-contact. The sole concerns of correctional facilities are safety and security, which do not consider how the environment impacts the quality of visits or its visitors, such as children (Covington, 2003).

The maintenance of family ties may facilitate inmate adjustment, positively influence in-prison behavior, and promote the reestablishment of familial roles upon release (Clark, 2001; Harman et al., 2007). Researchers suggest that prisonization would be lowest for inmates who possessed “positive” and “socialized” relationships before imprisonment and continue the relationships while incarcerated (Wheeler, 1961). Holt and Miller (1972), in the most widely cited study on inmate-family relationships, investigated the social ties between male inmates and their family and friends, and found that men who maintained frequent outside contacts while in prison did significantly better on parole. Of the 412 men paroled from the Southern Conservation Center parole board (Chino, California) from July 1968 to July 1969, 70 percent of the inmates with three or more prison visitors completed their first year with no parole difficulties, compared to 50 percent of men that did not receive either correspondence or visitors. Hairston (1988) reviewed five post-1970 studies (including Holt & Miller, 1972) and confirmed the finding that strong family and community ties reduced criminal activity, and supported post-release success (see Adams & Fischer, 1976; Burstein, 1977; Holt & Miller 1972; Howser & McDonald, 1982; Leclair, 1978). These studies have set the stage for the current research; however, the above-mentioned works did not fully consider the prior
relationship between the inmate and his or her family members. Also lacking are controls for prior arrests and sentences served. These factors may influence family members’ commitment to maintaining contact, their visiting patterns, and prisoners’ post-release success.

Much research has focused on the prisoner’s relationship with his or her children, the impact of contact on the family, and circumstances that limit visits (see Arditti, 2003; Arditti et al., 2003, Arditti et al., 2005; Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002; Casey-Acevedo et al., 2004; Christian, 2005; Comfort, 2002, 2003; Fuller, 1993; Hairston, 1988, 1991, 2003; Holt & Miller, 1972; Jackson, Templer, & LeBaron, 1997; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Johnston & Gabel, 1995; Schafer, 1978, 1994; Sturges, 1999). In Glaze’s and Maruschak (2008) demographic overview of state and federal prisoners and their children - an update to Mumola’s (2000) fundamental Bureau of Justice Statistics research - it was concluded that 52 percent State and 63 percent federal U.S. prisoners have a child under age 18, approximating to 1,706,600 children deemed as the “incarceration generation” (Eckholm, 2009). More than three-fourths had [State (78.6%) and Federal (91.3%)] some contact with their minor and/or adult children since their admission. Of the 78.6 percent of parents in state prison who had contact with their children, 53 percent communicated through telephone calls, 70 percent sent and/or received letters from their children, and 42 percent received a visit since admission. Of the 91.3 percent of parents in federal prison that received some form of contact from their minor and/or adult child, 85 percent made telephone calls, 84 percent sent and/or received mail from their children, and 55 percent received minor and/or adult child visits (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Research on inmate psychological well being finds that inmates tend to be more
depressed, anxious, and stressed when they received fewer visits each month (Wooldredge, 1999). Jiang and Winfree (2006) studied the relationship between social support, gender, and inmate adjustment to prison. The social support measure included calls, mail and visits from children, as well as the prisoner’s marital status and number of children. The outcome of the study finds that for both males and females, phone contact with children reduced the number of monthly infractions, but contact with children by mail and visits were both insignificant (Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Conversely, Casey-Acevedo and colleagues (2004) found that women incarcerated in a maximum security prison who received child visits were more likely to engage in serious and violent institutional infractions and committed a greater percentage of all infractions as opposed to inmate mothers who did not receive visits. The authors explain the findings by suggesting that inmate mothers may be comforted by a child visit, but in the same token, visits can also create or stir painful emotions (Casey-Acevedo et al., 2004).

Researchers have taken a step to examine the importance of the visiting environment on the visiting family member, their visiting experience, and the relationship between the environmental context and the quality of visits (Arditti, 2003, 2005). Scholars have recognized the numerous limitations (i.e. causality issues, lack of sufficient controls, or ignoring research questions) of existing research that explores and examines the impact of visitation on the incarcerated member. Haney (2006, p. 173) suggests that many inmate visitors are unaware of the “day-to-day stress of imprisonment, the cumulative effect of the daily humiliation and degradations of prison life, and the mood swings that these uncontrollable events can precipitate in prisoners” and as a result “contact with the outside world sometimes is more painful than it is pleasant.”
Aware of the limitations, Bales and Mears (2008) sought out to conduct the most sound and comprehensive examination of the visitation-recidivism link to-date. Utilizing data from the Florida Department of Corrections Offender-Based Information system, which includes demographic, criminal history (prior to, during, and after incarceration), and prison visitation event information (visit date; inmate-visitor relationship), the researchers were able to “systematically examine the effects of different dimensions of visitation (e.g., receiving any vs. no visitation, the frequency of visitation) and types of visitation (parent, spouse, significant other, child, relative, friend, other) on both recidivism and the timing to recidivism, as well as the effect of the recency of visitation on recidivism” (Bales & Mears, 2008, p. 295). The sample included 7,000 male and female inmates released from prisons with varying security levels between November 2001 and March 2002. Included participants must have served at least 12 months in prison were followed for a 24-month follow up period.

The research yields many significant findings. Overall, the results support the hypothesis that increased number of visits and receiving visits close to inmate release date delays the onset of and reduces recidivism, with an exception of child visits. Receiving frequent child visits was associated with an increased risk for recidivating, in line with the findings of Casey-Acevedo, Bakken, and Karle (2004) concerning inmate mother-child visits. Not surprisingly, less than half (42%) of the inmates released during the study period received visits in the year prior to release. Overall, Bales and Mears (2008) concluded that visitation and receipt of frequent visits were associated with a lower likelihood of recidivism. For inmates that received visits, the likelihood of recidivating was 30.7 percent lower than the odds for those who were not visited.
Frequent visiting is more impactful than not receiving any visits, however, the first few visits seem to “exert a greater effect than subsequent ones” (Bales & Mears, 2008, p. 306). The likelihood of recidivism decreased by 3.8 percent for each additional visit an inmate received. Interestingly, increased frequency of spousal visits resulted in decreased risk for recidivism. Lastly, the study revealed that receiving prison visits is most important for men, non-whites, and individuals with longer histories of incarceration.

With this important research, Bales and Mears (2008) have advanced criminological literature and began to address the research gaps and weaknesses of previous studies.

In considering the impact of visitation on inmate behavior, statistical findings must be paired with qualitative research. Visits require a large investment in time, money, and energy. For example, in a study of family members who ride the bus to upstate New York prisons, the minimum cost of one visit was $80, excluding childcare expenses (Christian, 2005). Tewksbury and DeMichele (2005) found in their examination of prison visitation programs in Kentucky that the average cost of visiting was $27 with other monthly expenses associated with maintaining contact equaling about $250, totaling $277 spent per month on continuing contact with an imprisoned family member. A large proportion of other expenses related to the costs of collect calls. It has been documented that collect calls from prison range from $15 to $150 a month (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas., 2006). Incarcerated persons who frequently call family members or friends can cost the member more than $600 a month, forcing families to disconnect their telephones and thus adding to existing tensions and resentment (Braman, 2004). In spite of the presented disadvantage, maintaining contact, especially parent-child, is cited as ameliorating the feelings of guilt and loss the inmate experiences due to incarceration.
For example, Arditti (2003) examined the importance of the visiting room as a “portal” by which the family is affected through—1) interaction with family, 2) interactions with staff, 3) interaction with other family members visiting other inmates, and 4) experience relative to the environmental conditions and policies. Findings identify the following factors as main concerns of study participants: lack of physical contact, lack of privacy, long waits, short visits, and dehumanizing treatment by correctional staff (Arditti, 2003). Also, selected works include experiences within jails as opposed to prisons, which present a different predicament. Visitation at a jail almost exclusively involves non-contact visits through glass windows. Research in this area is a precarious topic because researchers do not want to be held responsible for discovering that visitation, as it currently stands, may in fact not be beneficial either to the family or incarcerated person. As Johnson & Toch (1988, p. 16) state, “Science is a hard game to play where policy implications are immediate and where we are concerned about the consequences of our findings.” If stated without direct or convincing policy implications, prison visitation programs may lose funding and government support, hindering the multitude of reentry initiatives. With the aid of solid research, correctional officials and policymakers have a responsibility to change ineffective procedures.

Summary

Prisoners must adjust, adapt and cope with prison life and the newfound ambiguity within their familial roles. Historical works added to the dialogue by providing powerful insights on the inmate social organization. Major challenges inmates face throughout their incarceration include social acceptance, and lack of material possessions,
heterosexual relationships, personal autonomy, and personal security (Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958). They immediately lose their pre-prison status in the family and some may become more dependent on their families than they were prior to their arrest. The rules and regulations of the prisons permit family members to simply maintain a nominal relationship. In contrast, there is a downside to maintaining family communication. Hannon and colleagues (1984, p. 256) state, “New prisoners often report a great deal of anxiety in adjusting to the new rules of prison life, and when family problems occur in conjunction with this adjustment, the increased anxiety level often inhibits the adaptation process.” Although, visitation programs service the incarcerated population, in most instances the population is not involved in program design or implementation. Hairston (1996) finds when prisoners are included and involved in creating and sustaining prison programs, they hold a sense of pride and ownership, which in turn affects the integrity of the program and inmate participation.

Chapter 3 outlines the propositions of role strain theory and incorporates aspects from complementing role socialization theories, such as role transition and role conflict. The chapter illustrates that role strain theory is an appropriate premise to anchor and guide the current study’s theoretical framework and methodological approach. Lastly, the chapter explores role conflict within the prisoner role system.
CHAPTER 3

Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a discussion of role strain and transition theories, the theoretical frameworks used to anchor and guide the methodological approach and develop the analytic frame. I review the role theories and the supporting propositions, present role management and negotiation as strategies in response to perceived role strain, and demonstrate that transitioning to conflicting and incompatible roles forces prisoners to experience role strain.

Integration of Role Strain and Role Transition Theories

A role is expressed as the “culturally expected behavior” of an individual who occupies a particular position within the social system (Cottrell, 1942, p. 617). It is what an individual’s surroundings expect from him or her and what he or she ought to do or be (Allen & van de vliert, 1983; Moerings, 1983). The concept of role bridges three levels, society (social position), culture (normative expectations), and individual (role enactment or behavior) (Allen & van de vliert, 1983). Role behaviors are acts that are related to the expectations associated with a particular social position and the obligations and responsibilities that accompany the role (Allen & van de vliert, 1983). Role strain is encountered as a result of the felt difficulty in fulfilling multiple role obligations. An individual’s reaction to the perceived role strain can be found at multiple functioning levels: affective, perceptual/cognitive, and behavioral (French & Kahn, 1962 as cited in Allen & van de vliert, 1983).

In his classic work, “A theory of role strain,” Goode (1960) delineates theoretical propositions that outline sources that result in role strain. Role transition, a
complementary supposition of role strain, “refers to the process of moving in and out of roles in a social system” and “may involve the addition or termination of a role without any change in other roles; or it could be the termination of one or more roles and the concomitant beginning of another” (Burr, 1972, p. 407). In his reformulation and explanation of Cottrell’s (1942) piece on the adjustment of individuals to age and sex roles, Burr (1972) expounds on and integrates Cottrell’s (1942, p. 618) propositions with Goode’s (1960) role strain, to further examine the relationship between such factors as anticipatory socialization, role clarity, role conflict, role strain, role incompatibility, goal attainment, substitute gratifications, transition procedures, and amount of normative change and felt ease or difficulty in the role transition process. The subsequent section presents the integration of role strain (Goode, 1960) and transition (Burr, 1972) theories.

Goode’s (1960) proposition states that an individual may feel increased role strain because roles are required at particular times and places. The acquisition of a role is not a spontaneous event; however it is continuous, and requires a period of adaptation (Goode, 1960). As he suggests, conformity to the role is not automatic (Goode, 1960). If Merton’s (1968) anticipatory socialization, “defined as the process of learning the norms of a role before being in a social situation where it is appropriate to actually behave in the role” is applied to this hypothesis, it can be inferred that “the amount of anticipatory socialization positively influences the ease of transition into roles” (Burr, 1972, p. 408; Garabedian, 1963).

Researchers have applied anticipatory socialization to the initial adaptation to prison and the last phases prior to release from prison (Garabedian, 1963; Wheeler, 1961). They have found that inmates at the beginning and end of their sentences are more
likely to conform to staff expectations and norms compared to inmates in the middle portion of their sentence. Inmates in the middle stage are viewed as the furthest removed from society in comparison to inmates who have just entered the facility or those readying themselves to reenter their communities. The prison culture has its greatest impact upon inmates during the middle phase of their sentence (Garabedian, 1963). Research suggests that men near their release date prepare to transition into their new role outside of the prison and do not want to be involved in activities that may affect their upcoming release (Garabedian, 1963; Wheeler, 1961). The incarcerated individual becomes less concerned with coping with the pains of imprisonments and his roles within the prison and concentrates on his transition from prison to society and the familial obligations and responsibilities he will regain or acquire (e.g., earning primary wages, providing emotional support, and/or contributing to the decision-making). The second strain results when obligations of role relationships conflict or contradict each other (Goode, 1960). The role obligations may conflict in time, place, or resources. This source of strain indicates the existence of role conflict, defined as the presence of incompatible expectations for a social role (Burr, 1972, p. 410).

Burr (1972) draws the following propositions as emerging from the interrelated themes, role clarity, role conflict, role strain, and role incompatibility. Role clarity is the clarity with which roles are defined, the degree to which there is a set of “explicit definitions of the reciprocal behavior expected” (Cottrell, 1942, p. 618) rather than ambiguous or vague definitions. Role conflict is the presence of incompatible expectations for a social role or multiple social roles. Burr (1972, p. 410) supposes that
“role conflict probably influences role strain rather than the ease of making role transitions, and then the amount of strain influences the ease of transitions.”

**Propositions:**

The amount of role clarity positively influences the ease of making transitions into roles.

The amount of role clarity inversely influences the ease of transitions out of roles.

The amount of role conflict in a role positive influences the amount of role strain experienced when occupying this role.

The amount of role strain that results from occupying a role inversely influences the ease of making a transition into this role.

The amount of role strain that results from occupying a role positively influences the ease of making transitions out of this role.

The amount of role conflict inversely influences the amount of role clarity.

The third source of strain, similar to the previously stated, proposes that each role relationship demands several activities or responses and “various demands of roles create some strain as between the norms of quantity and quality, technical excellence and human relations skills, and universalism and particularism” (Goode, 1960, p. 485).

Basically stated, the obligations of multiple roles are inconsistent with each other, particularly roles that require differing norms. Burr (1972) refers to this proposition as role incompatibility, identified as the degree to which the demands of one role are incompatible with the demands of other occupied social roles (Cottrell, 1942; Goode, 1960). Role incompatibility positively influences role strain (Burr, 1972; Goode, 1960). Role strain is likely to increase if the norms of the old and new roles vary greatly (Moerings, 1983), hence;
**Propositions:**

The amount of role incompatibility positively influences role strain.

When there is role incompatibility, the amount of role compartmentalization inversely influences role strain.

The amount of activity that is normatively prescribed in a person’s life positively influences the individual’s role strain.

Lastly, many role relationships are “role sets,” meaning “the individual engages, by virtue of one of his positions, in several role relationships with different individuals” (Goode, 1960, p. 485). As a result of these various role relationships an individual may face conflicting array of role obligations and responsibilities. “If he conforms fully or adequately in one direction, fulfillment will be difficult in another” (Goode, 1960, p. 485). The total role obligations of an individual’s role system may be over-demanding (Goode, 1960). Individuals must determine how to effectively allocate energy and skills throughout their role set in order to reduce role strain. According to Cottrell (1942) the degree of adjustment to roles varies directly with the extent to which the role permits individuals to realize dominant goals in their subcultural groups; by the availability of substitute gratifications; importance attached to and the definiteness of the transitional procedures; and by the amount of normative change that is occurring in a person’s life and social significance of the norms (Burr, 1972).

Goode (1960, p. 488) indicated that “analysis of role allocation requires, of course, that we know the individual’s internal demands, that is, the demands which he makes on himself, and which contribute to his willingness to perform well or not.” The propositions provide a schema to consider factors contributing to the individual’s decision to allocate resources to specific roles during the role bargaining process. The
goal is to efficiently manage the role system, “allocating the flow of role performances so that various institutional activities are accomplished” (Goode, 1960, p. 485).

Critics of role strain and transitions theories cite that Goode’s (1960) theory works on the presumption of scarcity (Marks, 1977). Marks (1977) utilizes the expansion approach and suggests that humans have an available, abundant, and expansible supply of energy that aids in the accumulation and adaptation of multiple roles.

Abundant energy is ‘found’ for anything to which we are highly committed, and we often feel more energetic after having done it; also, we tend to ‘find’ little energy for anything to which we are uncommitted, and doing these things leaves us feeling spent, drained, or exhausted (Marks, 1977, p. 927).

However, Sieber (1974, p. 569) who also finds rewards such as increased privileges, resources, and gratification in role accumulation; and constraints and strain to be highly adjustable and a normal consequence of expansion of the role system explicitly states,

We exclude from consideration roles or statuses which are intrinsically offensive or deprivational, such as the prisoner, the sick, slaves, etc.

As a result of the limitations of the expansion approach to human energy to incorporate experiences and roles of the incarcerated, I argue it appropriate to apply the outlined propositions (Burr, 1972; Cottrell, 1942; Goode, 1960).

Role Management, Negotiation, and Transition

Ways that individuals manage role strain include compartmentalization, delegation, elimination or extension of role relationships, and/or setting barriers against intrusion (Goode, 1960). Compartmentalization is “defined on the psychological level as the ability to ignore the problem of consistency” (Goode, 1960, p. 486). The key components of compartmentalization include a) location and context and b) situational
urgency or crisis. Individuals decide what role to carry out according to the importance of the situation and the circumstance. The greater the compartmentalization when there is role incompatibility the less role strain (Burr, 1972). Delegation is a process of assigning role obligations and responsibilities to another individual (Goode, 1960). If an individual is unable to complete a role responsibility, he or she appoints another person to fulfill the obligation. Extension is the process of expanding role relations in order to plead their commitments as an excuse for not fulfilling certain obligations or the individual may expand his role system in an attempt to facilitate other role demands. Essentially, an individual may take on more roles and make the case that he or she was unable to complete other role requirements due to the newly acquired role obligations or acquire new roles in attempt to fulfill the responsibilities of other roles simultaneously. However, within this extension, the individual may encounter an increase in role strain due to an extension in roles; therefore this process may be counterproductive. Another mechanism utilized to reduce role strain involves setting barriers against intrusion. The individual may use several techniques to prevent others from initiating or continuing role relationships, such as hiring a personal or administrative to schedule appointments (Goode, 1960).

The role relationship is compared to a transaction or bargain, and bargaining is used when seeking to reduce role strain. Individuals question the reward for playing out the roles or the significance of carrying out a role at a particular time or place (Goode, 1960, p. 483). Throughout the individual’s deduction and decision analysis process on which role to perform, he/she examines his/her resources that can be utilized to keep the felt role strain, role costs, or monetary and performance cost at a minimum. Goode (1960,
p. 488) finds that the resultant decision is “habitual rather than calculated.” It is imperative that the following specific factors are considered in setting the role price in the role bargain: (1) pre-existing or autonomous norm commitment and desire to carry out the performance, (2) judgment of how much his role partner (sender) will punish or reward for the role performance, and (3) the esteem or dis-esteem with which the peripheral social networks or important reference groups (third parties) will respond to the role performance. Lastly, Goode (1960, p. 490) proposes that individuals select “a set of roles which are singly less onerous, as mutually supportive as he can manage, and minimally conflicting; and, second, by obtaining as gratifying or value-productive a bargain as he can with each alter in his total role pattern” as strain reducing mechanisms.

*Acquisition of Incompatible Roles*

The experienced role strain of prisoners affects the family structure. In addition to the physical separation, incarceration contaminates inmate relationships with family members and friends outside the facility. It requires that the offending individual and family members are detached for either a relatively short or a very long time, disrupting the household and family unit (Genty, 1998). It is important to consider the incarcerated individual’s pre-prison role and investment to the family prior to incarceration. Nonetheless, family members on the outside undergo role shifts. For example, Moerings (1983; 1992) incorporates role transition and role strain theory to that of the prisoner’s wife and the prisoner. His research finds that a woman’s response to her husband’s imprisonment depends heavily on prior experiences and the impulses and expectations of her surroundings (Moerings, 1992). It is evident that incarceration changes the role of the inmate partner during and after the incarceration period. Roles disappear, become altered,
new roles acquired and roles potentially restored upon the incarcerated family member’s return, resulting in additional transitions. Within the process of role transition, Moerings (1992) identifies moderating and escalating effects. Moderating factors consists of numerous individual (personality) and environmental (social context) variables which intervene between initiation of the transition process and the subsequent reactions (Allen & van de vliert, 1983). Escalating effects are defined as negative, stigmatizing reactions from the environment, such as the guilty by association response from society (Codd, 2000; Moerings, 1992). The intensity of role strain varies depending on the presence or absence of moderating or escalating factors that influence the role transition process (Allen & van de vliert, 1983; Doehrman, 1983; Moerings, 1983). The presence of particular individual and environmental factors lessen the degree of strain. Paradoxically, the current study suggests that such moderating factors as environmental variables (i.e. prison) increase the level of strain for incarcerated members.

For example, incarceration of a husband alters the role of wife and mother and may force the acquisition of the role of father. A prisoner’s wife seeking emotional and/or financial support from her parent(s) works to reinforce the role of daughter and minimize the role of wife (Moerings, 1992). During visitation sessions with their incarcerated husbands, wives desire the home atmosphere, but quickly realize that they are unable to practice forms of affection, resulting in the modification of roles (e.g. companion and lover) (Comfort 2002; Moerings, 1992). Prisoners’ wives try to shield their husbands from their domestic woes and at the same time, husbands prefer not to share their prison worries (Moerings, 1983). Consequently, the couple limits how they provide instrumental support to each other. Incarcerated husbands take on a possessive
characteristic and expect their wives to be available to answer every one of their phone calls. If the female partners maintain their relationship with their spouse throughout the incarceration period, they accept a social identity as ‘caretakers’ not only of children but of their imprisoned men, both in practical and emotional terms. ‘Practical caretaking’ can involve the provision of cosmetic items, educational textbooks, clothing, writing paper or phone card. While there is an obvious desire to improve their partners’ experience of their sentence, through the provision of items such as notepaper or phone cards, the woman is also taking on at least part of the responsibility for continued communication between spouses (Codd, 2000, p. 74).

As a result of the female partner accepting role obligations and responsibilities previously belonging to the male, the inmate may find it difficult to cope with his partner’s newfound power and independence upon his release. With this new independence, the connected women may reexamine the value of their returning partner (Harman et al., 2007). Or, upon their partner’s reentry, some women revert back to depending on their mate, or other couples successfully adjust to the role changes. The instant role transition experienced by prisoners and their wives leads to role strain and psychologically, emotionally, and physically affects both members as well as impact how they relate to each other.

When acquiring the role of prisoner, individuals are not provided an opportunity to fully disengage from their roles and prepare for the new role (Moerings, 1983). Once incarcerated, the role of prisoner supersedes all prior roles held, further severing connections between inmates and family members. “Within total institutions, membership in one role automatically disrupts ‘role scheduling’, since the inmate’s separation from society lasts around the clock and may continue for years” (Goffman, 1961, p. 14). Role scheduling, also known as compartmentalization, is defined as playing
roles in different physical locations or social situations (Burr, 1972). In scheduling roles, individuals make certain that one particular role does not block another (Goffman, 1961). The individual designates a time and context to carry out the responsibilities of each role, creating a role management system. Incarcerated members are unable to schedule the time in which they transition into the role of prisoner, their familial roles must be simultaneously performed with their institutional position.

Prisoners also face role dispossession, meaning the removal of prior responsibilities and obligations (Dornbusch, 1955; Goffman, 1961). Some dispossessed roles can be reestablished after the incarceration period and/or it may be possible to resume roles at a later phase of life. However, many inmates are permanently removed or unable to regain their earlier status.
Figure 3.a. Example role system

- **Prisoner**
  - Bound by prison rules & regulations—Surrender freedom, independence, and liberties, obey prison staff, follow the daily and regimented inmate schedule, work, participate in education, vocational, and counseling programs and services with the goals of treatment, rehabilitation, and self-improvement, maintain family ties, commit in-prison crime.

- **Partner**
  - Lead the family, love spouse unconditionally, earn primary wages, serve as security and emotional support system, be present, consistent, and a dominant figure for spouse, share physical intimacy, dedicate, spend time, and communicate with, be empathetic, share childrearing and decision-making responsibilities, honor and respect mate, act as a well-rounded man (spiritual, education, vocation, and mentally and physically), obtain, secure, and share assets, maintain healthy and stable family relationships.

- **Father**
  - Lead the family, love children unconditionally, earn primary wages, serve as family security and emotional support system, be a present, consistent, and dominant figure to members, rear children, provide discipline and advice, serve as a positive role model, spend time and communicate with children, invest in child future.

- **Adult Son**
  - Love parents unconditionally, obey, respect, and honor parents and elders, serve as security and emotional support system, act as a well-rounded man (spiritual, educational, vocation, and mentally and physically), accept parental caregiving responsibilities.
Figure 3.a illustrates a model of a prisoner’s role system. In particular, this individual has either achieved or been ascribed the listed roles – as a prisoner and social roles within the family as a father, husband/intimate partner, and son. Each role is attached to normatively expected social behaviors and requires varying actions and resources. Because the individual occupies the role as a prisoner, he may be incapable of fulfilling the expected role obligations of his other social roles (Goode, 1960). In holding the status of an incarcerated person, the individual faces the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security (Sykes, 1958). The expected behaviors of a prisoner are to incessantly obey and act subordinate to prison law enforcement staff and administrators [as correctional officers are security agents, a manager of people and a role model for inmates (New Jersey Department of Corrections, 2003)], follow the daily and highly regimented inmate schedule, to work and participate in educational, vocational and counseling programs and services with the goals of treatment, rehabilitation, and self-improvement, maintain family ties, and lastly it is anticipated that the inmate has the propensity to commit an in-prison crime (may be a result of protecting oneself). These deprivations and role behaviors of “prisoner” are in conflict with obligations that an individual commits to when carrying out performances in the position of parent, partner, and child.

The presented social behaviors subscribe to the hegemonic ideologies that a culturally normative ideal of masculinity and male behavior exists (Hattery & Smith, 2007). The role obligations may not match the lived realities of the current society or the incarcerated men. But, Elijah Anderson (1999) presents the role of the “man of the house” in inner-city neighborhoods, which, in fact closely matches societal expectations:
The role of the “man of the house” is significant. Working-class black families have traditionally placed a high value on male authority. Generally, the man is seen as the “head of household,” with the woman as his partner and the children as their subjects. His role includes protecting the family from threats, at times literally putting his body in the line of fire on the street. In return he expects to rule his household and to get respect from other members, and he encourages his sons to grow up with the same expectations. Being a breadwinner or good provider is often a moral issue, and a man unable to provide for a family invites disrespect from his partner. Many young men who lack resources to do so often say, “I can’t play house,” and opt out of forming a family, perhaps leaving the woman and any children to fend for themselves (Anderson, 1999, p. 38).

Specifically, it is considered that a male partner’s obligations to his intimate partner include, but are not limited to: serve as the family leader, love his partner unconditionally, earn the primary household wages, serve as a security and emotional support system, be present, consistent, and a dominant figure in the household, share physical intimacy, dedicate attention, spend time and communicate with spouse, act as the family’s fix-it/handyman (family laborer), be empathetic to spouse concerns and provide a listening ear and comforting advice (support), share childrearing and decision-making responsibilities with partner, honor and respect mate, serve as the primary household decision-maker and accountant, maintain faithfulness and loyalty to spouse, act as a well rounded man (spiritual, educated, employed, mentally and physically healthy), obtain, secure, and share assets (acquired and brought into the relationship), and maintain healthy and stable intimate and family relationships.

Within the parental role of father, expectations hold that a man will lead his family and contribute instrumental support to assist in the development of his children. Obligations include, but are not limited to the following: love children unconditionally, earn the primary household wages, serve as a security and emotional support system, be present, consistent, and a dominant figure in the household, serve as disciplinarian and
quality/positive well-rounded (spiritual, educated, employed, mentally and physically healthy) male role model to his children, dedicate attention, spend time and communicate with children, act as the family’s security and fix-it/handyman, provide a listening ear and comforting advice (support), aid in successful child development (e.g. critical thinking skills, problem solving), and invest in child’s attainment of formal academic training (e.g. college or graduate school).

As an adult son, a male is expected to love his parents unconditionally, obey, respect, and honor parents and elders, act as a well rounded man (spiritual, educated, employed, mentally and physically healthy), maintain healthy, stable intimate and family relationships, and take on parental caregiving responsibilities if ever necessary. Although, the individual is able to act out aspects of these socially accepted behaviors, the extent to which he can fully perform the role obligations as expected by society are limited.

In maintaining contact with family members through visits, inmates may be able to play out selected features of their role behaviors, such as disciplinarian and provider of emotional support; however, it should be emphasized and iterated that inmates are constantly carrying out the obligations of prisoner during their familial role enactments in the visitation room.

Research conducted by Clarke and colleagues (2005) on imprisoned fathers’ identity and contact with their children have found that visits represent a period of time for inmates and family members to show emotional support and communicate. The fathers valued spending time with their loved ones, especially their children, however, challenges did exist. Some men expressed that the visitation session was too long and commented on their inability to handle the “intensive condensed family interaction”
Incarcerated fathers discussed wanting to act as their child’s disciplinarian, but feeling as though they had no right to (Arditti et al., 2005; Clarke et al., 2005). The fathers were also disenfranchised in their decision-making responsibilities concerning their children (Clarke et al., 2005). Many of the men were more comfortable communicating with their children through letters or cards on a monthly basis as opposed to visits.

Although incarceration limits the enactment of a role it is important to consider the pre-prison identity, roles held prior to imprisonment, commitment to prior roles held and to normative ideals (Clarke et al. 2005; Dyer, 2005; Goode, 1960). In considering inmate age at the time of incarceration, societal norms dictate that an 18-year old has few or recently acquired responsibilities and limited role expectations and not “solidified free world identities” (Arditti & Parkman, 2011, p. 208). Men incarcerated at 18 years old or younger may have held the assigned familial roles of son, brother, and possibly father defined by their relationships and responsibilities, in which expectations may have included, do well in school, complete chores, follow parents’ household rules, and as teen father, assist in the child rearing and raising. According to the societal norms, it would be seen as an unlikely occurrence for young men to provide advice, financial assistance, or carry the role as head of household. However, research has found that disadvantaged young men acquire money-making responsibilities at a young age (Arditti & Parkman, 2011).

Identity theory links self attitudes, or identities, to the role relationships and role-related behavior of individuals. Many identities are linked to the occupied familial roles, thereby informing role expectations and relationships. Dyer (2005, p. 209) advises in his
theoretical examination of men’s paternal identity in prison. “If physical affection is not meaningful to a father’s identity, then not being able to receive a daily hug from a child may not impact his identity confirmation” but, “interrupting a highly salient fatherhood identity through incarceration causes great distress because it prevents fathers from acting in ways that are meaningful to their core sense of ‘who they are’” (p. 212). Arditti and colleagues (2005) find that prison represents a period marked by ambiguity and dormancy for incarcerated fathers, with men either playing out a reduced fathering function or none at all. Upon release, men state that they aim to reacquire their fathering identity, but while incarcerated, the “regulated and restricted nature of prison” (Clarke, 2005, p. 239) makes carrying out their fathering obligations nearly impossible (Arditti et al., 2005).

As Goode (1960, p. 494) poignantly argues, “Thus, though the sum of role performances ordinarily maintains a society, it may also change the society or fail to keep it going.” The mass incarceration of the U.S. population may result in prisoners practicing the disengagement, reallocation, or manipulation of familial roles, thereby affecting the role performances of family and societal members. The prisoner’s failure to enact his parental obligations will impact the individual, his family, and larger community.
Summary

Chapter 3 provided an outline of role strain theory, the framework used to anchor and guide the methodological approach and develop the analytic frame. The chapter presented theoretical support that indicates challenges faced by individuals attempting to fulfill obligations of multiple and potentially conflicting and competing social roles.

Every individual operates within a system that contains various roles set in different institutions, i.e. status of medical doctor, husband, father, professor, brother, council member, and so on (Merton, 1957). The role system contains the role behaviors and obligations of each possessed role that must be fulfilled to validate the individual’s occupancy of their positions (Linton, 1945). At times, role obligations of the occupied statuses/positions may conflict. For example, it may be quite difficult for an individual to effectively execute the role of parent and student because both roles have high expectations in terms of time and resources. Individuals undergo a role bargaining procedure to identify the roles in which he/she will allocate resources to. Scholars suggest that a person’s reaction to role strain depends on the moderating and escalating effects within the individual and their surroundings (Allen & van de vliert, 1983; Moerings, 1983). The dissertation research further examines how prisoners manage the high demands of and transition between familial and prison roles when forced to simultaneously carry the roles during the visitation session and throughout their sentence.
CHAPTER 4

Methodology

Research Design

Through a qualitative methodological approach, the study sought to uncover strategies utilized by prisoners to manage the simultaneous enactment and performances of prison and familial roles during visitation sessions. Additionally, the dissertation centered on exploring the experience and meaning of visits to prisoners. Qualitative methods were deemed appropriate for the research as the study aimed to understand the meaning or nature of individual experiences and investigate an unexplored topic area (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The research questions that guided the study were: 1) how do incarcerated men manage the differing role obligations and expectations of prison and family, 2) in particular, what strategies do incarcerated men utilize to negotiate incompatible prison and familial roles during visitation sessions and throughout their sentence, and 3) what is the role of visitation in the enactment of prisoner’s familial roles? For the purpose of this study, the scope of family and familial roles are broadly defined. Family includes a set of people with whom the participant shared social, physical, and/or financial support (Hattery & Smith, 2007).

To investigate role negotiation as a mechanism to manage disparate role obligations and learn about the prisoners’ perspectives and experiences, I interviewed 25 men incarcerated at a New Jersey State prison, observed 12 hours of prison visitation sessions, and conducted one focus group where participants completed surveys (12). Data were collected from May 2008 to February 2009. The mixed methods approach allowed
for triangulation of data sources, in turn, reducing the risk of systematic biases and provided a “better assessment of the validity and generality of the explanations” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 75). Each data collection phase was meant to build on the preceding method and intended to provide additional insight on inmate perspectives on visitation and strategies used to negotiate roles (Nurse, 2002).

**Sampling and Recruitment**

The dissertation research design concentrated on men incarcerated at one of the eight New Jersey adult state prisons (identified throughout the dissertation as the Prison of Focus, POF). The goal of the research was to avoid systematic bias and inclusion of only those inmates viewed in high regard or compliant by staff, and thereby referred for interviews. The only eligibility criterion used was that the incarcerated men had to be housed in units that were *able* to receive contact visits from family members or friends, which included inmates that were *able* but have or have not received visits from family members or friends. Prior to conducting interviews, I retrieved inmate information through the New Jersey Department of Corrections website as a reference to confirm inmate status, sentence length, and time served. Research indicates that the amount of time served and the sentence length can affect the frequency of visits (Clemmer, 1958; Dhami et al., 2007; Garabedian, 1963; Goffman, 1961; see Moerings, 1983; Schmid & Jones, 1993; Sykes, 1958; Wheeler, 1961; Zamble, 1992). If notified that the inmate had been transferred to another correctional facility or restricted access prison unit, released or refused participation in the study the next inmate in the sequence was selected.

Due to the exploratory nature of the project and the mixed method approach, the study included a combination of sampling methods. Of the 25 interviewed prisoners, 21
of the men composed a random sample selected from the POF Master List\(^1\). Six of the 21 incarcerated men were participants randomly selected and initially interviewed during a pilot research study (2005) and again for the current study (2008-2009). These six cases were extensively analyzed due to the additional available data. Four of the 25 interview participants were selected based on a theoretically motivated sample to broaden the range of existing data and confirm emergent findings identified during analysis. These targeted inmates were selected based on survey and focus group responses and because they met the eligibility criterion - able to receive contact visits.

In addition to the 25 interviewed prisoners, 12 prisoners participated in a focus group session. Focus group participants were students in college credit courses being offered at the POF by a local university professor. Course subject areas included topics such as health and philosophy. Focus group participants may have not been incarcerated at the correctional facility in April 2005 and were therefore not on the POF Master List, however, these participants were eligible for contact visits. Additionally, focus group participants completed consent forms and surveys that served as an abbreviated version of the inmate interview.

\(^1\) POF Master List is updated daily, as inmates enter and leave the facility. The random sample is a cross section of inmates, at one point in time (April 2005). Prisoner may have been selected in 2005, transferred out, and then returned to the POF within the last four years, which was the circumstance with one of the twenty-five interviewed inmates.
Table 4.1. Method of inmate recruitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of recruitment</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Random sample¹</td>
<td>David, Ivan, Richard, Shaheem, Vincent,</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot &amp; Current study interviews</td>
<td>William</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Random sample</td>
<td>Anton, Barry, Bernard, Calvin, Christopher,</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Geoffrey, Jackson, Kyle, Marcus, Julian,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Micah, Raymond, Ryan, Taquan, Thomas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience sample</td>
<td>Anthony, Amir, Andre, Angelo, Daniel, Jamal,</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group &amp; survey</td>
<td>Jose, Joshua, Kevin, Muhammad, Nathan,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Participants were interviewed two times, (1) pilot study and (2) current research.

²Although unable to attend the focus group session, Roberto was included in the theoretical sample. He is enrolled in the college course and attended the initial open discussion session not the focus session. He has been included in the theoretical sample because he revealed at the introduction session that he and his son were incarcerated at the POF.

Data Collection

Research Site

In New Jersey, the total residential population for the State’s correctional institutions and satellite facilities² is more than 25,000 individuals. Below, states the missions/goals of the New Jersey Department of Corrections as outlined in the “Inmate Handbook for the POF” (NJDOC, 2003):

Mission/Goals of the Department:

The mission of the New Jersey Department of Corrections is to ensure that all persons committed to the State correctional institutions are confined with the level of custody necessary to protect the public, and that they are provided with the care, discipline, training, and treatment needed to assist them for reintegration into the community. In this respect, the Department provides education, vocational and counseling programs and services to assist in the rehabilitation of offenders. The Department also monitors county and municipal jails to ensure compliance.

² Thirteen sites in total.
The POF program guide offers a lengthier mission statement and lists six major objectives (POF, 2005). An abbreviated version of the POF mission is provided below,

The POF is a medium security institution located on forty-three acres of property in [city, county, New Jersey]. The facility is a modern state of the art structure with an operation capacity of 2,706. Through the investment of a professionally trained staff working together to ensure that all persons committed to State Correctional Institutions are confined to a level of custody necessary to protect the public and staff. And also ensured that those in custody are provided with the care, supervision, training, and treatment to assist them with reintegration into the community…

MAJOR OBJECTIVES:

1. To develop, implement and monitor effective institutional policies and procedures which will ensure appropriate and meaningful programs, and protect the inmates and staff in a safe manner.
2. To maintain an ongoing revision of manuals, handbooks, and courses of study to provide the staff and inmate population with quality up-to-date information, with the goals towards American Correctional Accreditation.
3. To ensure compliance with the New Jersey Administrative Code and Department of Corrections’ Standards and Regulations in regard to the care and custody of inmates assigned to this institution.
4. To provide inmates with vocational, education and other interaction socializing experiences in order that they may become self-sufficient and capable of coping with the problems of everyday living upon the return to society.
5. To establish and administer a staff development program to enhance employees’ professional skills and maintain attitudes consistent with policies and standards of the Department of Corrections.
6. To provide sufficient internal controls in making a reasonable assurance that all state funds are used accordance with the Governor’s mission, Commissioner’s directives and the Administrator’s goals for the best institutional experience.

Although many U.S. prisons tend to be located in remote areas a long distance away from the inmates’ prior residences in urban areas, the POF is accessible by public transportation and situated off and near major interstate highways. The facility houses persons considered to be minimum and medium security offenders. As of January 2009,
the prison’s population was more than 2,700, accounting for approximately 10 percent of the total state correctional population.

In the most recently published New Jersey Department of Corrections (2009) Offender Characteristics Report, it is recorded that 61 percent of POF’s prisoners were convicted of a violent offense, a large increase from the previously recorded 2006 statistic of 49 percent (NJDOC, 2006). Twenty-three percent of the population were convicted of drug-related crimes. As far as sentence length, 32 percent of inmates face a one to five-year total maximum term at their admission compared to 67 percent of inmates that face a total maximum sentence of more than five years. Less than 15 percent of the prison population fall between 18-24 years of age; more than three-quarters of the population falls between the ages of 25-49 with the majority of inmates being between the ages of 28-30 years old. Sixty-seven percent of the POF inmate population are Black males, 21 percent Hispanic, and 12 percent White. There are evident similarities when comparing the POF inmate statistics to that of the state’s total inmate population. Of New Jersey’s total residential correctional population (male, female, and juvenile prisoners), 50 percent were convicted of a crime against a person, and 29 percent of a drug-related crime/narcotic law violation. Forty-eight percent of the prisoners are serving a total maximum term of one to five years, 18 percent are serving terms of six to nine years, and 33 percent are serving terms of ten years or more, which includes life sentences. The median term for adult offenders is five years. Forty-one percent (41%) of all residents in the New Jersey Department of Corrections are 30 years of age or younger. The median age for inmates in the adult facilities is 33 years. Consistent with POF residents, 61 percent of the state prisoners are Black, 18 percent Hispanic, and 20 percent are White.
The population demographics of the Prison of Focus are similar to offender characteristics for the State of New Jersey.

Profile of Participants

In total, 34 incarcerated men participated in the research project. Twenty-five of the 34 incarcerated men completed interviews and 12 (inclusion of 3 duplicated participants) of the 34 men participated in the focus group session and completed surveys. Six of the 25 interview participants were subjects in the pilot study and completed interviews at multiple phases of the research – during the pilot study and current research phase. Fifteen of the 25 participants were randomly selected from the POF master list and four selected from the convenience sample. Each participant was assigned a Project ID number and unique pseudonym.

The profile of prisoner participants is based on demographic information and responses to close-ended interview and/or survey questions. Data, except for conviction, was self-reported. It is plausible that the incarcerated men may have supplied inaccurate information in regards to their age, time served, sentence length, length of time at the POF, and/or overestimated their visiting patterns. I was able to confirm inmate age, and review the proposed sentence length and time served on current charge on the NJDOC inmate search website.  

3 The NJDOC website provides detailed inmate information. However, the sentence length is listed for individual offenses, which may not be the accurate sentence length. Also, time served can be unclear since inmates may have concurrent sentences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage (Frequency)</td>
<td>Percentage (Frequency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>100.0 (25)</td>
<td>100.0 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>84.0 (21)</td>
<td>70.6 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>8.0 (2)</td>
<td>11.8 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>8.0 (2)</td>
<td>11.8 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.9 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criminal Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving a mandatory minimum</td>
<td>88.0 (22)</td>
<td>73.5 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior incarceration</td>
<td>56.0 (14)</td>
<td>47.1 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated at other facilities</td>
<td>92.0 (23)</td>
<td>91.2 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conviction¹</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>56.0 (14)</td>
<td>61.8 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-related</td>
<td>28.0 (7)</td>
<td>26.5 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property²</td>
<td>12.0 (3)</td>
<td>8.8 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sentence Lengths (years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>24.0 (6)</td>
<td>17.6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>12.0 (3)</td>
<td>8.8 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>20.0 (5)</td>
<td>14.7 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>20.0 (5)</td>
<td>23.4 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.9 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>20.0 (5)</td>
<td>20.5 (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.9 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;60</td>
<td>4.0 (1)</td>
<td>8.8 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean(SD)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>38.1 (9.2)</td>
<td>39.9 (9.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Served (years)</td>
<td>11.24 (7.1)</td>
<td>13.15 (8.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of time at POF (years)</td>
<td>4.4 (3.1)</td>
<td>5.3 (3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times previously incarcerated</td>
<td>1.3 (1.8)</td>
<td>1.0 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Information on type of conviction was collected via DOC website; study sample was not directly asked about crimes committed.

² Carjacking recorded as a property offense if not in combination with armed robbery.

Table 4.2 presents the sample characteristics outlining the demographics and criminal history exclusively for the interview participants (25) and then inclusive of the focus group (34). The overwhelming majority of the interview participants were Black (84%), eight percent Hispanic, and eight percent White. The approximate age of the
inmates was 38 years old, ranging from 29 to 62 years; the average participant age at the
time of the current incarceration was 27 years old. Fourteen of the interview participants
were under the age of 25 at the time of their current incarceration, and four of these 14
interview participants were under 18 years old at the time of incarceration.

The interview participants had a wide range of time served, from 18 months to 27
years served. On average, the men served 11 years in prison and faced sentences ranging
from 5 years to Life. At the time of the interview, the men had spent about four years at
the POF. More than half of the men had been previously incarcerated at least one time.
The majority (88%) of the men are serving a mandatory minimum sentence. According to
the data provided by the NJDOC web resource, 56 percent of the incarcerated men were
convicted of a violent offense, 28 percent of a drug-related crime, and 12 percent of a
property crime. Participant age, sentence length, time served, and length of time at the
POF increased with the inclusion of the focus group participants in the descriptive
analysis; indicating that the focus group/incarcerated students were seasoned (mean age
of 43 years old) prisoners serving lengthy sentences (two focus group participants serving
more than 60-years) possibly for violent offenses (75% convicted of a violent offense).

Interview Procedures

Interviews were arranged with the correctional facility’s administrative staff\(^4\) and
POF Coordinator assigned to the research project. I was permitted by the correctional
facility staff to select the participants, restricting only inmates housed in high risk units
and not meeting the eligibility criterion. Face-to-face interviews were conducted over a

\(^4\) The POF underwent multiple changes (3) in Administrators. Each Administrator was
individually briefed on the research project and submitted approval for the study to occur
in the facility.
nine-month period, from May 2008 to February 2009, with interview lengths ranging from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. The interval of the interview period may present a seasonality effect, with contact, especially visitation trends increasing during summer months. However, the protocol inquired about contact frequency on average over the course of the year and asked prisoners to describe reasons why contact patterns might vary.

The essential purpose of these intensive interviews was to have an ongoing conversation and establish rapport (Charmaz, 2006) with the participants. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, small, private room. During the interviews, the door was closed and officers viewed the activity within the room through video cameras and frequently walked by the room and peaked through the small window in the door.

I administered the 25 inmate interviews, reducing the potential for inconsistencies in administration or interpretation. Detailed notes were recorded during and between interview sessions and later typed up. As I waited for prospective participants to arrive, I listened to inmates in the nearby hallway who were waiting to be seen by a lawyer, social service officer, or other entity, converse about various topics such as how to “do the bid” and work on building relationships with their children. These fieldnotes were recorded and included in the analysis.

At the start of each interview, I clearly and thoroughly explained the purpose of the study to each potential participant. I informed the inmates that I was not affiliated with the correctional institution or Department of Corrections. Prisoners were provided with consent forms (Appendix A) and information on how to receive psychological assistance if needed upon the commencement of the interview session. Interviews were
not forced to follow and fit into a standard protocol due to the exploratory nature of the research and data collection methods. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to “describe and reflect upon his or her experience in ways that seldom occur in everyday life” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). The participants candidly stated that, although important, they rarely critically thought about the questions that were being asked. The participants were more than willing to provide insight regarding their familial roles, relationships, and perceptions of visitation.

*Interview Guide*

Initially, two (2) interview guides were created, with one interview protocol targeting inmates who have not received visits since being incarcerated at the POF and the other interview schedule for prisoners who have received visits. Throughout the progression of the research, it was deemed unnecessary to utilize two distinct protocols for each population. Existing interview questions were refined two times throughout the study, adding specific questions to establish the inmate’s role prior to and during the incarceration period and determine how maintaining or not maintaining contact with his family has informed his familial role status (Appendix B). Questions were categorized as follows: 1) familial roles prior to and during incarceration, 2) affect of criminal activity on family and thoughts on doing time, 3) contact preferences type (mail, calls, visits) and frequency of each contact type, 4) visitor relationships, 5) perception of visitation, 6) function of visits in the prisoner’s and visitor’s life, 7) description and experience of visit turmoil, 8) experience of visits with children, and 9) description and meaning of visits. In particular, prisoners were asked to reflect on their role within the family prior to and during incarceration, how their involvement in criminal activities affected their familial
roles, and how their roles may now vary. Interview questions also inquired about prisoners take on “doing time,” their contact preferences—mail, calls, and visits—the frequency that they received each form of contact, and who the prisoner maintains contact with and what type. Specific questions addressed inmates’ visits with children (the inmate’s own children and/or other children) as a result of preliminary observation findings indicating that children either received all of the attention during the visit or no attention.

In exploring the relationship between incarceration and familial relationships and familial roles it was important to inquire about other incarcerated family members and whether the inmate had ever visited an incarcerated family member prior to his own incarceration. The remaining portion of the interview focused on the incarcerated men’s thoughts about prison visits and other forms of contact, the role that prisoners perceive visits playing in their family relationships and details about possible incidences that may occur prior to or during the visit, such as a visitor unexpectedly missing a visiting session or having an argument in the visitation room. The “meaning of visits” section posed questions about who the inmate would keep on his visiting list if only permitted to receive visits from one individual, what makes a visit with the selected individual stand above visits with others, and the inmate’s most memorable visits, calls, and/or letters.

In addition to the open-ended questions, close-ended questions captured prisoner demographic, family background, incarceration history, and current sentence information. Research finds that the prisoner’s adaptation strategy relates to his social background, sentence length, and correctional facility type (Clemmer, 1958; Dhami et al., 2007; Goffman, 1961; see Moerings, 1983; Schmid & Jones, 1993; Sykes, 1958; Zamble,
1992). The interview incorporated questions aimed at understanding the prisoner’s social background prior to the current sentence.

*Trust and rapport.*

The social position of a researcher influences her approach to gathering and interpreting data. Over the course of my graduate career, I sustained the interest in bringing “a qualitative consciousness to the study of marginalized populations impacted by incarceration” (Arditti, Joest, Lambert-Shute, & Walker, 2010, p. 1389). I understood that mass incarceration and prisoner reentry were more than “sexy” criminological terms or issues for political agendas, rather, processes affecting families and communities. Throughout the project, my overarching concern was to accurately capture the curious dilemma prisoners’ face in integrating their role sets behind the wall.

I have four years of experience in conducting interviews with incarcerated populations and their family members and observed numerous prison visitation sessions at two New Jersey state prisons. During my undergraduate years, I interned at a state prison and assisted the lead psychologist in conducting inmate risk assessments.

By their nature, prisons contain a captive group seeking opportunities to leave their housing unit. As I arrived at the correctional facility, informed the project coordinator of my presence, and cleared the security check, correctional officers simultaneously contacted the housing units and work locations of potential participants. The officer on the housing unit or at the work location informed the inmate that he was requested and approved to go to a specific conference room in the POF. At this point, the inmate was unaware of the reasoning behind the direction given to him.
Upon the inmate’s arrival, I briefly introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study. Participants were receptive and positively reacted to participating in the research study. It is possible that the incarcerated men assumed that as a young African American female, I may be familiar with or shared similar experiences. A selected few African-American inmates expressed that they would not participate in the research project if the Principal Investigator (PI) was not of the same race, indicating that they did not trust an individual of another race to conduct such a study. The shared similar racial backgrounds of the incarcerated men, the PI, and I resulted in me being viewed as approachable, knowledgeable about the topic beyond academic research, and able to relate with and accurately deliver their stories. Participants did spread the word about the research project on the yard, since some inmates were interviewed more than one time. By the prisoners sharing their knowledge of and experiences with the interview, they confirmed my trustworthiness to other potential participants. A few participants entered the interview room asking, “is this that study?” Other inmates thought they were meeting with their social worker or lawyer upon arrival and expressed slight disappointment. Inmates stated that the questions were thought provoking and for some, evoked strong emotions related to deprivations, frustrations, and psychological suffering they experienced prior to and during their incarceration and/or to the pain and disappointment prisoners’ feel they have caused their family (Haney, 2002). For some participants, the interview served as a quasi therapy session and I became a “sympathetic ear” to the

Raymond was informed the day prior to the interview that his teen son was incarcerated at a local jail. He entered the session distraught and began to share his feelings on the impact of his incarceration on his family without my probing.
prisoners (Arditti et al., 2010), allowing them to safely express their emotions without judgment.

Limitations.

The New Jersey Department of Corrections prohibited the use of audio-recorders in any of the correctional facilities. At the initial implementation period of the study, I was permitted to bring a laptop with the wireless feature disabled into the POF. Utilizing a laptop enabled participant responses to be recorded immediately, during the interview session. However, I was unable to build a rapport with the participant or advance the conversation or interview while focusing on accurate recording. Approximately four months into the study the prison prohibited outside visitors, including researchers, from bringing laptops into the correctional facility. Consequently, interview notes were inscribed on a notepad to create a comfortable, uninterrupted atmosphere allowing inmates to recount and respond to posed questions without the steady sound of keys being punched. Data were typed up and reviewed to assure completeness after each interview.

Focus Group

Focus groups facilitate interaction on a topic not usually thought out in detail by study participants. Triangulating individual interviews and observational fieldwork with focus groups draws benefits. In addition to preliminary interviews and findings generating a focus group discussion guide, focus groups provide a basis for selecting additional interview participants or research sites for observational fieldwork (e.g., selection of comparison groups or theoretical sample), assist in further exploring issues raised in interview sessions, and provide initial exposure to the research setting (Morgan, 1997). For this study, the focus group session served three purposes: (1) enabled the
recruitment of a theoretical sample, (2) collection of additional information related to visitation and familial roles through surveys, (3) focus group discussion supplemented the interview and observation methods and allowed for an open and unrestricted dialogue with a diverse group of prisoners sharing similar experiences. This additional research strategy provided further clarification of the preliminary study findings and contributed to the analysis of the interviews and observations. In particular, the participants shared their life histories and spoke on the transformation of their familial roles, and things they did to try and maintain their familial status such as "creating crafts, cards, sending flowers."

With the dialogue, the men were able to build from each other’s thoughts, yet, each participant expressed his individual approach. The following factors helped the discussion to evolve naturally – (1) the classroom where the session occurred was a familiar setting, (2) the college professor was a trusted individual, (3) the men worked together as a class, and (4) I provided a brief introduction to the research days prior to the focus group session. The background and perspectives were diverse and varied greatly.

I met the college professor when attending one of New Jersey’s public hearings designed to address and assess the unintended consequences and costs of incarceration on families, communities, prisoners, and prison conditions. She read a poignant and detailed letter written by her incarcerated student that addressed “visits, telephone, and contact with family.” I immediately introduced myself and research interests. She extended an offer to hold focus group sessions in her college courses held at the POF. The enrolled incarcerated students must have at least a high school diploma to register for the college

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6 Correctional officers were not present in the class.
7 Quote of Anthony, focus group participant.
8 Classes are two times a week at the POF.
course, eligible to receive college credits, and awarded with a certificate upon course completion.

Initially, I planned to hold two focus groups, one with each class session. On Day 1, the instructor booked three presenters for a two-hour timeframe. Unfortunately, I was unable to conduct a focus group session that day but I introduced the research background. On Day 2, I was allotted the full class period, distributed consent forms and surveys, and stimulated a discussion on prison visiting and role management. Students were asked to share their experience with visits and other forms of contact, such as phone calls and mail, specifically in the POF and then throughout their entire sentence. I became familiar with the prisoners’ sentence length, conviction, interests, and knowledgeable about their family background, with students bringing in pictures of their children and articles related to the hardships associated with incarceration.

The surveys served as an abbreviated version of the inmate interview and captured inmate demographic information, inquired about inmate support systems, and type of contact preference and contact frequency. The discussion naturally took shape as the men completed their surveys and I asked, “what’s your take on prison visits?” The opening inquiry led to an extensive discussion on prison regulations, the trouble with visits and calls, the loss of familial roles, and how men enact familial roles during their sentence. Four of the 12 focus group participants were selected as the theoretical sample based on survey responses, discussion points, and their family background. The college professor and incarcerated students were unaware of my selection. I intentionally did not select the participant who provided the articulate submission to the New Jersey public.

Another presenter had much more interesting story. He survived a debilitating disease and had unsightly scars to show the class.
hearings in an effort to prevent an elite bias effect, by overweighting data from articulate and high-status participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, I have included his documentation, the letter submitted in the hearings (Appendix C). The theoretical sample complemented existing data sources and refined emerging categories (Charmaz, 2002).

Observational Fieldwork

During observation sessions, I became familiar with inmate-family interactions, the visiting environment, treatment of visitors by correctional staff and more generally, was better able to understand and “ascertain the nature of prison visitation” (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002, p. 71) (see Appendix D for observation protocol). Observation permits the researcher to draw inferences about the subjects’ meaning and perspective that may not be clear by solely relying on interview data (Maxwell, 1996). For example, throughout the interviews, men were not likely to share detailed accounts on the type of games played with visiting children, religious rituals practiced, or strategies used to effectively spend quality time with each visitor. These behaviors were observed leading to the development and inclusion of additional questions in the interview protocol.

Approximately 12 hours of direct observations were conducted during weekend visitation sessions in the main compound visiting area- two morning and three afternoon sessions- with each visitation session occurring in about a two and a half hour interval. The coordinator assigned to the project also scheduled the observation sessions upon the administrator’s approval.

Observations were conducted before engaging in participant interviews and throughout the interview phase of the project. It was important to continuously explore this dynamic social process before gathering data and after conducting interviews to
incorporate possible observations and recurring concepts expressed by inmates, and refine emerging themes that surfaced during interviews (Charmaz, 2006). In addition to observing the general inmate population, I observed one visitation session for two of the 25 interview participants.

The fieldwork allowed the critical consideration of the interaction patterns between inmates, family members, children, and/or friends and the body language and behavior of inmates and family members. Fieldnotes captured how inmate and family members greeted each other, expressed their goodbyes, how children were kept entertained throughout the visit, visit terminations, the practice of rituals, such as prayer, and any unique circumstances surrounded the visitation program on the observation day. The protocol was used as a model to guide the observation session not as a structured questionnaire (Matthews, 2005). Notes were periodically jotted down, capturing important points by writing key terms. Fieldnotes were expanded and I made note of key reminders and occurrences during the visiting session when leaving the research site and arriving at my destination. Observations were formally recorded within three days of the fieldwork.

The observation period was particularly important because I repeatedly studied aspects of role enactment and performance that an inmate may not recognize or mention in the interview. For example, in an observation session, an inmate perceived to be a son, tied his visiting mother’s sneaker laces. During an interview, the inmate son may not express that he grooms his mother when visiting. In this same session, I observed male-female couple whispering in each other’s ear. This type of intimate behavior of whispering in a spouse’s ear or running fingers over her face may not be divulged in the
inmate interview. In yet another observation session, inmates perceived to be fathers
played games such as “rock, paper, scissors” with their children and suspended them in
the air similar to an airplane. When interviewed, the incarcerated father may not view
these individual actions as creating family time in the visitation room. These are sound
text examples of inmates abiding the restrictions of the prison and managing their role within
the family simultaneously.

**Impression management and adverse events.**

In conducting observations in a prison setting, I became aware of “impression
management” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The appearance and body language of
research “affect both our own experiences of fieldwork and the nature of the data we
collect” (Coffey, 1999, p. 60). During the observation sessions I was suspiciously
examined by inmates and their visitors because I was not wearing a correctional officer
uniform nor appeared to be part of the administrative staff, had to don a DOC badge, sit
at the front table with the correctional officers, and not allowed to freely roam the
visitation room. I entered and departed the visitation hall with an officer. I was an
outsider to the POF community and the social setting and as a result, I consciously
monitored my gestures and non-verbal behavior, appearance, interactions, and made sure
not to present an attitude of superiority.

My physical appearance, including style of dress and demeanor, influenced how
prisoners, visitors, and correctional officers perceived me. I was very conscious of my
body language and facial expressions, and consciously made an effort to not appear too
friendly towards the prisoners and their visitors to avoid being perceived as a threat to the
guards. Since inmates expressed in interview sessions that female officers and staff
members were permitted to wear tightly fitting clothing which upset visiting females who were forced to wear less body conscious clothing, I made sure to dress plainly in the setting and downplay my appearance, not to be seen as a threat to visitors. Although I worked to influence the culture’s perception of me by regulating and controlling physical and non-verbal information, interview participants would later mention that I was noticed in the visiting room and assumed to be affiliated with the NJDOC central office.

On the scheduled day of the observation, the superior officer informed staff members why I was there and what to do with me. Officers welcomed questions about the institution’s operation and procedures and the visiting process. Yet, the continuous and constant conversation of the officers made the observation session challenging. Inmates and visitors noticed the ongoing conversation, further affirming the NJDOC central office theory. As a result, regular interaction between an inmate and family member may have changed due to my presence in the setting. I detected family members who visited the table where I was seated carefully examined my identification badge, seated inmates and members guarded their conversations with their bodies, and others relocated to a different side of the visiting hall out of my view. The fieldnote provides an example of my possible too close and watchful observation that led a family to move from my direct sight.

Sunday, April 20, 2008

9:10 a.m. - Wave of visitors enter.

I notice a Black woman with a young daughter, about 7 years of age, wearing matching yellow shirts. The mother and daughter find seating on the right of where I am stationed.

10 I declined an officer’s invitation to attend a paintball outing. Others inquired about my background and relationship status, I successfully skirted around the line of questioning.
The inmate spots the woman and daughter and walks over to where they are seated. The couple quickly embraces and sits down. The daughter positions herself between one of the inmate’s legs and one of her mother’s legs. Although not permitted the family members are sitting side by side and holding hands.

9:15 a.m. - Correctional officers commence the security walk through the room. More visitors enter.

The inmate is cradling his daughter as if she is an infant.

9:30 a.m. - Two more correctional officers enter the room. The next wave of visitors enter. The majority of this visiting group wear large white t-shirts.

Now, the woman sits across from the inmate. The couple rubs palms and forearms. Moments later, the daughter lies across the inmate’s legs. The inmate feeds the daughter chips.

9:40 a.m. - Final wave of visitors enter wave of visitors.

I lose sight of the family, they are no longer seated towards my right.

10:30 a.m. - I notice the family seated toward my left. The bodies of other seated prisoners and visitors block my view of them.

As time throughout the session elapsed, inmates and visitors interest in my presence waned.

I was only permitted to walk around the visiting room with a correctional officer and seated at a station within the room that served as a help/information desk for inmates and their family members. Inmates and/or their family members visited this station when they had questions, concerns, or needed their approved medical prescriptions. While seated at the station I was able to gather information on inmate and family concerns such as the location of an inmate or visiting family member who has yet to arrive in the visiting room or inmates’ requests to terminate visits. Additionally, correctional officers were able to provide their personal insight regarding inmates and their families. When
taking a tour of the visiting room with an officer, it became obvious that I was an out-of-place foreigner. Only three groups existed in the visitation room: 1) prisoners, 2) visitors, and 3) officers. My badge and escort indicated that I did not fit into either category.

Officers encouraged that I depart the visiting room prior to the end of the session. Inmates and family members had to line up against opposite walls, watch officers flip chairs over to check for contraband, and wait for officers to perform an official count to ensure that the number of inmates and visitors leaving the facility was the same as the number that entered, before allowed to leave the institution. This process could become lengthy if officers discovered contraband or the count did not clear. Consequently, I accepted their offer and departed the room as the visiting session concluded. Family members who were lined up against the wall and waiting to be discharged held bewildered facial expressions as I strolled across the gymnasium floor. Along with being accustomed to the departure process and wait time, visitors were familiar with the POF visiting rules and regulations that indicated no person will be permitted to leave the visiting session once in the visiting room until termination of visits.

Other factors affecting the observation sessions included prison violence as exemplified by the fieldnote below.

Saturday, February 23, 2008

12:45 p.m.

When walking up to the prison I heard someone announce something over the prison intercom system. When I entered into the facility visitors, around 80 people were in line waiting to be processed. I informed the CO why I was there, and she said to have a seat because a CODE was called. The code was called because an inmate slashed (possibly stabbed) another inmate’s throat. The inmate who was the perpetrator was supposedly a Latin King and the other a Blood. The inmate walked up on the inmate
while in the “mess line” (possible mess hall) and stabbed him from behind about five times from the back.

Because of the incident, the visitation did not have the usual number of COs when the visitation session started. Many COs were sent to secure different areas of the prison, leaving the visitation program with few officers.

At 1:15 p.m. it was announced that the visitation program is now in progress.

During the session, officers shared that in the 8:45 a.m. visit; two inmates were suspected of transporting drugs from the visiting hall to their tier. The COs had to check the prisoners’ feces. One of the inmates mentioned that he was on a liquid diet, therefore he will not produce any feces, the CO responded that, “oh well, we will be here until something comes out.” The CO said that the inmate in question does not want to mess up because he has a funeral home visit scheduled on Tuesday.

These notes illustrate how questions of security may potentially affect the prison staff, visitors, inmates, and visiting academic researchers. The incidents may influence the attitudes and interaction between family members, inmates, and correctional officers. The visitors may become nervous during the session especially if there is less visible security, officers may become more vigilant and watchful of inmates and their visitors to prevent further violent or drug smuggling incidences from occurring, and inmates and visitors may take advantage of the less visible security and/or become bothered by the intense watchful eyes of the officers. This occurrence of violence may have alarmed some researchers and resulted in the termination of observations for that day. However, my interest was heightened. I felt it the perfect time to capture variation in prisoner-family interaction. Nonetheless, I did find myself counting the number of officers in the visitation room and making the determination that the room was grossly understaffed.

Correctional staff were not hopeful of the victim’s status. I was a bit on edge during this observation session.
The process of conducting prison interviews and observational fieldwork required much energy and tenacity. Though I only spent a few hours at a time in the POF, I left the setting extremely physically, mentally, and emotionally drained and exhausted. The prison population resembled members of my age and racial cohort. Some of the participants’ life stories were far from ordinary and contained instances of abuse and neglect. But, everyday that I departed from the prisoners, their families, and correctional staff, I reminded myself of my ability to leave the prison and capacity and commitment to giving voice to the incarcerated men.

**Ethical Considerations**

I received permission from the New Jersey Department of Corrections and POF’s Administrators (3) to conduct the current study. The research was approved by Rutgers Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Department of Corrections Institutional Review Board under Dr. Johnna Christian’s National of Institute of Justice sponsored project entitled, “Exploring Factors Influencing Family Members’ Connections to Prisoners’,” IRB #04-405Mp.

Special ethical considerations had to be taken with the inclusion of imprisoned persons as study participants. Prior to the interviews and focus group session, inmates were presented with consent forms (Appendix A), and provided with information about the project and assured confidentiality. Inmates were informed that participation in the research study would not affect their visits, visitors, phone calls, standing in the institution or before the parole board. Interview, surveys, and other data collection instruments were assigned random numbers, not linked with the prisoner’s state ID or prison ID number. Identifying participant information is held in the School of Criminal
Justice, Rutgers University locked file office cabinet and removed from all electronic files. Each prisoner was presented with the opportunity to end his participation in the interview, survey, or focus group if he became uncomfortable. Inmates were suggested to meet with the prison counseling staff if experiencing difficulties related to their study participation. Lastly, it was uncovered during the pilot phase that inmates were not interested in receiving compensation for participation, the correctional facility did not fully support providing incentives, and inmates rarely received the compensation, therefore, neither incentives nor compensation were provided.

Reliability and Validity of the Research

Qualitative research must consider the validity, confirmability, dependability, reliability, auditability, creditability, authenticity, and transferability of the study’s research methods and findings. It is equally important to determine the usefulness and application of the research results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers are unable to “control for the effect of particular variables” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 88), however, existing standards help to assess “the trustworthiness and authenticity of naturalistic research (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 277). To strengthen the confirmability, reliability/dependability, internal validity/creditability, and external validity/transferability of the research methods and findings, the following measures were taken: (1) inclusion of a representative sample, (2) purposeful inclusion of potentially contrasting cases, (3) data were triangulated, (4) fieldnotes and interview responses were recorded in a timely fashion, (5) received
feedback on typological categories from colleague researchers\textsuperscript{12}, and (6) data are discussed in context.

\textit{Confirmability.}

In an attempt to recognize my possible bias in the research, I explicitly outlined the research methods and procedures of the research design. The sample were randomly selected from the prison master list, others participated in a focus group-I did not know members of the sample prior to our initial meeting, and others selected from the focus group for participation in the interview. Fieldnotes and interview responses were recorded in a timely manner, and other documentation such as surveys, letters, and supplementary materials have been scanned for electronic access\textsuperscript{13}. I entered the project open minded and only had the pilot study findings to influence my expectations of the study and participants. I shared my experiences in the field with Dr. Johnna Christian, the dissertation committee chair. We discussed some of the emotional aspects of conducting research in a prison setting, and developed strategies for addressing potential fatigue and unintentional bias. She independently reviewed fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and provided direction on further probing of participants and revising the protocols to highlight emergent themes.

\textsuperscript{12} Gained feedback on typologies from colleagues at well-respected multi-site criminal justice research institute; findings shared and discussed at national criminology conferences.

\textsuperscript{13} Inmate names have been blacked out on the survey and replaced with a Study ID number.
Dependability.

Dependability refers to the “quality control” of the research design execution. The process of the study should be “consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). The research design complemented the research questions, and the multiple data collection methods tackled the questions through various means. Additionally, the interview guide evolved throughout the study to ensure that the questions accurately captured inmates’ perceptions of visitations and strategies used to enact and manage familial roles in the prison setting. Data were gathered over a period of nine months and guided by findings from the pilot study. The research presents a range of settings, times, and respondents. The culmination of these factors reveals a stable research design and findings.

Limitations rested within the dependability of the collected data – data relied primarily on self-reported information, fieldnotes were handwritten as opposed to audio recorded, and the researcher’s characteristics shaped the data collection process. Self reported data face issues with recall, honesty, and exaggeration of events as the most serious threats to accuracy. In spite of the potential threats, self-reported data is the best method to measure and gain information on unobservable behaviors and perceptions. The study is embedded with quality checks of the gathered data. In example, six of the participants were interviewed two times and presented with similarly worded questions at the follow up interview to cross-check responses. Participants provided consistent responses and information to the comparable questions.

Researchers face a myriad of challenges when gathering data in a correctional setting. The goals of these institutions are to provide a safe, secure, and potentially
rehabilitating setting for prisoners and assist in protecting the public at large. The environmental setting was uninviting and restrictive regarding movement, contact, and interaction (Arditti et al., 2010). Correctional facilities limit the types of technological devices permitted on the premise, administrative departments closely scrutinize the execution of the research design, and one negative incident can greatly affect the prison’s operating procedures and your proposed research. Consequently, I was not permitted to bring an audio recorder into the prison and the provision for laptops was changed during the execution of the study. These restrictions and changes led to the interview responses and focus group discussion being recorded by hand written notes. Fieldnotes, inclusive of observations, were electronically recorded in a timely manner. As a graduate student that has assisted professors with roundtables and other conferences, I have extensive experience with capturing exact and comprehensive notes through handwriting\textsuperscript{14}.

Throughout the dissertation study, I gathered the data and therefore shaped the data collection process. My characteristics may have influenced the type of and access to the data divulged by the participants. Participants expressed that I was considered a member of their group by sharing a similar background and age\textsuperscript{15} and those factors supported their decision to participate in the research. Another crucial consideration lies in the fact that I was a rather young female researcher in an all male correctional institution. It can be assumed that a segment of the sample were not going to deny spending time with or complain about talking to a woman who was not a correctional

\textsuperscript{14} Handwritten notes that were later typed helped to develop an international publication. *Bringing families in: Recommendations of the incarceration, reentry and family roundtables* (2006). A joint project of the Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice.

\textsuperscript{15} Researcher is a Black woman and 29 years of age at time of interviews.
staff member or lawyer. I realized that I was partially securing interviews based on my racial and gender characteristics when inmates inquired about my relationship status, attempted to interview me, and/or began to reveal their charisma by adding jokes to responses. The impact of my status was evident when spending time with the correctional officers during the observation sessions as well\textsuperscript{16}. Consequently, participants may have withheld accounts that would result in my viewing them in a negative light; a researcher with different characteristics may have obtained dissimilar data.

\textit{Creditability.}

Triangulation and complementary methods countered the limitations to dependability and increases creditability. Participants were recruited through a number of sampling techniques, and includes participants that received and did not receive visits at the time of the study. The research revealed meaningful findings that are in contrast with social science’s preconceived assumptions that all inmates benefit from visitation sessions (exception, Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002; Casey-Acevedo et al., 2004) yet are in support of role strain theory propositions. The findings build upon emergent results established in the pilot study phase indicating that prisoners’ prior and current roles and the (in)ability to enact such roles influences their perceptions of visitation.

The circumstances surrounding the data collection procedures were not ideal however, the methods provided access to a population that is widely referenced but rarely included in research that examines the multiple affects of incarceration on prisoners, families, and communities. The data are imperfect and may be considered narrow but it

\textsuperscript{16} Previously referenced the incident where the officer extended an invitation to a paintball event.
lays the foundation for future work. When identifying the target population, other populations (i.e. transitional and reentry center residents, and paroles) under the jurisdiction of the department of corrections were considered. Yet, each population has different visitation experiences. Individuals participating in reentry center programming or residing in transitional housing are likely to be placed in an area close to their families’ residences, able to receive visits more frequently, and permitted to engage in increased physical contact with visitors. Parolees would have been required to recall and compare their perception on visitation at different time points – time in prison to time in a transitional/reentry center. The goal of this research was to capture the perception of the incarcerated men as they experienced the events and were situated in the environmental context of prison.

Transferability.

The transferability of the research references the ability of the findings to be transferable to other contexts. It refers to the internal generalizability of “a conclusion within the setting or group studied” and “external generalizability refers to the generalizability beyond that setting or group” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 97). The population of POF prisoners with the exception of those in restricted units each had the same likelihood in being selected for the study. Twenty-one of the participants were randomly selected from the POF master list\(^{17}\). The participants closely matched the POF population and the state prison population. However, the participants are serving lengthy sentences, particularly prisoners included in the focus group.

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\(^{17}\) Six of the 21 participants were randomly selected for the pilot study.
Findings were shared with colleagues, outside of New Jersey, working on similar projects and at criminology conferences\textsuperscript{18}. In these discussions, others expressed how they could immediately associate typological categories with incarcerated individuals from their studies or projects. The findings were found to be consistent with their experiences. It is important to note that correctional facilities vary in how they operate their visiting program. New Jersey prohibits conjugal visits, and state facilities share similar formal visiting regulations and conditions, however, each New Jersey prison has informal practices independent of the formal rules.

Through the triangulation of methods, the dissertation research supplies “rich” data and employs tactics for confirming the findings (Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The existing limitations have not impeded upon the ability to “develop approximations of the truth that have firmer warrant than common sense” (Firestone, 1990, p. 123). The research captured the participants in their natural setting and attempted to bring meaning to and set experiences and prisoner perceptions in context.

Data Analysis

The preliminary codes that emerged from the pilot study established that prisoners’ views on visitation are complex, and, in fact, some inmates would rather not receive visits. From these results, it became apparent that the relationship between the perception of visitation and prisoners’ prior and current roles was multifaceted and warranted further examination. It was the purpose of this study to begin the exploration

\textsuperscript{18} Gained feedback on typologies from colleagues at well-respected multi-site criminal justice research institute; findings shared and discussed at national criminology conferences.
of those relationships and address the questions of: (1) what influences prisoners’
decision to continue or desist contact with their family during incarceration, (2) uncover
how incarcerated men manage the simultaneous enactment and performance of prison
and familial roles during visitation sessions when directly faced with conflicting role
obligations and throughout the prison sentence, and (3) identify the function of visitation
in the enactment of prisoners’ familial roles.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted under a larger qualitative research project
exploring family members’ connections to incarcerated men directed by Dr. Johnna
Christian. A random sample of prisoners were selected from the POF Master List as well
as another New Jersey State prison. Thirty-three incarcerated men participated in the pilot
study. Within the interview guide for the larger project, six open-ended questions
addressed how inmates viewed visitation, and the ways in which it strengthened or
hindered their family relationships. Emergent themes from the interviews indicated that
male prisoners related visitation with the following concepts: (1) envy/jealousy, (2)
regret and blame, (3) self-preservation/distress, (4) cathartic/stress relief, and (5) family
role maintenance. Additionally, two opposing key points confirmed the need to further
build this study—inmates equated love to the number of times a family member or friend
visits, in contrast, not all inmates wanted to receive visits for various reasons. For
instance, to receive a visit meant that the inmate was cared about, important to someone
outside the prison, and held a role in the visiting family member or friend’s life. Inmates
who refused or discouraged others from visiting expressed not wanting to deal with
problems on the outside in which they had no control over, the need to focus exclusively
on finishing their sentence, and/or visits reminded these inmates of missteps and the
negative impact incarceration has placed on their families. Overall, the findings
demonstrated that the prisoners’ perception of visits varied by time served, inmate age,
and role(s) and responsibilities held within the family prior to and during the
incarceration period.

I will briefly review the five emergent conceptual categories (1) envy/jealousy,
(2) regret and blame, (3) self-preservation/distress, (4) cathartic/stress relief, and (5)
family role maintenance to lay the groundwork for data analysis procedures of the current
study. The concept of envy and jealousy includes inmate discussions in which they
described concerns in which inmates who were not receiving visits were envious and/or
jealous of inmates receiving visits, including times when inmates did not inform other
prisoners when expecting a visit because of the anticipated negative reactions. For
instance, one participant held,

Lenny¹⁹: You have to be careful because people know that you are having
a visit…You have to be careful because people get jealous. They want
their people to come, people stand by the door to wait and see if they are
going to get a visit…His peoples come here and there, if they don’t come
it’s like he will go crazy, you can see it, it is like mental.

In addition, participants conveyed experiencing feelings of regret and blame. The
incarcerated men held negative views about themselves because of their physical and
emotional inaccessibility to their family members and children, prior to and during the
incarceration period. This theme comes to life when an inmate disclosed that he and his
sons were incarcerated in the same facility, and when another incarcerated father met his

¹⁹ Participated in pilot research only.
son for the first time in prison because he has been locked up for the better part of his son’s life. Richard\textsuperscript{20}, an incarcerated father and grandfather expressed,

Richard: Sure I can tell them (his two sons) things when they come visit me, but then they are back out in the world. They are coming to jail or prison and it has a lot to do with my incarceration here. When they were smaller and I was there, they stayed out of trouble. They didn’t get incarcerated until I wasn’t there…I can give them insight on whatever they are going through, but it’s different from being there.

Fourteen of the 33 inmates viewed the receipt of visits as stressful, “too serious and intense,” and at times were not welcomed. Receiving prison visits was “…a catch 22, you want to see them but you don’t want to see them leave.” The incarcerated men felt the need to focus only on “doing their bid” - visits introduced outside problems beyond their control and were too painful to deal with from week-to-week. The concept of not being able to handle the potential stress associated with receiving visits is coded as self-preservation/distress. Inmates worked to preserve themselves from destruction, harm, and additional stress that may affect, and potentially weaken, their psychological state. Some inmates believed that having family members visit distracted the incarcerated men from life inside the prison walls and made adapting to prison life increasingly difficult. Inmates expressed not wanting to be included or updated on any family happenings and when receiving visits, felt that family members held expectations of them or members used the period as a therapeutic session and dumped their problems from the outside world on the inmate. Given that incarcerated men are only able to provide minimal assistance from behind the walls, these exchanges became uncomfortable and stress

\textsuperscript{20} Participated in pilot research and dissertation research study.
producing. To avoid such visits, prisoners managed their sessions and visitors by accepting visits only from specific family members.

Contrary to the previous themes that portray damaging aspects of visitation sessions for prisoners, some of the participants described visits as a cathartic event, similar to a stress reliever (cathartic/stress relief). Prisoner-family visitation sessions helped to calm inmate nerves and stabilize psychological well-being and health. The final theme, family role maintenance, presents a promising explanation as to why visits may either induce or reduce prisoner stress. Some inmates suggested that visitation sessions offered imprisoned men: (1) an opportunity to assert familial roles, (2) reminded the prisoners of their inability to enact familial roles, or (3) reinforced prisoners’ lack of familial roles. The men described instances where they attempted to maintain their role within the family as father, disciplinarian, caregiver, husband, provider, support system, lover, son, but faced numerous restrictions associated with incarceration. Men worried about the livelihood of their family without them, while others expressed concern about someone else taking on their role within the family.

Present Study

In line with the grounded theory methodological (GTM) approach, data collection and analysis procedures occurred simultaneously and followed an interactive pattern. The constant comparison of the data allowed for the continual identification of similarities and differences across the data. Analysis of interviews provided a contextual understanding of observed behaviors and actions occurring at the visitation session; analysis of observations continually informed the interview guide and focus group
sessions. I continuously recorded memos to clarify ideas and tie together and/or differentiate strands of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Using the thematic categories from the pilot study, (1) envy/jealousy, (2) regret and blame, (3) self-preservation/distress, (4) cathartic/stress relief, and (5) family role maintenance, I closely examined the data sentence by sentence to capture the major ideas of each phrase (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These emergent themes guided my coding and assisted in identifying the language and conditions associated with enacting and performing specific roles.

To truly immerse myself in the data, I manually and methodically reviewed hard copies of each interview and supplementary data. Emergent concepts were recorded in the margins of the documents. (The computer-operated qualitative data management program, NVivo 8 aided in later stages of the analysis by identifying word combinations in the text or patterns in the coding.) The data underwent open coding until achieving theoretical sufficiency where data were classified, regularities surfaced, and coding did not reveal new insights about concepts (Charmaz, 2006; Dey, 1999; LaRossa, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I identified more than 200 labels that centered around categories such as participants’ pre-prison and current familial roles and familial relationships, expectations of family members and prisoners, life histories and experiences, barriers in maintaining familial ties, emotions experienced as result of maintaining or disconnecting familial ties, inmate fears, religiosity and spirituality, support provided to and/or from the family, stress, strain and regret, street life and hustling, intimate interaction, family and prisoner adjustments, family loyalty, inmate control, and financial burdens. The variation of the labels suggested that a number of
factors influence prisoners’ familial role performance and the function of visits in the lives of prisoners.

These refined categories led to focused coding procedures and enhanced categorization of the data. Throughout the process of focused coding I investigated the array of continuity and divergence across the categories. Due to the complexity of prisoners’ life events, roles, emotions, and experiences with familial contact, role strain and transition theories were integrated into this analysis phase and served two purposes, 1) established a dialogue between the data in analysis and extant theory, and 2) sensitized the identification of patterns and processes relevant to role obligations, expectations, performances, and ultimately role negotiation (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). In the iterative process of moving between grounded theory analysis and theoretical literature it became apparent that further linking dimensions to categories required an organizing scheme. The scheme for the analysis included structural factors consisting of participant age at first and current incarceration, total confinement time throughout life history, structure of family unit, and incorporated actions and interactions, including pre-prison and current familial roles, contact patterns, and familial relationships. The organizing scheme helped to shape case summaries, guided cross-case analysis, and resulted in the development of categories and their properties (see LaRossa, 2005).

Categories of familial roles included fathering, brothering, being a son, and husbanding. These categories were based on emergent role behaviors that characterized the prisoners’ current performances in the family rather than actual familial roles held by the men. In advancing the coding procedures, properties of the categories – fathering, brothering, being a son, and husbanding - were identified. Dimensions that constituted
the category of fathering were unengaged fathering, engaged fathering, and differential fathering. Engaged fathering was linked with the commitment to continue the performance of fathering duties during incarceration. In fathering, men initiated contact with their children, kept up-to-date on their children’s statuses, and enlisted the help of other family members to assist with enacting in their fathering duties. Unengaged fathering was associated with implementing a hard timing or dormancy approach to fathering and forgoing fathering obligations during imprisonment. Unengaged fathering demonstrated the incapability of fulfilling the cultural expectations related to fathering due to multiple barriers and prior behaviors, experiences, and relationships. Differential fathering related to inconsistency in performing fathering obligations and behaviors. Fathering responsibilities were abandoned in one family, yet, performed in another family system. Brothering was associated with dependent brothering and sustained brothering. Dependent brothering was defined as the reliance on and draining of family resources to continue the performance of the prisoner’s pre-prison familial roles. Siblings defined the prisoners’ role obligations and assisted in enacting, at times wholly adopting, and performing the role behaviors. Sustained brothering was defined as commitment to enact pre-prison familial roles during incarceration and exercising agency to redefine the pre-prison roles to fit within the environmental and psychological context of prison. Roles were redefined with heavy emphasis on leadership and support characteristics. Being a son was connected with dependent/reliant son and sustained son. To demonstrate, high reliance on parental input to construct, define, deliver, and perform pre-prison familial role behaviors was coded as a dependent/reliant son. The relationship with and expectations of parents defined the prisoner’s current familial role and status. Being a
sustained son was synonymous with sustained brothering. Husbanding was linked with engaged partner and unengaged partner. Surprisingly, the analysis revealed few men who expressed solely husbanding behaviors. However, the subcategory of engaged partnering was linked with the commitment to continue the performance of spousal and fathering duties during incarceration. Unengaged husbanding was associated with familial role dormancy, the abandonment of fathering and husbanding role obligations. It is in this phase that I examined and compared properties across the categories and investigated causes, contexts, consequences, and conditions (LaRossa, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

These coding procedures rendered emergent role negotiation patterns and pathways across all cases. In transitioning to the role of prisoner, participants engaged in a form of negotiation of their pre-prison familial roles to fit the environmental context of prison. The incarcerated men’s integration strategy and performance of their pre-prison familial role varied. By establishing dimensions of the categories I was able to discern commonly shared indicators that influenced the pathway of role negotiation. As the grounded theory analysis progressed, defining features of prisoners’ negotiation strategies emerged. The variation in role negotiation strategies centered on the following axes: a) pre-prison investments in the family, b) role performances and behaviors, c) contact with role senders, and d) self-identity. These axes shaped how the men negotiated their familial roles during visitation sessions and throughout their sentences. In considering the infusion of the axes, propositions were drawn to construct incarcerated role negotiator typological groups – Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer.

In uncovering the “main story underlying the analysis” (LaRossa, 2005, p. 850), the dissertation findings establish, in accordance with Cottrell (1942), Goode (1960) and
Burr’s (1972) propositions, that incarcerated men experienced role strain as a consequence of undergoing a process of negotiating the expectations and obligations of their pre-prison and current roles behind the wall. The prisoners differ in how they construct and integrate their role sets and negotiate and manage the expectations and enactment of roles. For the inmates, contact with role senders, especially in the form of visitation sessions highlighted the multiplicity of their role system and their ability and/or inability to perform in familial roles, which dependent on the negotiation pathway, increased or decreased role strain.
CHAPTER 5

The Visitation Room and Incarcerated Role Negotiators

Chapter 5 sets the context for the dissertation research findings. First, the chapter outlines the visitation regulations of the POF, presents informal practices, describes the POF visitation room, and introduces the contact patterns and preferences of the incarcerated men. Second, the chapter details how incarcerated men construct and enact familial roles within the correctional setting, by characterizing the Incarcerated Role Negotiator (IRN) typological groups.

As discussed in the section, “Factors and deprivations affecting the prison experience,” found in Chapter 2, prison is a total institution, defined as a place of residence and work where individuals are disconnected from society for a period of time and lead enclosed, formally administered lives (Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958). The POF reflects the identified characteristics of and adheres to the common practices of total institutions. The incarcerated men in the facility have been charged and convicted of a crime, sanctioned with a prison sentence and placed within the medium-security level setting to serve the mandated time. POF prisoners are: (1) physically removed from their families and communities by physical and psychological barriers, (2) identified by a number, (3) under the authority of the POF and New Jersey Department of Corrections, (4) mandated to follow a regimented schedule, and (5) dress in coordinated khaki uniforms from head to toe. Moreover, prisoners are required to wait a period of time to receive approval of their call and visiting lists before being granted permission to make phone calls and receive visits. Additionally, prisoners are reminded daily that receipt of
in prison employment\(^1\) or allowance to participate in vocational and educational courses is a privilege, given that not every prisoner is assigned a position to work or permitted to attend courses.

The Visitation Room and Regulations

The New Jersey Department of Corrections official website and the “Inmate Handbook for POF” (2003), specify ten visitation procedures that visitors and prisoners must follow. The basic rules and regulations require offenders to list potential visitors, provides a list of persons who may be approved to visit an offender (i.e., relatives, close friends, clergy, persons who may have a constructive influence), states that photo identification must be presented by visitors, only money orders or certified checks are acceptable forms of currency that can be deposited into an offender’s account, and lastly, all of a visitor’s belongings may be checked while on the POF premises. In accordance with the New Jersey Department of Corrections regulations, the POF provides physical contact and window (non-contact) visits, allotting one hour per week per inmate for window visits. Prisoners are permitted to receive one and one half hours for contact visits per weekend day (Saturday and Sunday). Visitors are not permitted to leave the visit hall until the termination of the session. Those individuals who depart prior to the close of the session are indefinitely removed from the inmate visiting list. Accompanying the prescribed regulations, corrections officers practice discretion in implementing formal and informal policies. As found by Nurse (2002) in her research of young incarcerated and paroled fathers, correctional staff allow exceptions to the rules as a way to reward compliant inmates.

\(^1\) POF prisoners receive minimal earnings from in-prison employment.
During weekend contact visiting sessions, the POF permits 150 inmates and four visitors per inmate, space permitting. The regulations do not specify the limit of the number of children allowed to visit. As outlined in the inmate handbook (NJDOC 2003, p. 26), the prison maintains an authorized general population visit program according to the following schedule:

On Saturdays, Sundays and seasonal visits, there will be three visits and registration periods. Visits will be one and a half (1 ½ hours) in duration, and limited to a maximum of one hundred fifty (150) inmates. The number of visitors per inmate is four (4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:45</td>
<td>Visitor Registration Opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>Visit Registration Opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45</td>
<td>Visitor Registration Closes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>Visitor Registration Closes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45</td>
<td>Visit Period Begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>Visit Period Begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>Visit Period Ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45</td>
<td>Visit Period Ends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These visit/registration times are equally applicable to the Minimum Unit visit program.

Special Visits (extended, hospital, multiple, etc.) are permitted upon written request from the inmate to be visited. These requests are to be forwarded to Assistant Superintendent [of POF], who is the administrative person in charge of visits, for approval. The request should be at least 48 hours in advance.

Authorized Visitors—Before being allowed to visit any inmate at [POF], a visitor’s name must be added to the visit list. In addition a man’s relatives (mother, father, sister, brother, wife, child) with (8) additional parties may be registered for a minimum of ninety (90) days. After ninety (90) days, a visitor’s name may be removed and replaced by another, not to exceed a total of fifty (50) visitors.

Visitors may be added to an inmate’s visit card four (4) times a year. Visitor(s) dropped from an inmate’s visit card must remain off the card for a period of sixty (60) days and any visitor may only be on one inmate’s list except with the permission of the Administrator.
Children under the age of 18 shall not be permitted to visit unless accompanied and supervised by a family member defined as a “relative” (See N.J.A.C. 10A:18-1.3).

In unusual circumstances, exceptions shall be made by special approval.

Inmates residing in high-risk units, such as the gang or mental health units, or in solitary confinement were excluded from the dissertation study for security reasons. According to POF staff, these incarcerated men have declared allegiance to a gang and/or may suffer from severe mental illness. The high-risk population is allowed to receive limited visits (usually non-contact), yet the POF administration advised against including the population in this study. The excluded inmates are not included as part of the general prison population and many spend the greater part of their day in lockdown within the facility or enclosed in single unit, outdoor gated areas. Further regulations of contact methods are outlined in Appendix E.

The Room

The majority of inmates permitted to receive visits, receive contact visits during the weekend. The contact, weekend visitation sessions were held in the POF gymnasium. Prior to entering the visitation hall, visitors waited in a roped line in the prison’s main entranceway with a sign indicating, “Line Starts Here.” The line led to a counter window where members could make deposits into the inmate’s account or new visitors could inquire about the visiting protocol, a station where a correctional officer recorded the name of the incarcerated individual, wooden benches, coin-key lockers, and the security check point. Visitors gathered in line at least two hours prior to the visiting time. It was common practice for family members to meet in the parking lot as early as 6 a.m. for an 8:45 a.m. visit. While family members waited in line to clear the security checkpoint,
correctional officers on the tiers simultaneously informed inmates that a family member or friend on their approved visitation list registered for the visitation session. Some inmates expected the visitor(s) and were prepared; others were not. The visitor security check took place in a room approximately 8 feet x 10 feet that led directly into the visitation location/prison gymnasium. Visitors were required to clear the metal detector and/or handheld wand detector procedure. The security procedure could become troublesome and embarrassing, particularly for women because a type of metal found in underwire bras was known to trigger the detection machine. If this occurred, women set on visiting could be required to remove the underwire metal pieces.

Officers allowed groups of 5-10 visitors to enter the visiting room after the individuals cleared the security detector. Correctional officers prohibited visitors not meeting the requirements into the visitation location. Such exclusions included, visitor did not clear the detector, lacked the required government identification documents, not listed on the inmate visiting roster, or inappropriately dressed. Visitors were permitted to rejoin the end of the line if they were able to resolve their issue(s) prior to the end of the visitation registration period.

From the security location, visitors walked through a door directly into the prison gymnasium that was transformed into the visitation room on the weekend. The gymnasium featured a sliding partition which divided the room into two sections. Officers disabled the divider during the visitation session (one-room gymnasium) and enabled the divider when closing out the session to separate prisoners from visitors (two-room gymnasium). Inmates and visitors were permitted to congregate in a small enclosed outdoor area (weather permitting) with concrete benches outside of the visitation room.
The outdoor space was coveted by visitors and inmates because officers allowed inmates and visitors to smoke and sit side-by-side as opposed to the non-smoking indoor area where visitors and inmates were required to sit back in their chair, across from each other with hands visible to officers at all times. The vending machine room, which housed snack and beverage machines, and the bathroom were opposite the visitors’ entrance (the holding security room). POF correctional officers, not visible to the public monitored the visiting session and interaction on security monitors from a separate location. These officers were required to buzz visitors into the vending machine area and bathroom. Although these officers were not visible to the visiting public or inmates, their presence was known and at times, visitors would look around, acknowledge, and wave to the cameras, as a sign to inform officers that they were waiting to be buzzed into either one of the rooms.

The arrival and inmate-visitor identification process was unceremonious. At the beginning of each visitation period, expectant prisoners were seated together in one section until their visitor cleared security and allowed admission into the room. Inmates spotted and then joined their visitor as he/she entered the gymnasium. Collectively, the incarcerated member and visiting party sought seating usually away from the crowd of awaiting inmates. An area distant from the larger group of awaiting inmates was considered prime because an increased number of inmates in one area meant increased security attention.

Prisoners and their visitors were permitted to momentarily hug and kiss at the beginning and end of the visit. Family members and inmates were required to sit across from each other in primary-colored, plastic interlocking chairs. Gym walls were painted a
pale sky blue. A portion of one of the four gymnasium walls was covered by a variety of murals that served as a backdrop for pictures with friends and family members. Each side of the visiting hall held approximately 12 rows of chairs organized into three columns. Six chairs were lined in each column, with each row totaling 18 chairs across. Throughout the visiting period, additional chairs were lined and interlocked with others, if necessary. Informally, a supervisory correctional officer stated that the room held 500 people; from my accounts, 432 individual seats were arranged in the room. Figure 5.1 provides a blueprint for the organizational setup of the visitation room.
Figure 5.a. POF Visitation Room Blueprint
**Prisoners and Outside Contact**

The interview and survey instruments conducted at the focus group posed questions about the prisoners’ preferred contact method (i.e. mail, calls, visits), received contact method, frequency of received contact, and preferred frequency of preferred contact method. Table 5.1 presents the reported contact frequency of the interview participants (25). Eighty percent of the incarcerated men reported sending and/or receiving mail and receiving visits, respectively. Seventy-two percent of the interviewed incarcerated men make phone calls to family members and/or friends. In further examining the frequency of each contact method, Table 5.1 shows that more than half (52%) of the inmates report sending or receiving mail at least weekly, 48 percent make calls at least weekly, and 32 percent receive visits weekly. It is important to note that 20 percent of the interviewed men never sent or received mail nor ever received visits, while 28 percent stated that they never make phone calls. Twenty-four percent of the men reported receiving visits monthly from family and friends. In all, more than three-quarters (76%) of the study sample has at least received visits a few times per year from a family member or friend on the outside.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Received Contact Method</th>
<th>Send or receive mail</th>
<th>Make calls</th>
<th>Receive visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>20.0 (5)</td>
<td>28.0 (7)</td>
<td>20.0 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>4.0 (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.0 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few times per year</td>
<td>16.0 (4)</td>
<td>12.0 (3)</td>
<td>20.0 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>8.0 (2)</td>
<td>12.0 (3)</td>
<td>24.0 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>28.0 (7)</td>
<td>32.0 (8)</td>
<td>32.0 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily or almost daily</td>
<td>24.0 (6)</td>
<td>16.0 (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage (frequency)
When questioned on preferred contact method (Table 5.2), 36 percent of the prisoners indicated that they would like to receive three forms of contact—mail, calls, and visits. Twenty-four percent would prefer to exclusively receive visits, 16 percent mail, and four percent calls. Eight percent prefer the combination of calls and visits with no mail and four percent would like to send/receive mail and visits. Notably, one participant preferred not to receive any form of contact.

In Table 5.2, a subset of the sample indicated that they would prefer to never receive or initiate contact with their family and/or friends. Specifically, two (2) men preferred to never send/receive mail, three (3) preferred never to make calls, and three (3) of the incarcerated men would rather never receive visits. Although the incarcerated men have expressed their contact preferences, it does not necessarily translate into actual practice. The participants may prefer never to receive visits, however the data shows that
80 percent received visits at one time or another. The qualitative analysis further explored inmates’ preferences and the actual trends.

As far as the frequency of inmate contact preferences (Table 5.2), the data reveals that the about one-third of the sample would prefer to receive daily contact, whether it be through mail (32%), calls (32%), or visits (24%). The greatest variation of preferred contact frequency lies in the preference of receiving visits. Twelve percent of the interviewed men never want to receive visits, four percent only want to receive visits once or twice, 16 percent prefer monthly visits, eight percent weekly, and 24 percent would like to have daily visits. Sixteen percent of the sample preferred not to change their current visiting pattern, and according to eight percent (2 inmates), visiting frequency does not matter.

Tables 5.3 and 5.4 summarize the results of the survey distributed to the focus group. Although the interview participants are the key focus of the dissertation study, the focus group results and discussion provide additional insight. The tables (5.3, 5.4) illustrate the contact method, frequency, and preferences of the focus group. It is overwhelmingly apparent from Table 5.3 that more focus group participants have engaged in contact compared to the interview participants. Every participant has sent/received mail (100%), 75 percent have made phone calls, and 92 percent received visits. Sixty-seven percent of the focus group members send/receive mail at least monthly, 41.6 percent make phone calls, and 33 percent receive visits at the least on a monthly basis. It is interesting to note that one-third of the group received visits only a few times a year, 25 percent received visits once or twice, and eight percent (one inmate) has never received a visit. According to the survey responses, 25 percent of the
incarcerated students have never made a phone call to family members or friends. Table 5.4 shows that half of these men would like to receive three forms of contact (mail, calls, and visits). Though notable findings, it is important to reiterate that the surveyed men (i.e. focus group participants) have served more time in prison and may have had the opportunity to utilize more forms of contact at one time or another over a longer period.

Table 5.3. Focus group reported contact frequency (n=12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Received Contact Method</th>
<th>Send or receive mail</th>
<th>Make calls</th>
<th>Receive visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>100 (12)</td>
<td>75.0 (9)</td>
<td>91.7 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
<td>25.0 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few times per year</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
<td>33.3 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>25.0 (3)</td>
<td>8.3 (1)</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>33.3 (4)</td>
<td>25.0 (3)</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily or almost daily</td>
<td>8.3 (1)</td>
<td>8.3 (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage (frequency)

Table 5.4. Focus group preferred contact frequency (n=12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Method</th>
<th>No contact</th>
<th>Send or receive mail</th>
<th>Make calls</th>
<th>Receive visits</th>
<th>Mail/Calls</th>
<th>Mail/Visits</th>
<th>Mail/Calls/Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.3 (1)</td>
<td>8.3 (1)</td>
<td>8.3 (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.3 (1)</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
<td>50.0 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage (frequency)

The previous section presented aggregate descriptive statistics for the interview participants and focus group. The next section will introduce the interview participants’ pseudonyms, outline demographic characteristics, and indicate the visiting frequency of
the prisoner’s family and friends and present the inmate-visitor relationship. Table 5.5 provides an overview of the sample characteristics and visiting patterns. These research participants have diverse backgrounds and experiences. The sample consists of college graduates, paralegals, and frequent flyers - men that have been incarcerated more than 6 times (jail and prison). With this variation, the study is able to capture the depth and breadth of POF inmate experiences in relation to role management and negotiation strategies during visitation sessions.

A number of the inmates have family members -sons or brothers- and close friends incarcerated in the facility, as the case with Angelo, David, Richard, and Roberto. Some of the relatives were the participants’ co-defendant(s) (termed by inmates as “co-d”), and, conversely, fathers were knowingly and unknowingly incarcerated alongside their sons. Sixty-eight percent of the participants have at least one child. On the Sunday prior to Christopher’s interview, he received notice that his son was recently arrested and being held in the local jail. David was informed that his son was incarcerated at the POF, but even after seeing his son in the prison they have yet to speak. Participants, Vincent and Amir are childhood best friends and co-defendants. However, these men have polar views on the role and meaning of visits in their life. Vincent receives visits from family members and friends every Saturday and Sunday, opposed to Amir’s infrequent and sporadic visits with his mother and brother. It is evident from Table 5.5 that women and members from the prisoner’s family of origin are the most common and frequent visitors to the prison. Adult female visitors include the inmate’s mother, sister, aunt, wife, fiancée, daughter, cousin, or female friend. Adult male visitors include father, brother, brother-in-law, son, and cousins. Child visits are not limited to the inmate’s child(ren),
also but include nieces, nephews, cousins, and friend’s child(ren). Conversely, Table 5.5 reveals that some of the incarcerated fathers did not receive visits from their child(ren). Four of the seventeen participants (i.e. Ivan, Taquan, Thomas, and William) identified as fathers did not receive visits from any family members. The diverse types of visitors provide an indication of the variations in familial roles held by prisoners and the shape of the prisoners’ social support system.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Incarceration Age</th>
<th>Sent. Lgth¹</th>
<th>Time Svd²</th>
<th>Prior</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Visit Freq.</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Female friend and her child, siblings, daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Fiancée, fiancée’s son, nephew (now deceased)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Mother, daughter, daughter’s mother, sister, niece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Cousins, aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Sisters, mother, female friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaheem</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Mother, father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Fiancée, son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoffrey</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Mother, sister, son, grandson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Children, children’s mother, mother, “Friends”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Father, brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micah</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Cousin, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Female friend, family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amir</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Mother, brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelo</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Mother, sisters, nephews, nieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Brother, daughter, mother, sister, female friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Mother, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Once/twice</td>
<td>Sisters, brother-in-laws</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Prisoner released and returned to POF.
¹Measured in years.
² Measured in years.
Table 5.5. Cont’d.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Incarceration Age</th>
<th>Sent. Lgh¹</th>
<th>Time Svd²</th>
<th>Prior</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Visit Freq.</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bernard</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taquan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Prisoner released and returned to POF.
¹Measured in years.
²Measured in years.

Incarcerated Role Negotiators

Based on the grounded theory methodological approach and integrated theoretical framework of role strain and transition theories the data analysis rendered emergent role negotiation pathways categorized as Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer. These groups were embedded in a typology labeled Incarcerated Role Negotiator (IRN). The variation in the prisoners’ role negotiation strategies centered on the following defining features derived from the data analysis procedures: a) pre-prison investments in the family, b) role performances and behaviors, c) contact with role senders, and d) self-identity. These features served as indicators of the adopted negotiation strategy.

Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer are fluid positions and accommodate inmates with extended or reduced role systems and strong or weak social support networks. Many of the inmates in the current study had a penchant for using one type of negotiation strategy most often, while few tended to develop a hybrid of role management strategies. Inmate-family contact in the form of visitation sessions highlighted the multiplicity of the prisoners’ role systems and their ability and/or inability to perform in familial roles. The direct and continuous contact that visits presented immediately amplified the prisoners’ role obligations. Due to the required simultaneous
enactment in disparate roles, visitation sessions produced increased role conflict. The role obligations were contradictory and incompatible. Without clear definitions of their familial roles and behaviors and efficient transition procedures from prison to family member and vice versa, the role conflict intensified the felt role strain. Consequently, this strain shaped the prisoners’ transitioning between roles in the prison and family. Nonetheless, contact with role senders through visits, calls, and letters were necessary because the family informed the prisoner of his expected role behaviors and obligations, and vice versa, family members depended on the imprisoned member to define their familial status and role expectations (e.g. children). The findings in this section present an overview of the typological categories.

Incarcerated Role Negotiator Typological Groups:

**Sustainer** has the ability to manage incompatible roles by implementing role bargaining to aid in the reconstruction and redefining of role expectations when undergoing an acute process of normative change. The restructuring process helps to provide clarity on expected role behaviors and obligations. He works to maintain a similar level of engagement, commitment, and consistency in his roles throughout the incarceration period as held prior to incarceration. Sustainer holds an independent relationship with each member and exercises agency by initiating contact with role senders (i.e., family members) and identifying ways to continuously serve as a resource and contribute to members in the role sets. The prisoner-family contact delivers messages to the Sustainer, reaffirming his self-image, personality structure, and expectations and obligations. Sustainer is highly invested in the family and works to compartmentalize his disparate roles. On the whole, he experiences difficulty in role
transition, especially during instances when forced to simultaneously perform more than one role, yet he has identified strategies and allocated resources to manage the felt difficulty. Sustainer has intentions to continue to carry out his role obligations and positively affect his role relationships.

**Deserter** eliminates incompatible roles when undergoing an acute process of normative change; as a result of the felt difficulty in managing incompatible roles simultaneously, he terminates even those roles (e.g., father) that culturally require role interaction to maintain his and others (e.g., his children) self-image and personality structure. Additionally, Deserter rejects relationships with potential role senders thereby affecting the shape and expectations of his roles. This individual does not exercise agency in his role relationships, and has non-existent to low engagement, activity, commitment, and consistency levels in the roles. The Deserter does not have any intention for his future role relationships.

**Dependent** has the ability to manage incompatible roles by implementing role bargaining to aid in the reconstruction and redefining of role expectations when undergoing an acute process of normative change. The bargaining and restructuring process helps to provide clarity on expected role behaviors and obligations. Dependent’s restructuring process includes the delegation of role obligations and responsibilities to other members in the role set as a result of his failure to enact and execute incompatible roles in disparate institutions simultaneously. He does not closely abide by the societal hierarchy of values indicating roles that may or may not be delegated; instead, he delegates any role in conflict with his current status. Therefore, members of the role set that perform his obligations provide clarity regarding his role expectations. He has
assigned others [whether (non)intentional or (un)consciously] and allocated their resources to maintain a similar level of engagement, commitment, and consistency in his roles throughout the incarceration period as he held prior to incarceration. The Dependent has not clearly defined his intentions within his role relationships.

Restorer previously adopted the role behavior and management strategy of Deserter by eliminating incompatible roles when undergoing an acute process of normative change; however, Restorer encountered a catalyst/change agent (e.g., fear of losing a loved one to a terminal disease or incarceration, newfound romantic relationships, spiritual awakening, or anticipation of an approaching prison release date) prompting a resurrection of role behaviors and expectations similar to or above the level of engagement, commitment, and consistency held prior to incarceration. Restorer exercises agency to redefine and restructure his roles. With Restorer, the rebirth of the role(s) may occur in the family unit in which the role was initially terminated or within a new family unit in which the role was never performed. He intends to reestablish his role relationships by adapting behaviors similar to that of Sustainer or Dependent.
Figure 5.b. Incarcerated Role Negotiation Conceptual categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Negotiation</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Extensive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restorer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deserter</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Role Performance</th>
<th>High levels</th>
<th>Low levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Restorer**
  - Role restoration and rebirth
  - Interested to resurrect pre-prison role within the liminality
  - Encounter with catalyst/change agent
  - Visit contact vital to entry into familial role and relationships

- **Sustainer**
  - Role maintenance by compartmentalizing
  - Pre-prison investments influences role performance
  - Family relies on
  - Exerts authority and control
  - Visits are “payback” for pre-prison investment

- **Deserter**
  - Role abandonment and termination
  - Traumatic life experiences
  - Dysfunctional familial relationships
  - Rejects contact with family in the form of visits

- **Dependent**
  - Role delegation and transference
  - Stable inmate-familial relationships
  - Accommodation from family
  - Visits affirm static perception
Figure 5.b illustrates the conceptual categories of negotiation that derived from the grounded theory analysis. Each IRN displays minimal to extensive role negotiation and varying degrees of role performance (low, moderate, or high). The typological groups establish the prisoners’ levels of agency, engagement, activity, commitment, and consistency in role performance, and prisoners’ intentions in their familial role relationships. To clarify, agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices; engagement concerns the process of carrying out an obligation or promise; activity is the involvement in effort and behavior related to obligations and responsibilities; commitment indicates the pledge to perform or carry out obligations or expectations; and, intention refers to the purpose a planned action and the anticipated outcome as a result of the actions. Table 5.6 presents the levels of role performance for each typological group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainer</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deserter</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restorer</strong></td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: + represents high levels; +/- represents moderate levels; - represents low levels.

Of all the negotiators, Sustainer displays the highest levels of the indicators, and prisoners characterized as Deserters are diametrical opposite of Sustainers and possess the lowest degree of agency, engagement, activity, commitment, and prevalence of intentions within the familial system. Dependents and Restorers constitute groups that have a variation in levels of each factor. Further significant distinctions between the

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2 Levels are measured as low, moderate, high.
negotiator typological categories include the elected strategies employed to manage incompatible roles when undergoing an acute process of normative change and allocation of resources during simultaneous role performance.
Table 5.7. Typological categorization and participant characteristics (n=25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typological Category</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Incarceration Age</th>
<th>Time Svd¹</th>
<th>Prior</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Visit Freq.</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainers</td>
<td>Angelo</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Mother, sisters, nephews, nieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Fiancée, son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Female friend and her child, siblings, daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Father, brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Mother, daughter, daughter's mother, sister, niece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Sisters, mother, female friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deserter</td>
<td>Bernard</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taquan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>No visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent/Deserter</td>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Brother, daughter, mother, sister, female friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaheem</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents</td>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geoffrey</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Mother, sister, son, grandson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Children, children's mother, &quot;Friends&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Mother, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Micah</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mnthly</td>
<td>Cousin, sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wkly</td>
<td>Mother, father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negotiation and Role Performance

In referring to the criterion drawn for each IRN, the Sustainer was identified as having the ability to manage incompatible roles by implementing role bargaining strategies, such as compartmentalization, and was found to allocate resources in a manner that allows him to continue to carry out his role obligations and positively affect his role relationships as indicated by a statement from a Sustainer;

Marvin: When I talk to my family and don’t tell them anything. I keep what’s going on in here in my mind. So, my family don’t worry too much.

The Dependent role bargaining strategy consists of delegating role obligations to other members in the role set thereby relying on others’ resources to carry out and fulfill his responsibilities. The Deserter eliminates incompatible roles when undergoing an acute process of normative change. Subsequently, resources are reserved and allocated to the performance of the selected role and he accepts the management strategy of “hard timing” or “individual maintenance and independence from your family” (Nurse, 2002);

3 Quote of Anthony, Focus group participant.
and, the Restorer previously adopted the role behavior and management strategy of Deserter, but encountered a change agent that led to the enactment of role behaviors and expectations at levels similar to or above those held prior to incarceration.

The IRN typological groups are inclusive, expansive, and Sustainer and Deserter demonstrate polarity. The two extreme typological categories represent two poles of value orientation; two contrasting conceptual categories. It is not uncommon for a prisoner to exhibit a varying degree of traits and characteristics of more than one typological category. It is also plausible that a prisoner demonstrates attributes of one typological category throughout his sentence, depending on the circumstances. The case of circumstantial behavior is most evident in Restorers. An incarcerated individual may have initially held the position of Deserter at the start of his sentence, but worked to restore his familial role and resume his responsibilities and obligations as his release date neared. Richard, a 44-year old grandfather, serving his second prison term exemplified this transition through roles. His continued substance abuse prior to incarceration and within the prison walls damaged his relationship with his mother, wife, children, and siblings. During the latter part of his sentence, he willingly agreed to participate in a substance abuse therapeutic program. The therapeutic program served as a catalyst of change and helped Richard to realize that he failed as a father to his two incarcerated sons and daughter. In spite of his past mistakes, Richard is determined to use and share his newfound knowledge on addiction and redeem himself in the eyes of his children and grandchildren as he nears release.

Richard: I came in, using the drugs here and there. A family man. Helping paying the bills, spending time with the kids…I came in using a bag a day.

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4 Similar to the polarity of E. Anderson’s decent and street families (1999, p. 36).
Left here an even bigger addict from when I got here…I explained to the family. I explained to the judge, I need help…I am not blaming them for me coming here…It [criminal activity] stagnated the family not just me but the family. When you’re out, lost in a delusional world, you’re not thinking…As I look back, sometimes I don’t want to look back. I did a lot of stupid shit. I did it. It’s affected me now that I’m here. I refuse to escape. I take all the knowledge I can get it, and instill it in my children….

[In the groups] they’re teaching you how to re-train your thoughts, your thinking pattern. You share about your experiences. How it affected your family. You realize now that it also affected them. That’s something I have to carry with me all my life. There is never too late for change…If you can change back time…everybody would.

I concentrate on me and my sons, my grandkids, lead by example! Started to leave the second day I was here [in the Therapeutic Community]. Now a month went by, within a month, I learned a lot…A child needs a role model, just like a wife needs a husband… Knowledge is power and until you learn you will never get it. I am so open to it. My mind is open. I record in my mind what they [Therapeutic Community group staff] said, I record it, that’s how bad I want to learn. I know it’s a better way than the way I dealt with things thus far.

Richard was interviewed at two points in time, at approximately the fourth and sixth year of his eight-year sentence. Prior to his redemption phase displayed above, Richard centered his thoughts on the situations placed on him rather than how he chose to cope with those circumstances. In the first interview, he talked more about his difficult childhood and the infidelity of his wife. At the second session, Richard talks at length about the therapeutic program and leading and serving as an inspiration to his family. The entirety of his experience will be explored further in the discussion on Restorers (Chapter 9).

Because of the various transitions incarcerated men experience throughout the duration of their sentence (independent of and dependent on family changes), I was purposeful in categorizing each prisoner into the IRN typological group(s) in which the data analysis suggested that he most closely aligns with at this point in his sentence.
Accordingly, I considered any prior statuses revealed either in the current or previous interviews. Consequently, six of the 25 role negotiators emerged as Sustainers, nine men were coded as Dependents with two of the negotiators also expressing Deserter traits, five prisoners classified as solely Deserters, and lastly, five men were coded as Restorers. Table 5.7 displays how the participants fall within the negotiator typological groups. Besides the negotiators’ differences in levels of agency, engagement, activity, commitment, and consistency in role performance, and intentions in their role relationships and the strategies employed to manage incompatible roles, the IRNs frequency of visits from family members and friends differ as well as their preference in the frequency and type of contact.

Sustainers reported receiving frequent visits, with half of these IRNs receiving visits every weekend from family members and/or friends. Christopher, a Sustainer serving a 10-30 year sentence finds the physical and intimate moments of visits to be important, but the maintenance of communication and advice received through calls, letters, and visits to be most valuable. Through the communication he has strengthened his relationships and receives counsel and guidance and direction.

Interviewer: What role do visits play in your family relationships?

Christopher: Big role! Not main, but one main thing. Nothing like physical hugs and kisses. They don’t have to come so I respect them for doing that.

Interviewer: So, what’s the main thing?

Christopher: Communication, period. Letters, phone calls, being able to talk freely. You can tell them what it really is...if I mess up they tell me. If they mess up I tell them. I never had this before because I was always on the street.
On the contrary, Deserters do not receive any visits and have limited contact with family and friends through phone calls or letters. A Deserter serving a life sentence provides his perception on visits:

Thomas: Confronted visits, they give you false hope. Pain in the ass...in here you can close shit off. Close my shit off. In visits you can’t do that. In family structure, you can’t do that. If your upset...you, imagine what it does to me?

More than half of the Dependents receive at least monthly visits and Restorers report a range of visits, from once or twice a year to weekly. Table 5.8 presents the variation across the typological groups based on demographic characteristics and visiting frequency. Overall, the attributes of the IRNs are similar. The Sustainers were incarcerated at the youngest age, few have previously served time, and two of the six men are Latino. Conversely, six of the nine of the Dependents have previously served jail and/or prison sentences. The characteristics of Deserters and Restorers vary from the total group and reflect each other. The men categorized as Deserters and Restorers, on average, represent the oldest prisoners, with the lengthiest sentences, most prior incarcerations, and the majority of these men are fathers.
Table 5.8. Comparison of IRN demographic characteristics (on average) and visiting frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRN Sample</th>
<th>Sustainers</th>
<th>Deserters</th>
<th>Dependents</th>
<th>Restorers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>n</em></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age*</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Age Range*</td>
<td>29-62</td>
<td>29-41</td>
<td>30-51</td>
<td>29-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Length*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.5, Lifer</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Served*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration Age*</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total with,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priors</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting Frequency</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Averages, in years.

Summary

Chapter 5 outlined the visitation regulations of the POF, discussed informal practices, described the POF visitation room, and presented the contact patterns and preferences of the incarcerated men. Readers were introduced to mechanisms used by prisoners to manage and negotiate their role relationships during the visitation session and incarceration period. Findings established the Incarcerated Role Negotiator (IRN) categories - Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer.

The remaining chapters – Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 – are each devoted to clearly defining and typifying the emergent Incarcerated Role Negotiators. The IRN profiles extend the findings to address the dissertation research questions developed with the
intent to examine POF prisoners’ perception of visitation, management and enactment of prison and familial role(s) during contact visitation sessions and throughout the prison sentence, and negotiation strategies utilized to assist in the enactment of familial roles. Conditions of Sustainer and Deserter counter each other and illustrate significant variation of familial role enactment and management within the prison setting; Dependent and Restorer build from the Sustainer and Deserter models and lay between the two extreme points.
CHAPTER 6

Sustainers

“They Owe Me”: The Big Payback

Sustainers and their family members have formed a reciprocal relationship. The prisoner’s prior deposits into the family resource account preceding his incarceration, and maintenance of engagement, activity, commitment, and consistency levels in his familial roles throughout the sentence has been exchanged for power, control, respect, and continued loyalty from the family to the Sustainer. Family members may be oblivious to the terms of the negotiated relationship or exchanges, however, Sustainers’ actions and behaviors imply that the prisoners are cognizant of this informal agreement and work arduously at managing the relationships.

Six of the 25 IRNs were identified as Sustainers. In comparison to the larger IRN sample, Sustainers were incarcerated at a younger age of 22.6 years old, completing shorter sentences of 15 years, and served slightly less time in prison of 10.5 years. At the time of the interview, Sustainers’ average age was 33 years old, with men ranging from 29 to 41 years. The group includes four Black men – Anton, Christopher, Marcus, and Ryan – and the only two Hispanic men of the sample – Angelo and Julian. Because these men are near the end of their sentence, their behaviors are likely to center less around the role of prisoner and more around their impending transition into familial obligations and responsibilities (Garabedian, 1963; Wheeler, 1961). In addition, their time served may have made them more accustomed to or acclimated with role bargaining and

---

1 Factors in relation to instant offense.
2 Average sample population incarceration age, 27 years old.
compartmentalizing incompatible roles. With Anton’s approach being representative of the Sustainers,

Interviewer: In general, what’s your approach on doing time?

Anton: Stay out of trouble. Try to avoid conflict. Don’t talk to too many people. Not trying to get caught in nothing. Just trying to get home with my family. Being in here, a lot of things go wrong. If you hang out with the wrong person…officers watch people. A lot people are gang members, they will assume that you are one of them. I see them, I speak and I keep it moving…..

Two Sustainers were previously exposed and socialized to the prison experience. Anton, 32-years old, is finishing his fourth prison term at the POF. Ryan, a 30-year old former college student has served two prison terms prior to his current sentence.

Table 6.1. Characteristics of Sustainers (n=6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sentence Length (yrs)</th>
<th>Time Served (yrs)</th>
<th>Prior</th>
<th>Receives Visits</th>
<th>Visit Frequency</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angelo</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few times a year</td>
<td>Mother, sisters, nephews, nieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Fiancée, son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Female friend and her child, siblings, daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Father, brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Mother, daughter, daughter's mother, sister, niece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Sisters, mother, female friend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to their incarceration, the Sustainers provided some means of financial assistance to their family of origin and/or formation. Their family structure required the young men to step up, some at very young ages, and contribute to the family financially (Arditti & Parkman, 2011). Circumstances that created such appointments included single parent
households, abusive or uninvolved fathers/stepfathers, birth of their child, parental
relocations, or maintenance of family outside of the country. The means of the
instrumental support provided by the men pre-prison in most instances was monetary and
illegal, resulting in imprisonment³. In the absence of a “man of the house,” some of the
young men were responsible for “head of household” duties such as protecting the family
from threats and being the breadwinner or good provider. In return for the fulfillment of
these role obligations the men expected to “rule his household and to get respect from
other members” (Anderson, 1999, p. 38).

Ryan, a prior offender and former college student has served 4 ½ years of his 15-year
sentence. Ten years ago, he accepted the responsibility of providing housing to his
younger sister and cousin when his mother and younger brother moved out of state to
Georgia. Ryan matter-of-factly said, “I was selling (drugs), so…financially, I took care
of the house and household. And, I was always the one in the family to offer moral
support.” Christopher, a 33-year old with a college-aged daughter, has been incarcerated
since the age of 18. He admitted to being involved in street life “since I came
out⁴…Everyone in my family is a crook, even the females.” To Christopher, hustling is
“second nature” or more so “his only nature,” and the profits assisted his single mother in
caring for his younger brother and sister and put food on the table. Like Christopher,
Marcus, 33-years of age, grew up in the projects with a younger brother and felt the need
to contribute to his single mother’s income and his then 4-year old daughter’s household⁵.

³ Seven of the 25 interview participants are serving time for a drug-related offense, only.
⁴ “Out” meaning since he was born, out of his mother’s womb.
⁵ Marcus’ daughter is now 16 years old.
Marcus claimed, “I just got caught up at an early age, 13.” His older brother was also incarcerated; Marcus remembered visiting his brother behind bars,

Marcus: I’ve visited my brother. My older brother was doing time. He’s deceased now…died in motorcycle accident. I would visit the prison once every 2 months. I was about 19 years old. I would just say to myself, “I can’t see myself doing time…”

His mother sensed that he was involved in some mischief activity, yet she was a nurse working a 12-hour shift and according to Marcus, she passively demanded, “If you are doing anything wrong, stop!”

Although family members may have not approved of the manner in which the income was obtained, the Sustainers did not indicate that the members strongly objected of their involvement in criminal activity. As Anderson (1999) captured in his ethnographic research on families in the inner-city of Philadelphia,

A common view on the streets among the corner men is that families of some these boys “know about” their involvements, because they “get some of the money” for help with household expenses. Corner men talk of parents’ tacit acceptance and willing ignorance of their youngster’s drug dealing…They worry often about the police, not just because of the prospect of incarceration but because the family in some cases has come to rely on the drug money (Anderson, 1999, p. 29).

In the visiting sessions with his brother, Marcus became aware that his hustling would lead to one of two trajectories – prison or death.

Marcus: I would say, I can’t see myself doing time. But even being on the street, I knew that it was gonna come to that or death.

It is typical for prisoners to claim to have supported their families by profiting from street-life activity. Sustainers are unique in that their family members continue to hold economic expectations of the prisoners and express their financial needs during visitation sessions, letters, and calls. As described by Ryan, the women in his life (four sisters and cousin) use visits to share their daily challenges and “dump their problems” on him.
Ryan: Now, they come up here, dumping their problems on me. ‘Oh, we’re struggling, the economy is bad…’ It’s crazy. They are waiting for me to come and save them! I gotta save myself first! Especially my one sister, she’s 25. She’s waiting on me…

Julian, a 29-year old native Salvadoran man credits his criminal activity to trying to help provide for his family in the United States and “back home.” He said,

Julian: My brother and father tell me about jobs and how hard it is outside right now. They tell me about my family in Salvador and how hard it is for them there.

I hurt my family…I hurt my brothers and sisters. They are in Salvador. That’s why I was working, to send money to them. I try to help them now, but I can’t. I can’t help them like I did before.

Similarly, Marcus’ family uses visits to share their economic woes:

Marcus: They let me know what’s going on. They tell me about their financial problems that they’re stressed out…

Sustainers are highly invested in their families. Prior to confinement, their strong commitment to invest put their freedom at risk. Subsequently, this show of commitment and risk taking resulted in gained status, influence, and increased reliance on Sustainers’ leadership and continued and consistent engagement within the family. The family comes to expect that the he will continue to be an active participant and leader. These internal and external intentions and expectations imposed on the Sustainer to perform in his familial role as he did pre-prison heightens the felt role strain. In return for their continuous investment and exposure to increased strain, Sustainers expect interminable loyalty from their family members. To the Sustainers, visits are key to confirming that the family “still got love” for the incarcerated men. As Ryan indicated in his response to questioning on visit turmoil and disagreements,
Interviewer: Have you had any arguments with your visitors?

Ryan: Nah, not since I’ve been back down here. But, yeah, when I first got down here, I was doing some arguing. I had practically….I mean everybody from my family is from Jersey City, but I had to beg them to come out here. When I was out there, I gave hand outs and they relied on me. But now, I had to ask a people, a number of times to…had to ask my people to come up here!

Strategy One: Exercising Perceived Control

Compared to the other IRNs, Sustainers exercise the most physical and psychological control within the family and over their circumstance. They have the capability and capacity to compartmentalize their multiple and at times conflicting roles. One way in which they separate their prisoner and familial statuses is by simply not sharing details about the “inside” with family members on the “outside.” Though the prison experience is in many ways an extension of street life, Sustainers disclose “inside” activities on a need to know basis. The method of selective disclosure helps to protect and uphold the perceived image of Sustainers as familial leaders as opposed to subservient prisoners. The Sustainers’ approach differs from Deserters in that Deserters totally exclude family from all facets of their life during their incarceration, implementing the coping strategy known as the “hard timing” response. Deserters practicing the “hard timing” approach cut off all contact and relations with their families (Nurse, 2002; Roy & Dyson, 2005). In contrast, Sustainers implement techniques such as selective disclosure to protect their familial reputation and relatives’ emotional well-being. Since physical appearance can be an indicator of an individual’s psychological state, Sustainers make sure to physically prep for visits by shaping up their appearance, so as to not cause worry
to the visitor (although, a mother was observed looking under her incarcerated son’s shirt to check for scratches or bruises). Julian shared,

Julian: When I talk to my family, I don’t tell them anything. I keep what’s going on in here in my mind, so my family don’t worry too much.

Christopher confided that it is important for him to maintain his psychological and emotional strength during visitation sessions with his mother because “she’s the only weak one, a cry baby.”

Christopher: I try to stay strong for my family…my brother and sister know what it is, but my mother be crying. I can’t get weak…I feel some kind of way at that moment, but then I have to go back to general.

Interviewer: What’s wrong with feeling some kind of way?

Christopher: I need them to think I’m dangerous. I can’t be walking around crying.

He worked to compartmentalize his disparate roles during a visiting session. Because he cares for his mother’s emotional health, he does not share his prison life experience with her, however, he can’t help but get emotional when she comes to visitation sessions. Christopher acknowledges that he transitions out of his familial role as an emotional son at the end of a visit and characteristics associated with prisoner quickly resurface. He essentially wears a mask to hide his emotional distress for his safety inside of prison – other prisoners must perceive him as aggressive, strong, and fearless. This oscillating behavioral adaptation between environments is essentially “code-switching.” In code-switching, Sustainers “may behave according to either set of rules, depending on the situation” (Anderson, 1999, p. 36). In prison, physical and psychological dominance is equated with personal power. Those exhibiting power receive respect from other inmates.

6 Observation session, April 20, 2008.
Ryan talked about his vulnerabilities and the difficulty he faces in switching his “visit psychological and physical state” to prison mode.

Interviewer: What emotions do you go through during a visit?

Ryan: Well, I try not to show them. Like I said, it’s bothersome. Having to see my people leave, go home, and I have to stay here. Especially when you come out and have a contact visit, and get to touch, you come up here smelling all good with the Victoria Secret on, and then we gotta come and sit here in the visiting room. And then to have to go back and have dudes in my face all day?

In the instance that Sustainers decide to divulge information to family members, it is usually coupled with a life lesson. For Angelo, a Hispanic male, it is extremely important to him to maintain his presence and status within his family because his older brother is serving the same 30-year sentence at another state prison for the same crimes, which means his family must cope with the absence of two male figures. His alcoholic and abusive stepfather died just a few years ago. Both men have completed 23 years of their sentence.

Interviewer: In your survey, you mentioned that your incarceration has destabilized your family, how?

Angelo: When out in the streets, I was hustling and made sure my mom and sisters were taken care of. They had boyfriends, but they are single moms. I was very protective of my mom. I am more close with her than any other of the kids…

And, well, what I didn’t mention is that my brother is locked up, too. So, both of the male figures are missing, it has greatly affected the upbringing of my nephews…my sisters are single parents. My one nephew is in [community correction facility].

Research finds the prison experience to be an extremely challenging and unnerving experience because the environment lacks the nurturance, warmth, and camaraderie typical of Latin culture (Toch, 1992a). Angelo and his family work through
such challenges by cultivating a family life that includes incarceration. It becomes a familiar thread in the structure and a dominant institution that influences their life experiences. Such an inclusion results in the continuity of intergenerational values that incorporate criminal activity as a norm.

Angelo’s nieces and nephews have been visiting him and his brother in prison since infancy. He talks about the message he tries to convey during his visiting sessions and calls with the younger family members. “I will have my sister bring them up to the visits, like if I have problems with my nephew…I say to them, look at me, where I’m at, how I destroyed my life…I’m suffering every day and have been for the past 20 years.” Despite his persistent and somewhat conflicting efforts and pseudo “scared straight” approach of reminding his nephew about his prison experience while acquainting him with the prison environment, Angelo’s niece and nephew have already started to follow in the brothers’ footsteps. Incarceration is a normal aspect of their life.

Angelo: I try to mentor and direct my nephews and nieces. I try to play an integral role in their life. My one niece is fucking up, one niece is married, one nephew in college, getting a BA in Business, the other is in Academy Park… I tell them, look at me, where I’m at, how I destroyed my life. I’m suffering every day and have been for the past 20 years.

Interviewer: Have they been in any trouble?

Angelo: Yeah, one niece, she’s about 23, 24, she’s been in and out of county jail. She’s on probation now.

Interviewer: When was she first incarcerated?

Angelo: It started when she was about 16, 17 years old.

Interviewer: And your nephews?

Angelo: Yeah, one is in the Youth Facility in Lincoln Park, or wherever it is.
Angelo extends his mentoring beyond his family to high school and college students visiting the POF. He is a member of the “Lifers,” an inmate group who speaks to students and other visitors\(^7\) to the prison about their choices, consequences of their behavior, regrets, and plans for a future on a different path. By sharing these life lessons and inquiring about the status of his family’s youth, he has enhanced and expanded his role obligations to include “mentor” and “father figure.” Consequently, the Sustainer has gained influence in the family and encourages members to include him in the family decision-making process and business. For example, Ryan served in a capacity similar to a family accountant prior to and throughout his sentence. He claims that his family avoided him for a period of time because he questioned how money was being handled, felt that the funds were mismanaged, and family members were fearful of his response.

As a result of the Sustainer’s concern of, and engagement and involvement with, the family youth and other members, the Sustainer has earned the right to serve as an authoritarian in the family, and the family allows and begins to depend on him to do so. Such enactment of authoritarian and disciplinarian was observed during visitation sessions. In one instance\(^8\), an incarcerated Hispanic male expressed great disappointment and visible disgust with a young female visitor.

Saturday, February 23, 2008, 12:45 p.m.

Hispanic inmate, Hispanic teen girl are talking to each other but not sitting in front of each other. The inmate and young woman are sitting diagonally across from each other, which is not usually permitted at sessions. The inmate is talking to the visitor, but he refuses to face/look at her. I begin to wonder if they really want to see each other. Another family member returns to their sitting area, the mother. She went to the vending

\(^7\)Coincidently, visited the POF with a group and was first introduced to Angelo and his story during a session with the “Lifers.”
\(^8\)Session February 23, 2008, 12:45 p.m.
machine…The Lieutenant notices me observing the family and shares that the inmate and young female visitor are brother and sister. The sister is 18-years old and told her incarcerated brother about two months ago that she is pregnant, by a 30-something year old man. The Lieutenant said that the guy “bugged out” on her at that time.

The exaggerated display of “bugging out” on his sister may have been the prisoner’s way of sending an authoritative message and letting others know (i.e., prisoners, correctional staff) that he is still in charge of his family, even though incarcerated, and demands respect.

Incarcerated men who were required prior to their imprisonment to serve as protectors, guardians, and father figures to family members are no longer able to do so physically. However, they continue to practice forms of discipline and/or express great disappointment in “wayward” members. Sustainers purposely present their incarceration as a negative life example and continuously encourage family youth to follow a more productive path. Situations similar to the presented observation provide the Sustainer with an opportunity to implement his authoritarian role – in the presence of others.

Accepting the responsibility of authoritarian is challenging to perform, yet Sustainers express that these obligations are within their comfort zone. Christopher articulated that he is most comfortable in his position as a “big brother,” which entails, keeping his younger brother, who was six years old (now 21 years old) when Christopher left home, “off the street.”

Christopher: Me and my brother are actually closer than we ever was…now we are close. I just tell him to stay off the streets!

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9 E. Anderson (1999, p. 39) explores this behavior and finds that inner-city men make a point to display “exaggerated concern for his family, particularly when other males are near…His actions and words…let strangers know ‘This is my family, and I am in charge.’”
Marcus starts to create special moments with his daughter and niece by moving their regular indoor visiting session to the outdoor garden space. The guards (and restrictions) are more lax, allowing family members to sit next to each other and engage in minimal touching. He makes these moments teachable by talking with the girls about their boyfriends, relationships, things going on at home, and other teen interests while imposing his expectations as a father and uncle.

In enacting his role as a mentor, advisor, and disciplinarian, the Sustainer exerts a sense of control on how others inside and outside of the correctional facility view and perceive him. He admits his faults and shortcomings, therefore eliminating the opportunity for family members and others to berate him. Additionally, the Sustainer gains respect in the family for serving as a mentor and advisor within and outside of the family (i.e., participation in groups such as Lifers). To other relatives not requiring mentorship or discipline, the Sustainer works to empathize with and provide emotional support to the member. Simply put, Sustainers attempt to “be there” for family members despite their incarcerated “liminality” (Arditti, 2005, p. 283). Elements of “being there” include imparting feelings of hope, perseverance, encouragement, and optimism. Though Angelo has lived within the presumed negativity housed within the prison environment for 23 years he continues to contribute significantly to the emotional well-being of his mother. He explained, “I give her hope and keep her encouraged. I’m her support now. My sisters, they support her as much as they can.” Anton produces feelings of hope in his fiancée who is raising his 16-month old son, when sharing specific future plans to change his lifestyle and obtain legal employment.

10 i.e. “inside the prison” examples include participation in the “Lifers” group and demonstrating “authoritative” behaviors during visitation sessions.
[I’m] trying to get this sanitation job for when I get home, help take care of my son, and fiancée…talking ‘bout changing my whole life around. I’ve been selling drugs since 14. I’m tired of that lifestyle. Her and my son deserve better. They don’t deserve this. And I deserve better!

In exchange, Anton’s girlfriend reminds him of her loyalty and commitment to bring their son to every visit.

Interviewer: Tell me about your most memorable visits?

Anton: You know, things she told me…that no matter what, she will still be here with me. I don’t have to worry about her cheating on me or worry about another man coming into my son’s life or calling him…calling another man, Daddy. And knowing that she cares about me after all the things that I’ve done.

Coupled with the provided guidance, advice, mentoring, and encouragement, Sustainers such as Marcus struggled with feelings of regret and helplessness.

Marcus: My daughter…she tells me that she wished I was there to pick her up from school and take her out. She knows who I am. She was little, like four years old, when I left.

I wish I was able to be there for my daughter. That’s what bothers me the most- like a father is supposed to be there. I mean, I do ask how she is doing, if anyone is treating her wrong. But since I’ve been locked up, I only see her every other weekend.

Sustainers intend to guard against acculturation into the prison environment leading to prisonization or identity transformation (Arditti, 2005). Due to his actions and behaviors, the Sustainer has protected his ego, identity, and idealistically, “the future of the family youth,” exercised physical and psychological control, and gained influence and respect, an authoritarian role, and a seat at the table in the family decision-making process.

Single mothers, as described in the observation notes, become dependent on the Sustainer to influence misguided siblings, even allowing the prisoner to publicly reprimand and chastise members. In turn, the Sustainer’s family members assist the incarcerated role
negotiator in retaining, reworking, and reaffirming his identity, self-image, personality structure, and familial roles. Pre-prison obligations are continued, transformed, or exchanged for the enactment of new role performances, and Sustainers take the lead in creating their personalized IRN script.

**Strategy Two: “Not Gonna Burn My Bridges” - Commitment and Consideration**

In designing their IRN script, Sustainers orchestrate ways to utilize their resources in preserving the perception of their familial role and status within their current liminality (Arditti, 2005, p. 283). The IRNs recognize that the imprisonment experience is taxing on their families’ resources so they identify ways to intentionally limit the additional burdens placed on members. It is a thin line for the Sustainers to walk; expecting reciprocity for pre-prison contributions and not creating additional burdens on already fragile family systems. As Ryan pointed out when asked about the working of the exchange,

**Interviewer:** Is it a reciprocal relationship?

**Ryan:** (Laughs) Mostly. But when you’re out there and then come to jail…even if you have a strong support system, out of sight, out of mind, people forget about you. About what you did for them. You have to remind people.

To guard against amplifying the effect of their confinement on their family when working to collect on the “big payback,” Sustainers perform a bargaining procedure to weigh the rewards and losses they may experience as a result of performing specific role behaviors and obligations.

By participating in the mentoring and advising positions previously outlined, he has sustained a prominent role in the family. He supplements those behaviors by
attempting to fulfill the family’s calls to uphold his economic and financial responsibility. Christopher confided,

Christopher:  I save a little money and send it to them. My sister, she has a good job, my brother does odd jobs. I do what I can for them…

Sustainers send money accrued from in-prison employment home, and use prisoner debit cards to make phone calls, though Daniel, a focus group participant serving a mandatory minimum sentence of 30 years, does not believe that the amount of money left after inmates’ incur surcharges is meaningful to family members. However, I argue that the act of sending money continues to show the Sustainers’ commitment to continually invest in their families.

Daniel:  You make $1.20 a day, $22 a month, they take out fines, $5 charge if you go to the infirmary, and other surcharges. What do you have to send?

Sustainers desire to continually be held in high regard by their families. Therefore it is imperative that they are perceived as an asset to the family and not a burden, “…a man unable to provide for a family invites disrespect…” (Anderson, 1999, p. 38). Julian is adamant about doing whatever he can to provide for his family in the states and beyond. He pensively described why it is important for him to continue to work.

Julian:  I was working to pay rent to the family. I worked very, very hard to go back to my country…I’m working hard in here. I send money home, I work a little bit hard, try to save my money, and working hard to get on probation and never come back to jail again.

Unable to provide meaningful financial support, as highlighted by Daniel, Sustainers identify other means to demonstrate their commitment in order to maintain their status, respect, and influence in the family. Angelo is one of few inmates who use the prepaid
debit system\textsuperscript{11} to make phone calls. He uses money in his commissary account to call home, thereby minimizing the financial burden directly placed on his family.

Angelo: I call home frequently to speak with my mom. I use the debit account, so I won’t be a burden on my family…I’m the one away, so…

Sustainers want to enact the behaviors that will secure their familial status and facilitate the receipt of rewards such as gaining a sense of control, respect, perception of leadership within the family, which results in continued commitment, loyalty, and support from the family. Angelo does not rely or depend on his family to accept his collect calls. Instead he enrolled in the debit system and works to pay for his own calls. As a prisoner it is expected for Angelo to call home collect; as “man of the house” it is not expected for him to impinge upon the family financially.

In maintaining this control, the Sustainer’s efforts center on protecting himself from feelings of disappointment, loneliness, pain, and hurt. He believes that he has influenced and managed the behaviors and actions of others, so, in the case that something or someone does not follow through as planned or “his plan” goes awry, he is able to say, “well, that’s how I wanted it” or “I have no one to blame but myself.” Yet, sometimes the result of having this influential role may be counterproductive and result in the inmate experiencing such emotions as helplessness and regret because he finds the expectations that he and his family set as unmanageable.

Fully aware that his meager financial contributions will not indefinitely hold their place in the families as active and involved leaders deserving of respect, Sustainers

\textsuperscript{11} Reportedly, Global Tel* Link offers inmates the ability to purchase prepaid calling vouchers from the facility or commissary. This option permits direct dialing and complete call control. Yet, one call can cost an inmate at the least $20, which would equal one month’s salary.
devise other mechanisms to exercise agency and demonstrate leadership. The strategy seemingly unique to Sustainers is the artificial “management” of the family visiting schedule. Sustainers journeyed to visit friends and relatives at correctional facilities prior to their own incarceration, so the men are familiar with the effort, patience, and persistence that is needed to visit the prison and the chaos that can ensue prior to and during visits. Sustainers work to relieve visitors of some responsibility and undertake the tasks of assisting with scheduling visiting days and times and managing the conversation or attention. Essentially, Sustainers are likely to terminate unplanned or unmanaged visits. Ryan confidently talked about the assurance of receiving visits and terminating those unwanted encounters:

Interviewer: Who currently visits you?

Ryan: Sisters, my mother….she lives in Georgia, so she comes up occasionally with my pops (lives in Virginia).

Interviewer: Who visits most frequently?

Ryan: My female friend.

Interviewer: How many visitors usually come at one visiting session?

Ryan: No more than two…my sister and female friend have come up together. I give both of them attention at the same time. If there is ever a situation where she [female friend] wants a visit to herself, than we will speak about it beforehand. And I will tell her [sister] to come the next or following week, so it can just be us. It’s never a problem.

Interviewer: Tell me what it is like when you don’t receive visits.

Ryan: That rarely happens. But if it does, it would be some type of beef…put people on knock off. Either that or sometimes, people have the tendency to try and hide certain things going on in the world…and it may be something that I have already heard about, so they screen calls, don’t wanna come up, and try to duck me.
Interviewer: Have you ever terminated a visit?

Ryan: Yeah, I had a person come up here that I didn’t wanna see.

Interviewer: Was the person on your visitor list?

Ryan: No. The officer, he’s alright, I mean his intentions are good. When in the processing area, sometimes he lets people in, depending on how persuasive you are. They may add you on the list and allow you to come in, right then and there…so I get down there, and I had to terminate that! We exchanged a few words - three to be exact.

On average, Sustainers receive more visits than any other IRN group, with an average of weekly visits (Dependent-Monthly; Deserter-Never; Restorer-Monthly). Visits aid Sustainers in the development of their personalized IRN script because it presents them with an opportunity to perform aspects of being a leader, in control, authoritative, demanding respect in the presence of their families and others and shows that their families have remained loyal and supportive. For Anton, the visiting experience has finally become easier the fourth time around.

Anton: I mean, you know, before, they used to stress me out. It’s hard to see ‘em leave, as bad as I want to leave with them I can’t. Now…it makes me feel good, everyone needs a hug or kiss or to hear that they [family] love them.

Interviewer: What role do visits play in your family relationships?

Anton: It’s playing a role…of my son still knowing me and we still have that bond and stuff. I was shocked…when I got arrested he was still in changing pampers…I was thinking he wasn’t gonna know me…he held his hands up to me and called me “Dada.” He still knew my voice…it shocked me.

Interviewer: Tell me what it is like when you don’t receive visits, when your visitor can’t make it? Does it matter to you?

Anton: Nah, but sometimes, when she say she was off Saturday, she gotta work late that night, and wanted to come Saturday, I was looking for her to come….you be a little upset but can’t be selfish though.
Marcus admitted that it pains him to see his family endure the visiting fiasco, but it helps him get through his sentence.

Marcus: A big role, supportive…Since I’ve been in here, it makes the time go by smoother. They are there for you, it plays a really big part….I would hate to see my family keep going through this. Standing on line, and all of that, it’s just tiring.

Interviewer: Is there something that you and visitor do at every visit like get snacks or pray?

Marcus: Sometime my mother will pray. She comes in the morning. I pray with her.

Interviewer: How would you do time if you didn’t receive visits?

Marcus: There’s nobody to blame but myself. I wouldn’t be stressed out, not to the point that I needed medication and my hair was falling out and stuff. But I would be upset and disappointed. I would be, cause I looked out for them when I was on the streets. Yeah, I would be kinda upset. But then again, I did it12…

The time also permits the family to regain a sense of normalcy and participate in common activities like prayer, playing games, taking pictures, and sharing meals13. Participation in such activities can be a bonding mechanism to attempt to “domesticate or resocialize the carceral setting by making it more like the familial world” (Comfort, 2008, p. 122) or a distraction from the prison environment or opportunity for teachable moments14 between inmates and visiting youth. Ryan talked about the personal void visits fill,

Ryan: Out of these that come to see me, it keeps the bond intact. Communication is important. I wanna know what’s going on out there. You hear on the news about gas, jobs, taxes, you get to reach out for a

12 Emphasis added.
13 Family members purchased chips and soda at 8:45 a.m. as well as 12:45 p.m.
14 Saturday, September 13, 2008, afternoon visit - Inmates shakes up soda bottle, untwists the caps slowly, then twists so bubbles stay in the bottle, and slowly disappear. The girls are amazed by the bubbles that have formed in the bottle. One girl asks, “So how did you do that?” He explains it to her. A Correctional Officer witnesses the lesson and stops and talks to the inmate and family.
moment and see how they are making it. It keeps me informed ‘bout the kids’ progress, my niece and nephews…with my sisters, I find out about some of their personal business. Occasionally it works into a beat down, complaining about issues about kids’ father, ‘bout boyfriends and so on…. I don’t mind ‘cause I have nothing but time.

Interviewer: After a visitor leaves, what are your thoughts?

Ryan: I wish that my people could fold me up and put me in their pocket and take me with them.

Conversely, visitation sessions allow the family to witness the men act subservient to male and female correctional officers, with their every move under surveillance. Inmates are not permitted to leave the visiting area and have limited access to the lavatory due to the smuggling of drugs, weapons, or cellular phones and inappropriate contact with visitors. As expected at any secured facility, the correctional staff manages every aspect of the visitation session, even the time. In one observation session, POF officers used their discretion to end a visitation session five minutes early because staff had plans to attend a fellow officer’s wedding. This discretion draws increased feelings of frustration and powerlessness from inmates and visitors.

From my observations, correctional officers minimally imposed on family visits; however a minor imposition could jolt a Sustainer from the positions he worked hard to sustain and destabilize his familial relationships. For Angelo, the harassment that he and his family members experienced resulted in him instructing his “religiously” visiting family to decrease the visiting frequency. Angelo elaborated on the circumstances affecting his visitation:

Angelo: DOC states that the purpose of the institution is rehabilitation. Visitation is needed to strengthen that bond with the family and the

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15Saturday, June 7, 2008 afternoon observation session.
community however it discourages family from coming to visit, by their behavior.

My family used to come and visit me every week, when I was incarcerated at [other state correctional facility] and when I was first transferred here. But now I told them to slow down on the visiting so they started only coming two times a month, because I didn’t like the way they were being treated. I told them to stop and now they visit three to four times a year.

Interviewer: I’m just wondering how you handle not receiving visits now, being that you received them consistently for 20 years.

Angelo: Well, I’m calling more to compensate for the lack of visits. To be honest, it’s been difficult, and as time goes by, family gets distant. I would love to have frequent visits with my family, but as long as long as I’m here, I don’t want to put my family through the mess, unless they insist.

Interviewer: Have they ever insisted on visiting?

Angelo: Yes, they have told me, we’re coming, we wanna see you, we miss you.

In Angelo instructing his family not to visit, he lessened the burden on the family and now he bears the weight of not receiving visits and finding ways to make up for the loss. Christopher’s family travels weekly from New York to the POF. He teeters between not placing an added burden on his family and friends and holding expectations of receiving visits at the designated day and time. Visits serve as reassurance that his family still loves him and provides needed physical attention and interaction.

Interviewer: Does your family visit?

Christopher: They visit…when my brother come, they come. My mother is older so I don’t put that much pressure on her.

Interviewer: Do other family members visit you as well?

Christopher: I don’t ask too much from them. I don’t wanna burn my bridges too thin.

Interviewer: How often do you receive each form of contact (mail, calls, and visits)?
Christopher: Mail probably around three times a week, and call and visits at least once a week. I didn’t burn any bridges so…but, calls are too much for people though. The phone turns off on you, before it’s even 15 minutes…the machine don’t work.

Interviewer: Who visits most frequently?

Christopher: A female friend…she visits at least one day on the weekend.

Interviewer: Did you know her from before? Is she from NY?

Christopher: Yeah, she’s from NY, but she lives out here now. In Paterson or Passaic, something like that.

Interviewer: Does your friend usually visit alone or with someone else?

Christopher: Alone most of the time, or sometimes she brings her son.

Interviewer: During a visiting session, are you trying to create any special moments with your visitor?

Christopher: What do you do? Can’t do anything cause the police are here. You talk to your family, eat, and that’s it. Find out about what’s going on in the streets…I mean every time I move, they are on me, like a squat team!

Interviewer: Suppose you are expecting a visitor and he or she is unable to make the visit that day, what’s your immediate reaction?

Christopher: They betta have a good damn explanation! It depends…If you can’t make it here because you went to the club, that’s your fault. I don’t like afternoon visits, takes up too much of my day.

Interviewer: Will you come to an afternoon visit?

Christopher: Yes. If I come to an afternoon visits, I have to find out what happened, I mean, you can’t leave here, you have to stay. We’ll sit there and say nothing, and just eat…I like to eat…and look around.

Interviewer: So, your family buys snacks?

Christopher: They put $30 or $40 on the card, and buy that much, every visit. A bottle of soda costs like $1.25 out there.
Interviewer: Have you ever had an argument with a visitor? What happens?

Christopher: Plenty times…Females basically know how that goes, you tell me we just friends, we just friends! So don’t get mad when I say someone is visiting that day so you can’t. It’s just an argument, I call later on or it will just pass.

When visiting the facility, families not only have to worry about the length of the registration procedure and the alleged harassment of officers, but they must also be on guard for the possible occurrence of violence. However, for those firmly committed visitors, the possibility and actual occurrences of such events seem to be more of an annoying delay than a real threat to their safety. For example, as recounted in Chapter 4, Methodology, visitation sessions were delayed due to a violent incident that left an inmate seriously wounded. The incident did not discourage family members, instead, they continued to wait until officers announced that sessions would resume.

In the POF visitation environment, prisoners are unable to freely move about and touch their visitors, participate in activities, or have intimate conversations. Angelo reflected,

Angelo: You want to be able to discuss more intimate issues, like my niece being involved in drugs…I don’t want to discuss that there, with someone on your back.

The POF permits inmates and visitors to engage in an initial welcome ceremony of a quick hug, embrace, and kiss while standing. Throughout the visit, correctional officers constantly remind inmates to “sit back” and keep their hands visible. To negotiate the setting and circumstances effectively, the Sustainers immerse themselves into recreating a home-like environment while optimizing their time with individual visitors. “Family time has been reallocated from the living room and embedded inside the prison culture”
(Tubbs, Roy, & Burton, 2005, p. 88). As an onlooker, I witnessed such a prisoner manage family time in the visitation room.

Saturday, September 13, 2008

9:12 a.m.

Family 1 - Young Caucasian Family
Consists of female, assumed to be spouse and mother of children (late 20’s to 30’s), son, daughter (7-9 years old), and inmate about 25-30+. The inmate walks over to where the family is seated. He instinctively picks up his daughter. She sits on his lap while her brother sits beside his father and shows off his new sneakers. The daughter soon joins in and shows off her new footwear. She’s on his lap with her arm hanging around his neck. The mother sits across from her mate and the kids. The son then lays his head on his father’s lap.

Inmate father kisses his son’s head, the son has been sitting on his father’s lap for about 10 minutes. The daughter shows that she has bruises on her leg and then her brother pulls up his pant leg to show that he has hair on his leg. The three members (daughter, son, and father) touch the bruised leg. The wife is still seated across from her spouse and kids, she looks on. She moves closer and the couple steal a kiss. At 9:35 a.m., the mother and daughter go get snacks and leave the father and son alone. The son moves to the seat where his mother was seated. They hold hands and talk.

10:15 a.m.
The brother and sister play hand games with each other. The parents take advantage of the free time and sit almost nose-to-nose. They lean in and talk to each other. The father diverts his attention from his spouse back to the children. The son wants to play a hand game and the daughter is hanging on her father’s arm. At this moment, the father tightly hugs his son. The father plays the hand game with the children as the mother looks on.

The observation revealed that the inmate father and mother worked together to manage the visiting session, and the father was the center of attention and possessed a relationship with each family member. The mother sat quietly and watched the children talk and play with their father. After 10-15 minutes passed, the daughter and mother go to the vending machine, in turn, creating father and son quality time. Customary trips to the vending
machines allow inmates to dedicate their undivided attention to one family member. Once the mother and daughter returned, the children played with each other so the spouses could enjoy their brief “alone time.”

**Summary**

Sustainer has the ability to manage incompatible roles by implementing role bargaining to aid in the reconstruction and redefining of role expectations when undergoing an acute process of normative change. In the role bargaining process, he looks to fulfill obligations that will reward him with control, respect, access to the family business, and frequent visitations. Due to his liminality as a prisoner, these role obligations may also result in feelings of powerlessness and regret (Arditti, 2005, p. 283).

Within his liminality, these incarcerated men sustain their families by providing emotional support, limited financial assistance, mentorship, advice, and encouragement. These behaviors result in the family granting the Sustainer access to the decision-making process regarding familial matters and permission to assert his authoritative role publicly. The Sustainer attempts to manage the delicate balance of expecting a “big payback” and “not gonna burn my bridges.” But, at times, even he must remind family members about his prior deposits into the family resource accounts and “collect on” on his pre-prison investments. It is necessary for the Sustainer to be included in the family structure, because his family delivers messages reaffirming the Sustainer’s self-image, personality structure, and expectations and obligations.
CHAPTER 7

Deserters

“Close my shit off”: Role Termination and Resentment

Deserters implement the strategy of “hard timing” to manage their incompatible in-prison and familial roles (Nurse, 2002). In such a strategy, the men reserve and allocate resources exclusively to the performance of prisoner, and eliminate any pre-prison obligations, even those deemed culturally unacceptable to terminate. I argue that a number of determinants such as undefined pre-prison role identities, latent commitment to the values and behaviors associated with their pre-prison roles, tenuous family relationships, traumatic life experiences, maternal gatekeeping, and reciprocity imbalance influence prisoners’ decision to terminate their familial roles and retreat to their in-prison statuses. Deserters find it necessary to dissociate role obligations in different institutional orders (Goode, 1960), thereby terminating functions that conflict and are not mutually supportive of those associated with prisoner. Conversely, interaction with others outside of the prison is necessary to maintain the prisoner’s self-image and personality structure (Goode, 1960).

Incarceration removes prisoners from their moral commitment to their families (Braman, 2004) and ensures a “deep initial break with past roles and appreciation of role dispossession” (Goffman, 1961, p. 14). In the case of Deserters, their ambiguous pre-prison identity and traumatic life experiences left the men somewhat detached from their familial role obligations prior to confinement. The men spoke of being physically, verbally, and sexually abused as children, growing up without father-figures, being alienated from family members because of their criminal involvement, and growing up in
extremely large households with limited resources and feeling forced to pass on their future opportunities to others. Consequently, these traumatic experiences contributed to dysfunctional interactions and relationships. The dysfunctional family relationships coupled with the non-engagement, non-involvement, and non-commitment of Deserters resulted in the inevitable pathway to role dispossession and termination. Practices such as “maternal gatekeeping,” defined as the restriction of a father’s involvement in the life of his child(ren) by the mother (see Allen & Hawkins, 1999 and Fagan & Barnett, 2003 as cited in Dyer, 2005, p. 210) and the unequal exchange of resources further destabilized the relationships and confounded prisoners’ roles. The Deserter incarcerated fathers cited that their child(ren)’s mother(s) restricted access to their child(ren) on account of the parents’ troubled or at times, non-existent relationship.

Because incarceration disrupted the disbursement of “the norm of reciprocity that inheres in family life” (Braman, 2004, p. 221), Deserters reported feeling shortchanged of their reimbursement for pre-prison investments to the family. Rather than continually being disappointed by blocked access to their children and not receiving reimbursements in the preferred forms of monetary support or maintained contact, Deserters eliminate their familial roles and retreat to their prison statuses to guard against feeling overwhelmed, helpless, unsupported, and abandoned. The process of familial role elimination reduces the felt role strain. Simply put, the Deserter rejects his familial roles as he perceives that his family is pushing him out.1 His thoughts and actions are centered on avoiding stressors that make adaptation to prison increasingly difficult. Moreover, both parties, the prisoner and family, see a “lack of profit” in maintaining the relationship

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1 Future work to examine the order of causality.
Muhammad, a 56-year old focus group participant serving two consecutive life sentences conveyed, “Don’t want to place a burden upon people. Parents come. Mom passes away. I pushed everyone else away.” Forty-five year old Ivan stated, “I can’t deal with family and what goes on in here,” and “self-preservation is first.” Focus group participant Anthony who is completing a 70-year sentence provided a complementary statement, “In prison, it’s about individual maintenance and independence from your family.” Barry elaborated further on the process of role rejection.

Barry: I can get upset and say, I did this and that for you but in the same token, don’t nobody owe me shit. These are the same people that kicked down my door asking for things when I was out there. Now, when I’m down, who was there for me? I keep it my memory bank, that’s part of the game. We all take a gamble.

Fifty-year old Thomas explains his reasoning for applying the “Deserter” approach throughout his Life sentence.

Interviewer: In general, what’s your approach on doing time?

Thomas: I use my time by myself. Every time I pick up the phone you will hear something bad. Every time you write a letter, they write something that they shouldn’t that comes from 10 years ago.

Do your time on your own…No other way to do it. If you do it from the outside in, you will lose your mind. Can’t do nothing out there. Why put yourself or another person in that space?

Deserters occupy the polar opposite status to Sustainers. These prisoners face the same challenges and liminality as other groups, but lack the capacity, capability, and/or interest to develop management strategies of their incompatible role sets. Unlike Sustainers, Deserters do not intend to sustain their familial roles or contribute to the family resources during confinement; additionally, the men did not express any intention
for role enactment upon release. Taquan, who hasn’t seen his eight-year old daughter for the six years he has been incarcerated plainly remarked,

Taquan: I feel like I accomplish what I can from here…

All of the IRNs are significantly constrained by their circumstances – in particular, Deserters are characterized as depending on the context and circumstance to shape and define their familial roles. The incarcerative setting transmits messages indicating the barriers of role performances outside that of prisoner. In addition to the messages pertaining to the institutional barriers, Deserters lack the desire, motivation, and possible capacity to simultaneously fulfill their familial and culturally expected obligations and their responsibilities as prisoners. It is important to note that the family members of Deserters have not made extensive efforts to continuously include the prisoners in outside family activities or happenings either, which may be the result of unstable pre-prison relationships and interactions or the inability of the family to handle the “ambiguous nature of loss for families impacted by incarceration” (Arditti, 2005, p. 254). The ambiguous nature of loss can generate “emotional ambivalence” leading to the isolation, emotional withdrawal, tension, and deterioration of closeness and an avoidance of the incarcerated family member (Brodsky, 1975 as cited in Arditti, 2005, p. 255). The interplay of these dynamics produces a ‘why bother?’ attitude. Why should the Deserter work to sustain relationships when he is unsupported by his family? Family relationships are considered expendable and familial roles and functions lay dormant.
Strategy One: Familial Role Termination

Deserters, like other IRNs, significantly contributed to their families financially prior to incarceration. Ivan, serving his second prison term, described his pre-prison responsibility in the following passage,

Ivan: My mother lost her house, so I was looked to as the financial person. I paid the mortgage on the house, taxes, plus with my own house. I paid the electrical bill, worked two jobs, sold drugs.

Taquan, 30-years old, has hustled since the age of 12 years old and claimed to be his family’s “moneyman,” meaning that he made significant financial contributions. He has completed 6 years of his 15-year sentence.

Interviewer: How long have you been money making?

Taquan: Since about 12 years old. I did it for my mom, I didn’t have to but I did it and still do it…I still am the moneyman².

In comparison to the larger IRN sample, men only coded as Deserters³ were incarcerated at an older age of 29 years old, which presented the men with more opportunities to spend increased time defining, performing, and enacting their familial role. However, the findings indicate that the pre-prison role of Deserters was in fact undeveloped and imbalanced. The prisoners’ lengthy sentences and increased time served on average of 16 years also presents reasoning for implementation of the Deserter approach. Family members unwilling to support the inmate or manage the extended period of ambiguous loss may have terminated the relationship at the start of the incarceration period. For example, Taquan has been separated and not had physical

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² Taquan claimed to have his attorney send money to his family.
³ Shaheem and Barry are coded in both Dependents and Deserters, yet, their demographic data is only included with Dependents, due to statistical mutual exclusivity.
contact with his daughter since she was two years old. He speaks her with by phone a few times a year with their most recent conversation taking place a year prior to the research interview. His relationship with his daughter’s mother ended the day he entered prison.

Interviewer: Do you and daughter’s mother still have a relationship?

Taquan: No, we aren’t tight anymore. The minute I got locked up, she never had the nerve to tell me, just left…just left and got tired.

Alternatively, the men may have previously attempted to execute other negotiation strategies, but with little success decided to accept and implement the Deserter approach of “individual maintenance” and “independence from family.”

At the time of the interview, the Deserters’ average age was 43.5 year old, with men ranging from 30 to 51 years. The group includes four Black men – Ivan, Taquan, Thomas, and William – and one Caucasian man, Bernard. Two of the five men, Ivan and Taquan, completed one prison sentence prior to their current incarceration. The analysis revealed that Shaheem and Barry occupied differential statuses in their relationships with their children. Because the role negotiation strategy of the men varied dependent on the role relationship, Shaheem and Barry are presented as a hybrid of Dependent and Deserter.
Table 7.1. Characteristics of Deserters (n=5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sentence Length (yrs)</th>
<th>Time Served (yrs)</th>
<th>Prior</th>
<th>Receives Visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20*</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernard</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taquan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*He maxes out in 2014.

The life experiences of Deserters had a demoralizing effect on the prisoners. I argue that traumatic events/stressors, such as abuse, deaths, alienation, and being made to feel insignificant and worthless within their family have intensely affected the inmates’ mental health and shaped their cognitive-behavioral patterns. In comparison to the other IRNs, Deserters thoughts were detached and at times delusional; the men expressed difficulty in coping with current and past life events. Resultantly, these life events continue to negatively affect and undermine their interpersonal functioning with family members. Thomas, serving out a Life sentence, confided that as a child, his mother was verbally and physically harsh. “My mother knew what a whooping was! Anything she can get her hands on…She said now you know you are too ugly, and the older you get, the uglier.” Ivan talked of being physically abused by his mother and recounted being sexually abused by his childhood babysitter. Ivan remembered the difficult times with his mother.

Ivan: My mom did some things. She put me through whole lot at a young age. I’m very outspoken, and she is old time religion, that wasn’t effective in 70’s. You can’t take a product from their environment, put them in
different environment and you have no knowledge of that environment. Just believe. We moved to a better environment. We moved from Newark to Irvington, which was racist...She would tell me that I could tell her anything. So I would tell her, you know, and then you want to hit me? Cause I’m speaking to you, and trying to get an understanding. At 13, she bust me in the head, and that trust was gone...It’s documented in [hospital name], that my mother was gonna kill me. They arrested my mother.

The two brothers Taquan was closest with died prior to his confinement.

Interviewer:  How do you think your family’s life has changed since you have been incarcerated?

Taquan:  My mother’s life has changed...she’s lost two of her sons in the last 8 years. It hurt her, cause I’m the baby. Been gone 6 years...Me and my brothers⁴, we don’t get along, and that started before I came in here. Just the two that passed, them was my boys!

These encounters with rejection, neglect, loss, feelings of insignificance, and grief are constant and have defined the prison experience for Deserters. These negotiators regard the status of their relationships as non-existent, maintain a pessimistic outlook, and do not see worth in extending individual resources outside the prison complex. As Taquan remarked, “it is what it is⁵.” William, fifty-one years old, started serving time in correctional facilities as a juvenile. He has not spoken with his three sisters since receiving the news of his mother’s death from the prison social worker in 1995. William expressed disappointment and anger with his sisters for not taking the time to immediately and personally deliver the sensitive information. As a result, he has disconnected from his sisters and other family members. He believed things would be different if his mother was alive. William complained,

William:  Worst part of a visit...is when they bring you bad news. Social worker informed me of when my mom’s passed. I would have rather my

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⁴ Taquan has three other brothers.
⁵ Quote from Barry.
family told me. I found out two days later…that’s why I haven’t talked to my sisters.

My mom was the one to keep the family together, when she passed it went [he points down].

Without the support of his mother, William felt disenfranchised, powerless, and unimportant. He rejected and disengaged from his role performances as a son and brother and dissolved his relationships with his sisters and maintained minimal relationships with his two children. Thomas talked about his pre-prison familial responsibilities held 27 years ago and how those expectations have diminished over the course of his incarceration.

Interviewer: Before you were incarcerated, what was your place in your family?

Thomas: Hmmm…I went to school. I was still a young guy, I was 20…I went to Lincoln education service. You had to help clean the house. My mother…she tricked me to learning how to clean and cook. I did for the whole family. Everybody in my family taught me how to cook.

Interviewer: How do you currently contribute to your family?

Thomas: Different cause after time you don’t know each other. Technically they don’t know you. They know who left, they don’t know who came back. The family structure is a chain, once you go and leave and go wherever, they close the rank on the chain to survive. Little link of love and it’s not needed, but appreciated. Looking from the inside out, and outside in. You try to fit in…You get paid you put paycheck on the table, but they don’t want to accept, cause they don’t know if it’s going to continue to be there.

In his status as son and student, Thomas relied on an authority to provide the expected role behaviors. The death of Thomas’ mother and father resulted in the loss of his role as son; his incarceration eliminated his role as an active student; because his daughter was born after his incarceration he hadn’t previously engaged in or committed to activities related to fathering; now, he allocates his resources to in-prison roles.
Many factors influence the Deserters’ decision to forgo the enactment of familial roles. The culmination of previous experiences and association of visits with “bad news” like the death of his parents, led to Thomas’ rejection of his familial roles and “closing shit off.” He explained further,

Thomas: In here you can close shit off, close my shit off. In visits you can’t do that. In family structure, can’t do that. If you’re upset…you imagine what it does to me?

Although, Thomas’s parents are deceased, he has other family members who depend on him to define their personality structure and familial status, such as his daughter. By being unengaged and uninvolved, other members (i.e., daughter’s mother, Thomas’ siblings, or other relatives) are forced to fulfill his fatherly obligations. Thomas has not considered the impact that his role rejection has on others.

In other instances, Deserters, like Bernard, 50-years old, did not display behavioral, affectional, or committal aspects of performances in their familial roles prior to incarceration (Arditti et al., 2005). The termination of Bernard’s roles began at the age of 16 years old when he was emancipated from his mother. His only brother died 6 years before his imprisonment in a “street washing accident” and he does not have a spouse or any children and lacked strong ties with other family or community members. As far as friends, he said,

Bernard: My friends that I had…they don’t know about my current situation. I was in circles that shun people that get arrested from things. They don’t know. If they did, haven’t heard from them.

Bernard had a weak pre-prison network and the fact that he was emancipated at 16 years of age indicates that his relationship with his mother was dysfunctional and troubled at the least. Expectantly, he did not hold familial roles that required performances.
The Deserter incarcerated fathers cited, maternal gatekeeping as heavily influencing their connection to and relationship with their children. Barry\(^6\) has two daughters by two women. His eldest daughter is fifteen years old and lives in North Carolina. The youngest is ten years old and resides in New York, Barry’s hometown. He had this to say about his daughters,

Barry: Now, my one daughter is in North Carolina, so we don’t speak too often. Me and her mother are going through things…My daughter in New York, she comes to see me periodically. My brother brings her up. Me and my brother are close.

Barry blamed his distant relationship with his eldest daughter on structural barriers such as the distal location of the prison from her home and his relationship with her mother. Another inmate attested, “People move away from you while you are in, especially those with young children, it’s difficult to form a relationship. You are now second in their life, the outside and what’s going on outside takes precedence\(^7\).” Barry has not accepted the responsibility of directly initiating contact with his daughters or exercised personal agency to sustain fatherly role; instead, he relies on his brother to serve as the portal of communication. He remains in contact with his youngest daughter because his brother brings her to visitation sessions. If Barry’s brother did not commit to bringing his daughter to visits, I suggest that Barry would have limited and infrequent contact with both daughters. Such limited contact may result in a contentious relationship with his daughter’s mother and tense and negative interactions with his daughter. The intersection of these factors might lead to the deterioration of his father-daughter relationship.

The difficulty of maintaining the father-child bond and building a relationship intensifies when layering the complexity of serial parenting -defined as children by

\(^6\) Coded as Dependent and Deserter  
\(^7\) Daniel, focus group participant.
multiple partners with “maternal gatekeeping” and maternal or caregiver influence - (Clarke et al., 2005). Such challenges leave Deserters feeling worthless, without authority, and defenseless against the active authority of their child(ren)’s mother(s).

Thirty-one year old Shaheem⁸ has been in and out of jail “about 20” times. He has an 11-year old son and eight-year old daughter by two different women, and a wife, with whom he has no children. He and his wife have been, “Doing on and off for awhile, I say about six years, off and on.” Shaheem is in constant contact with his daughter and speaks with his son on a less frequent basis. He attributed the difference in his parent-child relationships to the number of times he’s been in and out of jail and prison, the timing of incarcerations in relations to the children’s birth and developmental years, and the relationships with their mothers. Shaheem spoke in detail about the differences,

Shaheem: I was there when my daughter was born. I was there with her mother at the time. Me and my daughter, is closer than me and my son. Me and my daughter is closer. Every once in awhile, I call my uncle or aunt house, like this weekend I called my uncle house and he (his son) was there. He wanted to get back in the pool so he was rushing through, saying he was doing good in school…he asked if I wanna come home…I talk to him every once in a while.

Interviewer: What do you relate the differences in your relationships with your children to?

Shaheem: Relationships with their mothers…With my daughter, from the time she was born, I was in jail tops 30 days. It was broken up…even if not living under the same roof, I was seeing her everyday. Me and my son mother we were never in a relationship, she got pregnant, and had a son. I was like you need some money? When I started dealing with my daughter’s mother, she (son’s mother) really starting playing games. I told her that the only thing stopping me from being with him is you. I’m not gonna be miserable for nobody for the sake of someone else…

⁸ Coded as Dependent and Deserter.
Never establishing a prolonged engagement with his son’s mother and being incarcerated for his son’s first four years critically destabilized their relationship. As Nurse points out in her research on paroled fathers, “A successful sexual conquest of a ‘bad girl’ may be a notch in a young man’s belt, but having a child with one is not” (Nurse, 2002, p. 137). Shaheem neglects developing a meaningful relationship with his son because of the absent parental relationship. Conversely, he has intentionally held a relationship with his daughter’s mother and developed an ongoing relationship with his daughter and her siblings that have no biological relation to him. He credited his closeness with his daughter and her family to being present during her formative years, with his current sentence as the only extended period of absence.

Shaheem: Even like my daughter’s mother…she got three other kids. Her two sons is older, like 10 and 11, and her daughter, Jasmine⁹ is seven. Since Jasmine is little she don’t know no one else. She started calling me daddy... I talk to all of them when I call. I talk to her [his daughter] and her sister, Jasmine. I don’t treat her no different than I treat my daughter. Even in the county, I would see my son, my daughter, and Jasmine. I started something, so I gotta finish it. Even on Christmas I would buy the sons something, something. But I would really look out for my son, my daughter, and Jasmine.

Shaheem’s dialogue is striking in that his “good” standing and formalized relationship with his daughter’s mother has created an opportunity to perform fatherly role behaviors in that family system. This finding supports research that suggests fathers do not view the relationship with their children as separate from their relationship with the mother (Furstenberg, 1995). Shaheem’s own mother ambitiously worked to improve his bond with his son by bringing him to visitation sessions. But, over time, the responsibility

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⁹Pseudonyms were utilized when respondents used proper names or other descriptions that could provide identifying information. An underline mark replaced the description of identified places.
associated with the task proved exceedingly challenging because “my mother don’t drive, so she is dependent on someone bringing her” and “she scared, she don’t know if she can bring the insulin into the jail” for his diabetic son.

Other Deserters totally relinquish their fathering functions and transfer the responsibilities to family members. Ivan’s case demonstrates such desertion of obligations. Ivan has 11 children from three separate families with three different mothers. One of his sisters has cared for his twin daughters since they were 1-month old because the children’s mother did not want the girls, his wheelchair bound mother was deemed incapable of doing so by the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), and Ivan, their father, is incarcerated. Another sister cares for another one Ivan’s daughters in Florida. His other children are separated and live in different parts of the world. He explained,

Interviewer: Are you still in contact with your children?

Ivan: The twins yes, and the oldest son 27, yes. The twins are with my sister…my daughter, Shana, is with my sister in Florida, one in Trinidad and one in Germany. All except for three…Well, not direct contact but through mom’s. Michael, the oldest directly. He’ll come down to see\textsuperscript{10}, or I’ll write him. I have four grands…daughter has two, two sons, have one, all three are married.

Prior to his confinement, he spent time entertaining his eldest three children and participated in some normative father-child activities. He remembered,

Ivan: The older three, we went to the park, played basketball, amusement parks, sit back and take them to library for homework. Take them to my mom’s house, and let them see family that they don’t know. I just threw it in the air and asked them, “What you want to do today?”

\textsuperscript{10} Michael last visited in March 2007.
Since his incarceration, Ivan reported limited contact with his siblings and feeling unsupported by the family. Ivan stated, “my sisters and brothers, they aren’t like me. If they were like me, they would be here now.” The thought of caring for 11 children behind bars can be overwhelming and the reminder that his sisters perform his parental functions may awaken feelings of regret. Hence, Ivan has remained inactive and uninvolved as a father, brother, and son. He has accepted the “why bother” approach and perceives his contribution to be insignificant and insufficient.

William is one of the prisoners who participated in two interview sessions. In the first interview, he spoke fondly of his relationship with his daughter who was five years old at the time of his incarceration. “We were close before I was incarcerated. That is my heart. We are still really close.” He indicated that they spoke everyday by phone and the relationship improved greatly over the years due to her developing maturity and the fact that “she can talk now.” However, at the initial interview session William did not mention having another child, even when probed. In the second interview, he opened up about both children and admitted to engaging in more contact with his daughter than son. He and his daughter usually communicate a few times a year by phone or letters, which include receiving pictures of his grandchildren he has yet to meet.

William: My daughter is 32, son 34. My daughter has two girls. My son has about six kids.

Interviewer: When was the last time you had contact with your children?

William: Last month, I got a letter from my daughter. She wants me to call her, but I don’t know what to say to her. My son, he don’t want to talk…I try to talk to him about this place. We spoke about two months ago. He will have to find out on own [about prison]…My daughter. We are very close. She can get anything from me, when we on the phone, if she need something I send it. Father and daughter close, my son he is doing his own thing so we aren’t that close. I think he is a momma boy.
William’s interviews revealed that his “close” relationship with his daughter may in fact be artificial and a created fantasy. Additionally, it is uncovered that he hasn’t accepted ownership of the impact of his actions, behavior, and detachment on his children. Presumably, his son is a “momma boy” because William has been incarcerated for 23 years of his son’s life. His role in his son’s and daughter’s lives is defined by his inaction and absence. Furthermore, the children’s mother is influential in shaping their view of him.

William: Last month, I called my daughter…I changed…but she be asking about her mom. Her mom be putting stuff in her head. I don’t want to get into it with her.

William’s perception of his relationship with his child(ren) is not reflective of his behavior or reported contact with his child(ren). He did not hold a meaningful relationship with his child(ren) pre-prison and has not exercised personal agency to reconstruct his role.

Similarly, Taquan, who has been separated and not had physical contact with his daughter in six years, prefers to enact his fatherly role compared to other familial roles during incarceration. He remarked that his daughter “don’t listen to nobody but me.” However, like William, his claims seems improbable in considering that his daughter was two years old at the time of his incarceration and he only cited contributing financially to his family pre-prison,

Taquan: The moneyman! To take care of my daughter and stepson, gave them the money.

Interviewer: Did you contribute any other way?

Taquan: No, I paid people to do that.
Therefore, I speculate that Taquan constructed a “fantasy” relationship and overstated his role in his daughter’s life to subconsciously cover the fact that he lacked a significant emotional and meaningful presence in her life. He provided details on their relationship,

Interviewer: What position in your family are you most comfortable carrying out now?

Taquan: Yeah…being a father. I can, but I can’t. She knows who I am, but I’m still not there…my daughter is bad, I mean real bad! That’s my fault, she don’t listen to nobody but me.

Interviewer: What do you and your daughter talk about on the phone?

Taquan: Everything…school…she tell me every time she get in trouble. She put it like she don’t do nothing, I tell her she better do good. I tell her “I’m coming home and gonna get her,” she been doing good now. She’s being good and doing what she gotta do. She always wants something, I spoiled her, new coats, new boots, new toys, whatever she wanted.

In general for imprisoned fathers, “Incarceration changes his behavior toward his child(ren) as well as how he is symbolically and physically connected to them” (Dyer, 2005, p. 207). In particular for Deserters, functions related to fathering, such as fortifying relationships based on meaningful and emotional support, becomes unclear and more ambiguous during confinement. Deserters are uncertain as to how they can provide such support from prison. Instead, the men develop “fantasy” relationships with family members and friends to potentially cover their shortcomings.

The Deserter’s role elimination affects his internal development and personality structure and that of their children. In response to “closing shit off,” Deserters do not have role senders transmitting messages to direct and construct their familial role and role behaviors. As a result, the role expectations can become more confusing as mothers “struggle to carefully define and monitor men’s involvement through gate keeping” (Roy & Dyson, 2005, p. 292). The intersection of these factors – gatekeeping, serial parenting,
and non-existent parental relationships - actualize incarcerated fatherhood into an indefinite period of dormancy (Arditti et al., 2005).

Due to Deserters absence and inactivity and absence as family agents, specifically as fathers, their prior deposits and investments (e.g., “moneyman”) into the family resource account go largely unnoticed and unreciprocated in the desired forms of contact maintenance and monetary support. In contrast to Sustainers, Deserters do not employ their familial roles in the incarcerative setting by mentoring family youth, or providing guidance, support, or advice to members. Findings indicated that men typified only as Deserters do not receive visits, and have limited contact with their family through letters and phone calls. As previously presented, Deserters associate visits with unfavorable memories and find that “they give you false hope…pain in the ass.” The men fear abandonment and work to push others away to guard against rejection. As observed during a visitation session, prisoners avoid any situations in which they risk experiencing abandonment or rejection, and take steps to isolate themselves.

Saturday, February 16, 2008, 8:45 a.m.

The prisoner’s wife arrived at 7 a.m. but was not permitted into the visiting hall until 10 a.m. She was looking for her husband but the COs said that he was tired of waiting and wanted permission to return to his cell. So they let him go back. The wife was mad and said, “But what about my visit?” They tried to explain that he didn’t want the visit. She wanted to come back for the 2nd visitation session, but they explained that he gave up his visit for the day. She was upset with the officers for allowing him to return to his cell.

I argue that the abovementioned observation is an example of an inmate avoiding an encounter with rejection. In doing so, he terminated his visit and neglected the needs of his family. I also assert that the perceived imbalance of reciprocation generates feelings of resentment. Deserters push others away and harbor resentment, but like Ivan, the men
recognize the need for and at times yearn for physical contact with family members,

Ivan: Nothing beats a hug from your family. You get that genuine feeling of love. It’s not the fake stuff back in the tier.

Without this family contact, I argue that Deserters formed an artificial sense of “closeness” with family members (i.e. mother, children, siblings, or spouse) not established prior to their incarceration nor maintained through continuous physical or verbal contact. The incarcerated men engaged in creating fantasy relationships with family members due to the social pressure prisoners face to be connected to the outside. The lack of agency, involvement, commitment, or expressed intentions within his familial roles on the part of the Deserter contribute to the lack of reciprocation by his family. Without a place within his family, Deserters focus efforts on “staying as busy as possible” as prisoners

Strategy Two: Disillusionment and Harbored Resentment

The traumatic life events of Deserters and perceived reciprocity imbalance affect their interrelationships with family members and produce increased feelings of resentment against the family unit. The experienced life altering incidents (i.e., abuse, alienation) have not been discussed or addressed; however, such incidences have impacted how the family relates to one another. Deserters lack the skills to effectively communicate the impact of their life experiences to family members. Family members, unaware of the inmates’ grudges and resentment, do not respond sufficiently to their grievances. Resentment becomes fueled by the absence of communication and reciprocation. Consequently, Deserters reject their family relationships and focus on their in-prison status.
Bernard lacks a familial network. He directs his energy to striving to be a model prisoner. He wishes to be looked upon favorably by the correctional staff and other inmates. His only outside contact has been with lawyers or family members of other inmates. He explained,

Bernard: I have to say, the most memorable visit is when another inmate wanted to see visitors, so he can see his cousin…but he wasn’t on his visiting list, so I sat there for the visit so he could see his cousin…

Bernard was the only interview participant to bring a certificate of program completion (for Introduction to Paralegal Functions) to the interview\(^\text{11}\). He was not previously informed of the purpose of who he would meet. His actions serve as an indication that Bernard uses the certificate as a badge to prove that he is different from and possibly better than the other prisoners. Similarly, William expressed extreme pride in his 11-hour per day position as a power pro canteen employee\(^\text{12}\) where he holds authority over other inmates. He described his in-prison work by stating “I tell the other guys what to do.” As Goode (1960) indicates, individuals may over perform in one activity of his role relationship to compensate for poor performance in another. Deserters dissociate from their familial roles, yet expand their role set within the prison. These prisoners transfer their primary group affiliation from within their families to those within the prison (Clemmer, 1958).

I argue that the prisoners’ entrenchment in life inside has skewed their perceptions and expectations of their family. These points are illustrated in the examination of Ivan’s familial relationships. Ivan, a self-proclaimed “Prodigal child” talked about how he

\(^{11}\) Prisoners were unaware that they would be asked to participate in the research study. Some inmates did hear about the research, but none were made aware of why they were being called from their tier on the specific interview date.

\(^{12}\) Canteen supervisor.
provided “moral support and security” and financial assistance to his family prior to his incarceration. His attitude as a youngster was founded on “animosity and hatred.”

Ivan: Mom moved from Clinton Street. There were six black families in Irvington when we moved there. I went to church with mostly white kids, they chased me home. It hurted me that they have no respect to my mother, and fake respect to my father…When we moved to Irvington, police officers, a cop called “Whitie,” sicked a dog on my brother and sister and me all the time.

Animosity and hatred and getting even…Next day I bought a pocket knife and tried to kill the dog…That’s how I grew up. Here for murder, attempted murder, aggravated assault, it was an accident, I know I did the attempt.

Ivan expressed being extremely distressed by his family’s move to Irvington because of encounters with racism. In his narrative, he further identified the reasoning of his resentment against and disappointment in his mother for her willingness to care for her deceased sister’s children.

Ivan: I wish my mother in ’69…I wish my mother, when my aunt died… I agreed taking my cousins was a good thing to do. There was a time in my household, four bedrooms, and over 22 people in the house. Two adults, and the rest are kids. Two, four, six, bunk beds in one room. Upstairs you have two bunk beds. All these different ages, males, females, cousins. She took away from us! Now all the other sisters’ kids, they went to the college, their language is much better. She had to fend for self to teach. Why couldn’t she split them up? There was over 16 of them. She spread herself too thin. I would change the living conditions starting from my childhood.

Over the years, Ivan’s frustrations with his mother significantly deepened. He expressed that as a child growing up with 20 other people, his future opportunities were “taken away” and/or handed to other members. The large household size resulted in less attention and support for Ivan and incurred increased financial responsibility. To assist his mother in providing for the household, he turned to drug dealing, stating that he “sold drugs to take care of people.” His drug dealing money helped pay the mortgage, taxes,
and other utilities. As a result of his drug dealing, Ivan held a significant presence in the community as well. He reminisced,

Ivan: I was like a confidante. A big brother, a friend, wouldn’t say a father figure, had my own kids. Some would say, but I would say a big brother.

Paradoxically, Ivan, a drug dealer, provided a class of high school students with drug-involved and addicted parents, graduation caps and gowns.

Ivan: I bet they won’t tell you. June 97, there was 14 students, that couldn’t pay graduation cap and gowns, nor for the class trip, because their mothers was crack heads….caps and gowns, trip, dresses, shoes…I must’ve spent $4700. It started with 2 kids on the block… I went to the graduation and everything, it was beautiful.

For Ivan, he made the sacrifice to hustle, so his other family members would not have to.

Interviewer: Do you continue to contribute financially or other ways to your family?

Ivan: Nah, don’t have any ties to this community now, not too tough. Sister and brother are married, no need to be around them. It’s been 11 years and you did without me. When I was home, I was constantly giving out. I was the one with the jacket already, I tried to make sure it stayed that way.

Interviewer: Do you and your family talk about your daily activities?

Ivan: No, everyone is grown, my sisters and brothers, they aren’t like me. If they were like me, they would be here now. You calling and asking me for money. They would drop a line. I have $1700, $1800 in my account. Everyone is trying to get money. My moms don’t know where the paperwork for $3500 that I have in the bank is now…a lot of things going on ‘cause they ask me.

First thing they said is they need help to bury father. I can’t get administration to pay last respects to father. I’m not thinking about brothers and sister. You left me on my own after all I did for you? I put Kareem through ______Institute, so now he took up computer programming, works for DMV…he has a good job, married, he’s doing excellent…well.
Ivan’s resentment toward his family progressed and snowballed from childhood experiences to adulthood encounters. He sacrificed his childhood, legal standing, freedom, and aspirations to provide for his family and community members. Similar to the family members of Sustainers, Ivan’s relatives continued to expect his financial aid during his confinement. Ivan articulated being disappointed and frustrated with his family for having the audacity to ask for money without trying to maintain contact with him in some form, like “dropping a line.” Conversely, his family might believe that they have reciprocated Ivan’s pre-prison efforts and contributions by raising and rearing his 11 children.

Summary

Deserters do not have the capacity, capability, and/or interest to manage their pre-prison and current roles simultaneously when undergoing an acute process of normative change. Deserters’ familial roles and responsibilities prior to confinement were ambiguous and become more unclear, less defined, and imbalanced during incarceration. These men lack the needed personal agency to reconstruct and redefine their roles in the context of prison; instead, Deserters allow the context to shape their identity resulting in the termination of familial roles. Consequently, Deserters retreat and allocate their resources to the performance of their in-prison statuses. Deserters simply regard their circumstance as “it is, what it is.”
CHAPTER 8

Dependents

“Accommodate Me”: Reliance, Stability, and Support

Dependents place significant reliance on family members to fulfill the inmates’ pre-prison familial role obligations. These IRNs recognize the importance and necessity of maintaining their status within the family system. The continual enactment of the prisoner’s roles shapes his personality structure and that of other family members, especially his children. The family system is dependent on his role performance to inform and influence their social behavior. However, Dependents perceive that they lack the capacity and capability to personally manage their incompatible roles simultaneously due to the liminality associated with incarceration. Dependents expressed, “Being that I’m incarcerated? Not really able to contribute”\(^1\). Twenty-nine year old Jackson, father of two daughters enjoys performing the “daddy role,” but he described his limitations.

Interviewer: What position in your family are you most comfortable carrying out now?

Jackson: I can’t carry out nothing right now. I have contact with the kids, and keep in constant touch with them, through mail, visits, and calls. My daughter’s birthday is coming up, so I’ll give her a phone call and they’ll maybe come up for a visit.

Interviewer: What role do visits play in your family relationships?

Jackson: Helps me keep up with my kids, other than that…just being a constant reminder that I am Daddy. That they know who I am. My oldest…she’s only 10 now…I tell her everything. She is my best friend in the whole world. She tells me everything…

In comparison to Sustainers, Dependents lack tenacity and ingenuity to personally redefine and reconstruct their familial roles within the environmental context of prison.

\(^1\) Quote from Micah.
Yet the prisoners believe they have a moral obligation to carry out their pre-prison responsibilities. Consequently, Dependents and the family unit mutually negotiate to transfer elements of the Dependents’ role assignments to other unit members. Assigned family members execute the Dependents’ role functions and serve as a portal between the prisoners and members. The prisoner depends on his family to continue to embed him in relationships and activities. However, the changing environmental context affects in his engagement, commitment, activity, and consistency levels in his roles because he is no longer the executor of the role functions.

Dependents on average were incarcerated at 25 years old, completing the shortest sentences of the IRNs of 14.2 years, and served the least amount of time (9.1 years) on their current sentence. More than half of the men have been previously incarcerated. The Dependents, Barry, Calvin, Geoffrey, Jackson, Joshua, Kyle, Micah, Shaheem, and Vincent, are African-American and averaged age 34 years old at the time of interview, ranging from 29 to 43 years. Findings indicate that Dependents’ have a resilient support network that works to continually sustain the inmate and adopt and enact his role obligations. On average, family members and friends visit Dependents at least monthly.

2 Coded as a Dependent and Deserter.
3 Coded as a Dependent and Deserter.
Table 8.1. Characteristics of Dependents (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sentence Length (yrs)</th>
<th>Time Served (yrs)</th>
<th>Prior Incarceration</th>
<th>Receives Visits</th>
<th>Visit Frequency</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barry*</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few Times a year</td>
<td>Brother, daughter, mother, sister, female friend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few Times a year</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoffrey</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Mother, sister, son, grandson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Children, children’s mother, mother, &quot;Friends&quot;</td>
</tr>
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<td>Joshua</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few Times a year</td>
<td>Mother, sister</td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
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<td>Shaheem*</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Mother, father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Inmates included in hybrid model of Dependent/Deserter.

*Strategy One: Role Transference*

The stability and support inherent in the Dependents’ families allows the negotiators to undergo this process of role transference. Dependents trust the family members to perform their role obligations, because they were previously forced to rely and depend on these relatives at another point in time. The resiliency of the family has demonstrated the capacity to survive, regenerate, and grow out of crises (Arditti, 2005). As the case with 30-year old Micah, who along with his four siblings lost both parents and maternal and paternal grandmothers prior to his sentence. His older female cousin (38-years old) stepped up and accepted the responsibility of supporting Micah and his
siblings, though they were of legal age\(^4\) to care for themselves. Within the household, Micah contributed to paying the household bills, providing groceries, and protecting the family. Of his cousin, he said, “she’s real supportive, 100 percent, she’s always been a mother to me, my brothers, and my cousins, a mother figure to all of us.” She continues to support Micah and his incarcerated younger brother. For Micah in particular, his cousin and sister help to develop his entrepreneurial aspirations.

Micah: I want to be an entrepreneur. Dealing with business, clothing design. I have my own clothing label…yeah, they are my supporters…they are contributing. They got the trademark and copyright. My cousin and sister researched it.

It is critical to consider that these families have previously encountered the challenges associated with incarceration as a result of the inmates’ prior imprisonments or that of other immediate family members. Still, they display internal and unrelenting strength. Six of the nine men coded as Dependents have previously served time in jail and/or prison. Micah has been previously incarcerated as a juvenile and adult and his younger brother has served 11 years of a 25-year sentence in a different state correctional facility. The family has maintained their commitment to visit both men. Likewise, thirty-one year old Shaheem\(^5\) described the evolution of his relationship with his mother over the course of his “about 20” or so jail and prison incarcerations.

Interviewer: How has your relationship changed since your incarceration?

Shaheem: I think it got stronger. Every other time I was incarcerated…every other time it was like “you made your bed now lay in it.” This time it was like, “I got your back.” In this situation, family and friends…when you get behind fences and walls, people disappear. When the smoke cleared, she was here. Not saying she wasn’t here before for me, but it was tough love before.

\(^4\) Micah was 21 years old at the time of his mother’s death.
\(^5\) Coded as a Dependent and Deserter.
Shaheem shared that his mother was not supportive or present throughout his sentences. He explained that she harbored resentment against him for introducing his adopted younger brother to “street life” which eventually led to his death. In turn, Shaheem blamed his mother for taking in three boys in addition to her own two sons. He remembered, “I wasn’t the baby anymore...so I was gonna rebel.” He resents his older brother for attending college, being a “financial burden” to the family and taking away Shaheem’s own opportunity to attend college. Despite these challenges, Shaheem and his mother have since reconciled and she has remained by his side, letting him know that “I got your back.”

The Dependents, especially those who grew up in households led by their mothers talked about special mother-son bonds. Thirty-five year old Barry grew up in a single-parent home with his two siblings. His father who he communicates with only through letters resides in Denver. Barry’s older brother recently completed a prison sentence in New York State and his sister is soon-to-be named a Sheriff. Pre-prison, Barry’s life revolved around being the provider for his children as he states, “taking care of me and my kids.” Despite having served time for a prior offense, Barry manages to maintain strong and trusting relationships with family members. His brother includes Barry as partner in business ventures and uses visits as brainstorming sessions and business meetings. Barry’s brother has also accepted the responsibility to bring Barry’s daughter to visitation sessions. His mother focuses on securing housing arrangements for Barry upon release. He fondly described the relationship he has with his mother.

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6 Brother is now in law enforcement.
7 As stated by Shaheem.
8 Coded as a Dependent and Deserter.
Barry: Me and my mom are close. We are everything to each other. She’s my best friend. Emotionally, we take care of each other.

Interviewer: Do you include your family in your activities?

Barry: Yeah, they know. I am pretty much trying to better myself as a person. Yeah, they include me. My mom has a house in North Carolina, and we talk about if I want to move down there. She has property in NC, NY, and VA. She wants to know where I want to be so she can accommodate me.

Excerpts from his interview revealed that his family works arduously to support and sustain Barry, even drafting plans for his future upon release. Similar to the retreating of Deserters, Barry participates in programming to further develop his educational and employment skills and reassess his cognitive-behavioral processes while his family maintains his familial role status.

Joshua, a thirty-six year old completing his first prison sentence was the least expected in the family to be incarcerated.

Joshua: I never really got in trouble. No one ever thought I would be in here…no one thought they would see me in jail…My brother was the one always in trouble and locked up, not me. I was in ______County College, ROTC, took the civil service exam, had good jobs at the Post Office, Security, Auxiliary Officer…I got caught up in the spur of the moment and couldn’t control my temper.

Due to his father’s incarceration, Joshua and his two siblings were raised mostly by their mother. Joshua’s father was abusive, alcoholic, and absent. He remembered visiting his father as a child at the POF who was incarcerated a number of times, with sentences ranging from three to seven years.

Joshua: My own father was always in and out of jail, but I come from a very religious, Christian family. It was hard to deal with, I was the protector, me and my mom, I helped to take care of her and the other kids. It’s a struggle to deal with…not being there.
He conveyed, “The best advice my father gave me was, ‘never grow up to be like you father.’”

Joshua: It hurt him to see me going to jail. He used to say, that I was not thorough enough. I was truly afraid of him…But right before he passed away is when he got his life together. He started going to church with mom, ‘cause she wasn’t having it any other way. I learned that, “Once you get your life together, the streets catch up with you.”

As a result of his father’s desertion, Joshua, as the oldest child, was expected to fulfill his father’s functions. His new role resulted in close bond with his mother.

Interviewer: Has your mom’s life changed any?

Joshua: She is disappointed. No one else has stepped up to protect her. My brother (36) moved in with his girlfriend and they are about to get married. My sister (27), she’s young and just wants to party, go to concerts like Summer Jam…my mom, she can’t go to church, Bible Study because she is stuck with the kids.

I’m not there to protect my mother. I grew up protecting her, taking care of her, taking her to church, taking her out to eat. I was always there. I was the oldest.

His mother now supports him and his son and remains engaged in custody battles with his son’s mother.

Interviewer: So, is your son staying with your mother, too?

Joshua: My son…he’s back and forth. There’s a custody battle going right now, between my moms and my baby mom. When her and her boyfriend are cool, they throw the kids on my mom…she just needs a vacation. I want to give that to her.

Joshua indicated that his incarceration has affected his father-child relationships and his son’s behavioral development

Joshua: My son fights and get into trouble. My daughter, she’s 18, her birthday was in January. She’s in the Marine Corps, she is doing the right thing and staying out of trouble. But I’m not there and haven’t been there for her because of the incarceration, so, they do not listen to me…I’ve been away for a long period of time. I hoped she would wait [ex-
girlfriend], but the relationship died out. Being around another guy, now he [son] is used to him…he slipped and told me that he is calling someone else “Daddy,” and it’s ‘cause I’m not there.

Interviewer: Has your daughter come to visit?

Joshua: Yeah, but not recently. She was supposed to come up for her birthday, but didn’t. That was around Christmas. My son, it’s been about 8 months since he’s been up here.

Like Barry, while Joshua’s mother maintains his role obligations to his children, he participates in prison programming, including groups such as the speaker’s forum and drama outreach. “I stay busy, attend every church service, I have 37 [program completion] certificates.”

Forty-three year old Geoffrey has an increased reliance on his parents. He has completed two previous prison sentences, and served 8 years of his current sentence. Prior to confinement, Geoffrey depended on and resided with his parents and said of his family, “I have a very supportive family…yes, in fact.” Geoffrey talked about his prior deposits into the family resource account.

Geoffrey: I worked. I helped to pay bills. I remodeled the whole house, paint the house, chores around the house.

Geoffrey depended on his parents to assist with the raising and rearing of his son, and counted on them to continue to provide housing and fulfill his other financial and social needs. Geoffrey spoke of his mother as the member who primarily accepted his role obligations and as “the rock she keeps everything together.” His father’s involvement has been limited by his dialysis treatments. At present, Geoffrey’s parents have taken on the full responsibility of raising his 22-year old son and assisting their grandson with caring for his five-year old child, Barry’s grandchild. In a sense, his parents and prison have created an intergenerational cycle of dependence.
The Dependent negotiator and his family share a relationship based on unequal exchanges, similar to Deserters, it can be seen as a reciprocity imbalance. However, the family members of the Dependent do not anticipate high levels of commitment, engagement, or involvement from the inmate during his incarceration period. The members willingly accept and adopt the delegated responsibilities, many in which they might have assisted the Dependent with prior to incarceration, and do not expect a return on their continued investment to the inmate. “These are relationships that create shared meaning through care and indebtedness. Those estranged from these relationships suffer not only materially; they are, in a sense, devalued as humans” (Braman, 2004, p. 220).

The largely female support network may perceive it to be an extension of their own role obligations to continue the prisoners’ role obligations. Their capacity to survive and grow out of crisis strengthens the family and inmate. Additionally, the support network may be seen as blameworthy for the Dependents’ involvement in criminal activity and incarceration. Subsequently, the family members feel responsible to pick up where the inmate left off. In the instance that the prisoner’s mother was no longer able to retain the role responsibilities of the Dependent, another family member assumed the duties. For example, during his incarceration Calvin lost his two sisters, brother, and common-law wife. His parents fought to gain custody of Calvin’s step (1) and biological (4) children upon the death of his wife. He remembered the reasoning for his parents engaging in a “feud” over the parental rights of his children.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about the household you lived in before you were incarcerated. Who was living in the household at the time?

**Calvin:** I was 22 and living with my baby mother…really common law wife, 7 ½ years…she passed in 1989 in a car accident. We have three children together.
Interviewer: Who take care of the children?

Calvin: Well, it was my mother and father.

Interviewer: Why not her parents?

Calvin: There was like a feud over it, but her parents wasn’t financially ready. And her oldest son had to go through an adoption agency. My parents always felt the need to see my children. They feel what I done was a mistake. They basically feel bad about my actions. I’ve realized a lot of things…my crime…don’t think affect a lot of people, but it does.

Calvin emphasized the special relationship he held with mother.

Interviewer: Did your mom visit? How often?

Calvin: My mom, every two weeks. She made sure she came, would bring her food. Every month she made sure she had a food pack, my father made sure of it. They would send my sister money to bring through…she didn’t have to…to the people that would come to see me, I say “you did the bid with me, you didn’t have to come.”

Because his mother lay the foundation to sustain Calvin and his role during his confinement, his father willingly accepted the responsibility to continue to raise and rear Calvin’s children after her death. His now adult children, who range in ages from 22-29 years old, and his father, live in Cleveland, Ohio. Due to the family’s relocation, the level of commitment exerted toward maintaining ties with Calvin remains stagnate.

Interviewer: Who currently visits you most frequently?

Calvin: Most frequently is my father, he comes up, sometimes every few months. He come up in April and he will be back up before October. I get more visitation ‘cause I’m on my way out…halfway back now…they used to bring food. Everyone would come up, my sister, brothers, then gradually it deteriorated. I don’t see it, but don’t wanna recognize years taken away, 10 years go that fast.

As far as contributing to his children, Calvin indicated, “I help my father give to them.”

He credits his incarceration with strengthening his own relationship with his father.
Calvin: As far as my parents, and brothers and sisters…they blame other people for my doing. My father says it happened, you have to get pass it. You can keep on doing what you do or get yourself right, that’s where my strength comes from, him right there. Now, he says things that I never got in the household. Never said it and communicated when I was home or maybe I would’ve have took heed to it.

Interviewer: Has your relationship with your Dad changed, since you said that you didn’t get the words that he tells you now while you were home?

Calvin: He’s my best friend now, that’s my father. Anybody would want a father like that. I felt that way before I came in here. He prayed morning and night. At night he went to school. He couldn’t read or write well, and then he got his certification to become a welder. He was an auto mechanic first and then a welder for 40 years. For a long time, we were taken care of, he didn’t want my mother to work. She was a housewife. They used to take us many places. He was a great father, still to this day, we always talk about the things we did, fishing, going down south, the family time we spent, bonding.

The Dependents expressed significant appreciation for the actions and supportive function of their family network and, like other IRNs, struggled with thoughts of overburdening their members. Specific to Dependents, their behavior revealed aspects of entitlement in the form of maintained contact, which is more an indicator of standards set by the family to commit to visit, write letters, or receive his calls as opposed to their imposed expectations. For example, in regards to not receiving visits from time to time, Vincent put it as, “It doesn’t matter ‘cause I get visits so much.” However, Dependents’ increased reliance and dependence on their families and inability to creatively execute their familial roles from behind bars continually depletes the families’ capital. Ironically, Barry who depends on the full support of his family to maintain his role status and provide “accommodations” upon his release provided the following insight, “As a man, I don’t wanna depend on nobody…burden nobody.” Similarly, Joshua feels indebted to his mother for her devotion to his family. He struggles with “not being there,” feelings of
regret, and being a burden to her. To lessen the burden he places on his mother, Joshua will obtain housing outside of his mother’s household upon release to lessen the burden.

He said,

Interviewer: Are you going to live with your mother when you leave here?

Joshua: I could always go home. I asked for placement outside of the home, somewhere else. But my sister and her kids are there, my kids, I don’t want to be more of a burden. I don’t want to take, I want to get established…I want to be able to help.

These IRNs are similar to Sustainers in that Dependents accept ownership for their behavior and fully aware of the impact their imprisonment placed on their family units.

Jackson reflected on the stress that his incarceration has on his daughters’ mother and his mother.

Interviewer: How would you say your involvement in criminal activity affected your place within your family?

Jackson: I’ve been in the streets since I was young…definitely compromised everything ‘cause I’m in here. I’m not there physically, there with the children. It’s a strain on the kids’ mother. My mom understands some things, but she still doesn’t believe I could have done anything wrong. Could you believe that I went to college? I messed everything up over a couple of dollars. Threw everything away.

Calvin spoke of undergoing internal changes since his incarceration.

Calvin: I put the mistake on me, never transform and do something. I’m still who I am, going at it with a different perspective. I know how I am, I think right, instead of irrational.

Because Calvin is unable to provide meaningful contributions to his family, he decided to allocate his resources to in-prison programming. He has received a certification in literacy, ministry, and works independent of prison programming to help other prisoners learn how to read.
Calvin: People that want to learn, but I put forth motivation and progress, don’t come down on them at all. They be afraid to show that you are some sort of illiterate, can’t read or write. I tell them that you have a gift in one area, believe that. Don’t let anyone tell you different, they become a little comfortable. They are lacking in spelling…majority, most people are lacking in that, touch up on things like that. They are scared to approach the board [chalk board]. I try to get them comfortable, make the spell things on the board.

Barry similarly discussed the change in his approach to doing time over the years. His first year in prison was about relaxing and “me time.” To build on areas in which he previously lacked, Barry participated in education and employment programming in the fourth year of his term.

Barry: I go to work, school, stay busy all day. I stay as busy as possible. Watch TV, I’m writing letters…..In the beginning years, the first year, I would relax, just relax. I wasn’t in school, it was a time for me to get to know me, so I could be better with the next steps I took. I was in a few programs, self-awareness, parenting, just to see where I was lacking, thinking for a change. If I could avoid the situation…with a different approach, I could’ve have taken a different approach with my situation, and I wouldn’t be doing time. It was mostly “me time” in the beginning.

Similarly, Dependents and Sustainers exercise agency, hold a great interest in maintaining their pre-prison roles, and understand the importance of their role functions. The negotiators diverge in mechanisms used to manage their disparate roles within the family and prison. Dependents and family members undergo a role transference process, delegating the Dependents’ role assignments to members in their support network. In contrast, Sustainers work diligently to sustain their pre-prison status and obligations by personally maintaining and performing their role functions. The differences between the Dependent and Deserter lie in the Dependent’s strong commitment to his family and to executing, though not personally, the performance of role functions and the resiliency and commitment of his family support network. The Dependent’s family continually embeds
the inmate in outside family activities, even if merely through the periodic sharing of information.

The increased reliance on parents into late adulthood through their 40s places a physical and psychological strain on the supporting cast. For example, Joshua’s mother had a heart attack when leaving a visitation session. However, the family structure allocates resources to support those members who have failed at or are incapable of completing their duties. Based on the findings, I suggest that researchers explore the link between spirituality/religiosity and family resiliency and willingness to adopt prisoners’ familial roles. Throughout, the incarceration period, aspects of the Dependent-familial relationships change, however, the role of the prisoner remains constant.

_Strategy Two: Maintaining Static Role Relationships_

Vincent: Even though I am 28 years old⁹, I am still my mom’s little baby.

Thirty-one year old Vincent was 18-years of age when he was sentenced to serve his first term of 30 years in prison. Prior to his incarceration, he was a high school senior and an only child from a two-parent home. His mother is “a stay at home mom, she takes care of the house and my dad works. She’s a desperate housewife.” Pre-prison, Vincent did not hold many role responsibilities or obligations due to his young age, inexperience, and sheltered upbringing. He reflected on how he and his family spent time together.

Vincent: We went to church every Sunday. My dad worked nights. I worked with him and helped him out with repairs throughout the house. I used to help mom out with chores. Throughout the course of the day we used to have conversations. Washed dishes, take out the trash, talk about whatever, school or work…I was their son. I went to school and had fun.

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⁹ Vincent was 28 years old at the first interview.
Though Vincent has aged and 13-years have passed since his prison entry, his imprisonment has blocked the opportunity for him to acquire any life responsibilities. Subsequent to his limited responsibilities, his parents continue to view, consider, and send role messages to him as their 18-year old son. He perceives himself as such.

Interviewer: Do you still have this place within your family?

Vincent: I’m locked up. I’m still their son, they still love me, and they come to visit.

Though Dependents have matured and undergone experiences that encourage psychological and emotional growth, their families continue to hold pre-prison views of the inmates. Vincent has never enacted or participated in other role behaviors or functions, besides that of being a teenage/child son. As a youth, Vincent was heavily dependent upon his family to inform his role functions and during his 13 years of imprisonment, he continues to lean on his parents to shape construct his role. Vincent has not experienced independence as a youth or adult. His functions have not developed to include additional obligations, responsibilities or expectations; his role remained static throughout his confinement.

Interviewer: What position in your family are you least comfortable carrying out now?

Vincent: I don’t know any other position. I mean, I got locked up at 18. I went from being taken care of by parents to being taken care of by state.

In addition, Vincent’s parents might feel partially responsible and blameworthy for his participation in the criminal activity and eventual incarceration. Therefore, they cater to what they perceive to be his needs. For example, he explained the reasoning for his parents visiting the facility separately on the weekend.

Interviewer: Why do your Mom and Dad visit you separately?
Vincent: So I get more visits. The other reason is...you know how to talk to your mom and then you to talk to Dad, that way no one won’t be left out. They’ve been doing it for years, if they hadn’t I wouldn’t be true self.

I was able to observe the interaction between Vincent and his mother at two visitation sessions. In one Saturday afternoon session, I witnessed Vincent leave his mother in the indoor visitation facility for 15 minutes, enabling him to fraternize with other prisoners and visitors in the outdoor garden area. The sequence of the interaction is presented below:

September 13, 2008, 12:45 p.m.

12:50 p.m. Vincent’s mother runs up to him as if it she hasn’t seen him awhile. He sits down and then his mother goes to the vending area.

His mother leans in to talk to him. His napkin falls to the ground and she instructs him to pick it up. He is eating a honey bun.

1:40 p.m. Mother leans on the edge of her seat.

1:45 p.m. Yard opens.

1:45 p.m. Vincent goes into the yard without his mother. She is sitting inside, alone and begins to fall asleep, leaning on one side of the chair.

2:00 p.m. Vincent returns from the yard and his mother hops up and rushes to the ladies rooms. She returns to him at 2:05 p.m.

Both family members are leaning back in their chairs. Mostly, the son carries the conversation. It appears as though he is telling a story, he shows many facial expressions.

The interaction revealed an unequal exchange between Vincent and his mother. She committed to visiting Vincent every weekend; yet, he is not expected to visit with her. Instead, he uses the visit to spend time with other inmates and visitors. His behavior could be characterized to that of a teenager leaving his (overbearing) mother behind in a
public space. Vincent recognized the need for growth and expansion in his parents’
expectations and static perception of him.

Interviewer: Are there things about the relationship that you wish were
different?

Vincent: Mother…Yes, a lot back then. They are real old school, so when
it came to clothes and money, they weren’t understanding of today’s time
and situations. Even though I am 28 years old I am still my mom’s little
baby. She is a little more understanding. I would want to change that. A
little bit more respect.

Interviewer: Is there anything that your parents wanted you to change?

Vincent: Mother…She wanted me to talk more and be more open, be
more expressive of my feelings and listen to her. Father…He wanted the
best for me. He worked real hard, tried to give me virtues to live by, but I
was out there. Now I listen to him more and see that he was correct. We
talk quite openly now.

Notably, the relationship between Dependents’ and their support network have evolved
and strengthened over time. Alternatively, the family’s expectations of the Dependent
have not transformed in relation to his current social position of ego (i.e., age). Rather, as
presented in Vincent’s case the lack of respect provided reflects his current life
responsibilities, which are limited, the stagnation of his social position of alter (e.g.,
power, prestige, resources), and lack of content of performances by ego or alter (Goode,
1960). Vincent has not had the opportunity to demonstrate his growth in an unrestricted
setting.

Similar to Vincent, twenty-nine year old Jackson, a former college student who
has “compromised everything” by being incarcerated and claimed that he is “the only
knucklehead in the family that do dumb stuff,” has committed parents. He entered the
POF for his current sentence at the age of 22 years old. His evangelist mother and his
father visit monthly from Virginia. During visiting sessions, his mother prays and
attempts to groom him.

Interviewer: Is there something that you and visitor do at every visit (i.e. get snacks, pray)?

Jackson: Yeah, I gotta pray with my mom, she’ll lay hands on you.

Interviewer: Does she pray for other guys too?

Jackson: Nah…but she’ll still try to clean my ears!

It was not uncommon to witness families praying together or women grooming their loved ones in the visitation sessions. However, I found it most telling when mothers groomed and examined their incarcerated adult sons for any bruises or physical changes. Calvin indicated that his family notices any slight change in behavior or appearance.

Calvin: Sometimes I get out there and pray, but it doesn’t seem right and don’t sit right with me. And once your family see something different about you, they may check on it. If they hear something different in your voice and they know that you were growing and progressing….they will sense it, they will know if you’re crazy.

Family members consent to adopt the Dependent’s pre-prison assignments during his confinement. The delegated roles, culturally, are obligations that the prisoner should personally execute, such as fathering or caring for elderly parents. However, the Dependent’s family member serves as a portal between the obligor and recipient. As result of the family’s continual performance of the Dependent’s familial roles and his non-performance of roles, the incarcerated member’s identity remains static within the family. To clarify, the inmate may be a 43-year old man with children and grandchildren, but still perceived to only be a young adult son because that’s the last role he enacted prior to his incarceration and he does not hold any responsibility in prison.

Goode (1960) found that “Each individual system is partly held in place by the systems of other people, their demands, and their counter-performances – which ego
needs as a basis for his own activities” (Goode, 1960, p. 495). The Dependent relies on his family to transmit messages to inform his familial role, expectations, and personality structure, yet the family system continues to send messages communicating his limited pre-prison status. The role relationships do not progress because the role senders do not amend their expectations of the Dependents to reflect their social position of ego or psychological and emotional growth. Alternatively, his non-performance in his familial roles grants him with additional resources to allocate within the prison. Dependents referenced participating in considerable amounts of in-prison educational and therapeutic programming compared to other IRNs.

The resiliency and incessant support of the family may actually work to enable the prisoner’s non-performance, encourage regressive behaviors, stir resentment between family members, and affect the prisoner’s transition between institutions. The consequences of incarceration are that the “current regime of criminal sanctions injures poor and minority families and communities disproportionately while at the same time failing to hold offenders accountable in any meaningful way” (Braman, 2004, p. 224). Dependents demonstrate moderate levels of initiative and agency and provide the required minimum in terms of support to the family. I witnessed the interaction of these factors within a family unit where the inmate was perceived to perform similarly to a Dependent negotiator.

April 20, 2008, 9 a.m.

The Hispanic family consists of mother, father, and grandson approximately 8 years old. The grandmother and grandfather encourage the son to go and greet the inmate (assumed to be his father), but the son complains that he is tired. Minutes later, he obediently gets up and goes to embrace his incarcerated father. The mother hugs the inmate, but his father does not have much contact with him. The grandson tells his father
a story while sitting on his grandfather’s lap. The father maintains a stern look on his face while his son speaks. The father uses his hand to fix his son’s eyebrows. The inmate’s mother looks down the back of the inmate’s shirt and pulls it up a bit. She is looking for something on his back. The son grabs his inmate father’s arm, but the inmate returns the gesture with a stern facial expression. Minutes later, the son places his forehead on his father’s forehead, and hugs him, his arms are on his head. The mother says something, and then the son removes himself away from his incarcerated father and places his head on his grandfather’s chest…he reveals a disappointed facial expression.

Sometime later, the son moves to sit on his father’s lap and plays with his father’s ears, but again, the inmate father maintains a dissatisfied expression on his face. The grandfather (inmate’s father) comforts his grandson and allows the boy to sit on his lap and lay on his chest. He hugs the grandfather and clings tightly. The grandfather speaks to his incarcerated son and then looks away.

The grandfather and inmate son pick up their conversation, the volume of the conversation increases…The grandfather and grandson talk with each other…The grandson becomes interested in the baby seated next to him and begins to play with the baby. Before the end of the visits, the son returns to his father’s lap…he is hugging his father. In return, his father rubs his back.

The described observation revealed challenges associated with role transference. The prisoner’s parenting functions have been transferred to his parents. Prison serves as a barrier preventing the prisoner from accepting the responsibility of raising his son. The thorough examination revealed that his mother continues to view him as her teenage or young adult son and not as a middle-aged man. The prisoner’s son did not display a level of comfort with his incarcerated father. Instead, he clung to his grandfather indicating a chasm in their father-son relationship.
Summary

Dependents, like Sustainers and Deserters have previously contributed to the family in the form of finances, household chores, maintenance work, and/or moral support. The men delegated their roles to others without thoroughly assessing the impact that a role transfer would have on their access to and perception of their familial status or respect within the family. Moreover, it may prove to be difficult for the inmate to ever regain his status during his confinement or upon release. His lack of life responsibility leads the family to perceive him as he left, not reflecting his current standing. The family member who accepted the role transfer may have to serve as a permanent portal and facilitate relationships between the inmate and other members. Dependents and Sustainers differ on the mechanisms used to negotiate their familial roles. As Sustainers altered their roles to work within the liminality of prison, Dependents lack the ingenuity and resourcefulness to execute their roles from behind the prison walls, requiring others to enact their familial responsibilities, redefine, and restructure their familial status. Resultantly, Dependents maintain static role relationships with family members based on their pre-prison status. These interactions may affect the ease of the prisoner’s reentry into his family upon release. In example, Vincent’s mother will expect “mom’s little boy” to return home, however, he will be a middle-aged man with life experiences only related to prison.
CHAPTER 9

Restorers

Familial Role Restoration

Restorers previously implemented the “hard timing” approach to manage their disparate roles in the prison and family (Nurse, 2002). In such a strategy, the men reserved and allocated resources exclusively to performances associated with prison, and eliminated or never enacted any pre-prison familial obligations, even those deemed culturally unacceptable to terminate, such as father. In contrast to Deserters, Restorers encountered a catalyst during their incarceration that prompted the resurrection of their familial role behaviors and expectations. The prisoner exercises agency to redefine and restructure his role relationships in the family unit in which the role was initially terminated, or within a new family system. He demonstrates levels of engagement, commitment, activity, and consistency similar to or above the levels held prior to his confinement. Findings indicate that the Restorers identified dynamic change agents that altered their approach to doing time. Such determinants that actuated change included situational urgency of a crisis (e.g., fear of losing a loved one to a terminal disease or incarceration), role expansion often due to romantic relationships, receipt of intrinsic gratification (i.e. being satisfied with self and circumstances in the spiritual and physical realms), and dissociation of role obligations connected with the prison (i.e., anticipation of an approaching prison release date) (Goode, 1960).

Restorers use visitation sessions and other forms of contact to aid in their role restoration process. The men encourage disconnected friends and family members to send
letters and attend weekend visits\(^1\). For example, during an afternoon visitation session\(^2\), one woman shared with officers and me that she traveled from Pennsylvania to visit an inmate she hadn’t seen in 10 years. She stated that next weekend she would be waiting in line at 6 a.m.

Five of the 25 IRNs are typified as Restorers. Of the five men, Amir, David, Raymond, and Richard are Black and Roberto, Caucasian. Compared to the other IRNs, Restorers were considerably older with an average age of 44.6 years\(^3\) at the time of interview, ranging from 31 to 62 years old. The Restorers were incarcerated at the oldest age of 37 years old in comparison to the larger group of 27 years old and completing sentences of 23.6 years. Similar to Sustainers, Restorers have served approximately 11 years in prison for their current sentence. Four of the five men have previously served time. Three of the men, David, Richard, and Roberto have been incarcerated alongside their sons at one time or another. Raymond revealed that he “just found out that my oldest son is incarcerated in county jail, and that, it was, it was not his first time in jail. I don’t know if it was his second, third, fourth time, I don’t know how many times.” Amir does not have any children nor a prior record. With the resurgence of their role within the family, Restorers on average receive visits on a monthly basis, comparable to that of Dependents.

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\(^1\) Prisoners must request restoration of visits of persons previously deleted from their visiting list.

\(^2\) February, 16, 2008, 8:45 a.m. visiting session

\(^3\) Sample average age at the time of interview was 38 years old.
Table 9.1. Characteristics of Restorers (n=5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sentence Length (yrs)</th>
<th>Time Served (yrs)</th>
<th>Prior Incarceration</th>
<th>Visits</th>
<th>Visit Frequency</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Female friend, family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Fiancée, fiancée’s son, nephew (now deceased)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Cousins, aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amir</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Few Times a year</td>
<td>Mother, brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Once or twice</td>
<td>Sisters, brother-in-laws</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Situational Urgency_

The key element that motivated Amir and Raymond to change their approach to doing time were encounters with a crisis. For thirty-one year old Amir, the fear of losing his mother to Stage 4 Lung Cancer was coupled with his perception of having increased capacity and capability to manage dual roles inside and outside of the prison. He attributed his increased capacity to his approaching release date, increasing his willingness to think about life beyond the walls. Amir candidly responded,

Amir: Jail is a microcosm, and then the streets, and everything that with it, I couldn’t do both...Me, I can do one thing and excel at it. My first bid, I couldn’t do it...now that I’m 14 years in, I can do it.

Prior to incarceration, Amir characterized himself as an outgoing and exceptionally social 18-year old that divided time between his mother’s and father’s residences. He was the oldest of his mother’s five children and his father’s only child. He preferred spending time at his father’s house because, “At my Dad’s house, they didn’t ask a lot from me, I
did some chores, took out the garbage, cleaned my room, well, not really, and did well in
school.” Amir held more responsibility in his mother’s household as the eldest son, “I
took care of money, but I was never good with time. I didn’t understand anything about
just being there, I understand it now. Hindsight is 20/20.” His preference in living
situation and lack of responsibility prior to his incarceration may also be an indicator of
why he previously implemented the Deserter approach and terminated his familial roles.
Amir cited his role elimination as a result of his frustrations associated with being unable
to engage in or share experiences with others outside the prison and the fact that his
family was unfamiliar with and uninterested in his experiences inside the prison. He
discerned that his limited interaction with outsiders has affected his temperament. “Prison
reverses everything. I was social on the streets, but now, I’m anti-social in here.” He
elaborated,

Amir: I think I’ve changed. I used to be a “social butterfly” and I’m a
man, so that may not be the best phrase. But I used to be real social. I got
along with everyone. I had all different type of friends, from the goth, to
the jocks. I was comfortable and fit in with everyone. I associated with
everyone…It’s different now…I only be around people that I hold in high
regard, and that’s three people…besides that, I would rather be by myself.

According to Amir, it was also necessary to “cut off” off contact with his family and
friends to sustain his sanity. He justified his termination of roles,

Amir: I had to cut off the nonsense…when in camp the
I can’t live in both worlds now…after cutting off, I haven’t been in
touch. The disconnect was harsh and abrupt. But, that’s what I needed to
do and saw as the only option at that time. When I was getting visits or
talking to my boys and friends, I was a feeling like, “Ya’ll are killing me.”

Interviewer: What was going on?

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4 Inmates are placed in these minimum housing units when approaching release.
Amir: My friends were having problems and were going to parties that I wanted to be at. I used to be the life of the party...when problems would come up, I was the youngest of the clique, but I would solve the problems. But I wasn’t there. I felt like my hands were tied, helpless. I never been in a situation like this before...

I had a girl, but I cut that off. Now that I am about to finish, it may be different. But, immediately, I couldn’t do both. I used to be the one going to parties, I used to be the party! I didn’t want to hear how my boy was meeting with this girl and that one, and going to parties, especially when I used to be the person dealing with them...I couldn’t deal with them while I was dealing with this...one had to go, and I chose the streets.

However, Amir altered his approach to reconnect and reengage only with his parents and siblings due to “situational urgency or crisis” (Goode, 1960, p. 490). The terminal diagnosis of his mother reduced the uncertainty of his expected role performances.

Normative expectations of the eldest son in a crisis include accepting the lead in the supporting and planning for sick parents, serving as the mainline of communication between family members and doctors, and being a key source of emotional support.

Immediately upon being informed of his mother’s diagnosis, Amir exerted control and settled into his position as eldest son and brother.

Interviewer: How did she tell you she was diagnosed?

Amir: When I called, she was at the hospital and my little sister picked up. I gave her instructions, and told her “Don’t leave til you find out what’s going on,” and later, I got access to a phone and spoke to my brother and told him, “Look, you stay with Mommy, don’t leave.” They came up that weekend and we took it from there.

Subsequently, Amir encouraged his family to inform and include him in the family business, especially activities related to his mother’s treatment. He also purposely reached out to his younger brother who has become as what Amir described “the Johnny on the spot guy.” He said, “that’s all he does, all he has ever done, he’s the Johnny on the spot guy…it’s a little resentment. He’s obligated to take care of mom, not the other
siblings.” His younger brother has accepted the responsibility of caring for his mother and household upon Amir’s absence. He was aware that it was necessary to support his younger brother and of the expectation of him as the eldest son to provide emotional support and comfort, to his mother and other siblings. The increased interaction as a result of a terminal diagnosis increased his felt role strain. He reflected on the moment he decided to restore his status within the family,

Amir: Man, once the cancer came on, something happened. I gave her the green light…I can’t let much time go by without seeing her.

Amir now has weekly phone calls scheduled with his mother, welcomes visits from his mother and brother, works to share the emotional stress associated with her diagnosis and risks losing further freedom by utilizing illegal in-prison resources to maintain contact.\(^5\)

Likewise, situational urgency also led Raymond to rethink the allocation of his role resources. Raymond was informed that one of his two sons had been recently incarcerated. This crisis prompted him to reconsider his obligations and responsibilities as a father. The interaction of factors, Raymond’s dissociation with his children’s mothers, continued involvement in criminal activity since a juvenile, and absence due to incarceration has deteriorated his relationships with his 19- and 10- year old sons. Raymond last saw his ten year old five months prior to the interview. He talked about how his son’s mother “tried to get me to sign my paternity rights to someone else! No! I’m not doing that, the case was dismissed.” Moreover, he was informed the weekend prior to the interview that his 19-year old son was arrested and then incarcerated at a local county jail. He fears that he has failed his sons as a father and that they will follow his

\(^5\) Amir utilizes obtains a phone illegally to make that additional call.
Raymond recognized his inadequacy as a father. He talked at length about the unseen consequences of his involvement in criminal activity and absence from his sons’ lives (e.g., unstable households, involvement in criminal activity, and gang involvement). Not only is he fearful for his son’s own imprisonment experience, he fears that he will one day have to or will be unable to protect his son in the prison setting. In continuing the
discussion on fears, Raymond explained his fear related to his reliance on the correctional institution.

Interviewer: Why are you scared?

Raymond: Institutionalized. Can’t throw me back into society or some type of halfway house. I’m used to being around these people here.

Expansion of Role Obligations

Fifty-one year old David has served time as a juvenile and completed four jail and three prison sentences. At age 13 years old, his involvement with drugs and criminal activity damaged his relationship with his mother and siblings. His mother later died in 1982 during his incarceration and he last spoke with his father in the “summer of ’78”.

He said of his life,

David: I stayed with my mother ‘til I was 13. I started getting incarcerated and doing bad things since I was 13. I’ve been in jail and prison, since I was 13. All of my adult life, I say I’ve been in prison.

David’s limited time in free society, latent commitment to roles and normative values, and absence of role senders and familial role examples resulted in David deserting his own role obligations as father and spouse. He immediately terminated his obligations as a husband, which affected his role as a father. He was incarcerated during his wife’s pregnancy and has yet to formally meet or speak with his son, who is also incarcerated at the POF. He recalled his first sighting of his son inside the POF.

David: I got locked up in 1981 and released in 2003. My son was locked up here in the ______ unit when I left...I didn’t know he was here. He was born in 1982 so he wasn’t even born yet when I was locked up. The first time I seen him...was here, that’s the first time I seen him. I was working in the kitchen and feeding the _____ unit, he had a step brother on _____ unit, and he told me he was here, I didn’t see him until three months after, didn’t even speak to him.
Yet, David’s role adoption was fluid during the course of his incarceration, and he ultimately displayed characteristics of a Restorer. David’s romantic relationship with his fiancée actuated change of his role set and obligations. David expanded his role system to include the enactment of spousal and fathering functions to benefit his fiancée and her son. He met his fiancée in his few free years in the community prior to serving his current sentence. He talked at length about how she continues to positively influence him.

David: My life began all over again when we met. It was something about her. Her demeanor, her attitude, the aura she had around her. It’s so much, much, more than that. She’s a very, very, very good person inside and out. She’s very honest, she always wants people to be honest. She holds no punches. She tells you what you need to hear.

She brought a lot into my life, stability, respect, a little God in my life. She knew if I didn’t change, I would be dead. What I saw in her I never saw in another woman before. We talk and talk and talk like no one else was there. I knew from that point, that she was someone I wanted to get to know…She really put a lot of stability in to place in my life.

In addition to actuating change, the relationship made David part of a family, something he hasn’t experienced since childhood. He described his role obligations within his new unit.

David: I was working and helped financially, spiritually, and morally. It was just me and her and her son, we were real close. Her son never called me his father or Dad, he called me David...I gave him advice, telling him don’t make the mistakes I made. We were real close. You know as a child his views changed traumatically from day-to-day.

Interviewer: What other ways did you help out the family?

David: I was supportive of her needs. I supported every decision she had to make. I was proud of her. I was proud of her son even though he was a terror at times, he was a straight “A” student. We got to be real close. Everything was close. It was real good. Everyone had mutual respect. We did everything equal. We cooked cleaned, everything we did we did as a family, we did everything as one equal partner.
Goode (1960, p. 486) stated that “the individual may expand his role relations in order to plead these commitments as an excuse for not fulfilling certain obligations…to facilitate other role demands.” David underperforms in his role as a father to his incarcerated son, but over performs in the same role requiring similar functions⁶ with his fiancée son.

He’s lived in the household with his fiancée and son, and participated in family activities, like sharing meals and completing household duties together. He alluded, “If I wasn’t here we could’ve got married.” Even when asked his preference of visits exclusively with his fiancée or with the inclusion of her son, he remarked,

David: Visit with both. No, I would rather see both of them at the same time. No matter what the case may be.

Interviewer: What are the visits with her son like?

David: He’s 12, but he’s 24. He is smart. He didn’t ask me any questions ‘cause he can look around and see what’s going on. He just wants me to come home cause he says his mommy misses me. I write him and I write her. He writes me. He calls me old coon, I call him young coon.

David’s fiancée rewards his performance as a father figure by reciprocating love, support, and continued contact. His active role with her son compensates for his poor performance in his own son’s life.

Intrinsic Gratification

Sixty-two year old Roberto characterized his pre-prison identity as “I wasn’t too good of a husband. It wasn’t a big part of my life. I was a good provider, a lousy parent, and a terrible husband. I’ve been married 3 times.” He was always there to support and listen to his family. Throughout his confinement, he continued to neglect his familial

⁶ Fathering functions vary as children age.
responsibilities, especially those related to fathering. He stated, “I regret the embarrassment I caused them and the hurt and pain they went through” and the forced separation further deepened the break from his family.

Roberto: You are torn away in here. There’s no social bond. So you become socially distant with your family, when you’re around them you don’t know what to say. It took a couple of months to feel comfortable sitting and conversing with somebody.

Roberto’s termination of his fathering functions began at the start of the 35-year prison sentence that he shares with his son (codefendant). Roberto credited an epiphany described as a “spiritual awakening” that occurred at a church retreat in addition to the unintentional relocation of his son to his tier as change agents that resulted in his restoration, reengagement, and recommitment to his fathering functions.

Roberto: For the first time in 20 years, we are on the same unit. He locks with me. We were together at _____[another state prison], but I rarely saw him. The first time in 20 years that we’ve been in such close proximity.

His acceptance to reestablish his familial role provides an inherent gratification.

Interviewer: In general, what’s your approach on doing time?

Roberto: From when I first came in…I went thru different phases. Off the street, I couldn’t do nothing right. Then I had an epiphany, my thinking changed, I became focused, got back in school…searching, looking for the spiritual truth. Now I live one day at a time and make the best of it. I had a spiritual awakening!

The physical presence of his son removes the uncertainty related to his expected behavior. On the tier, Roberto tries to make up for lost time by catering to his son and attempts to teach him 20 years later about the characteristics of “being a man.”

Interviewer: What’s your relationship like?

Roberto: Our relationship…well, he still calls me Dad. The guys on the tier get a kick out of that. He is smart, intellectual, a prolix and argumentative. There’s love there, but communication wise, I’m very
intolerant of his way. I try to let him know that there’s more to being a man than being of age…there’s definitely strong love…but he’s a vegetarian, so whenever I cook something and tell him to come over, he don’t wanna eat it. I bring him bread back, I work in the kitchen, but now I made him starting to get up and get his own food, he’s lazy. How can I expect him to stand on his own two feet when I keep catering to him like a kid?

_Dissociation of role obligations_

The impending elimination of structural and institutional barriers associated with imprisonment and successful completion of a substance abuse therapeutic program were Richard’s catalysts of change. At the time of interview, forty-four year old Richard was near completion of his sentence. He served six of his eight-year sentence and resided in the prison’s minimum unit where he completed daily programming sessions. His two sons are also incarcerated at the POF. Due to his prior drug use, Richard previously held a latent commitment to his role as a father. He was unable to integrate father, substance abuse, and prisoner among other roles into his identity simultaneously. The values and expectations of the roles conflicted.

The therapeutic program brought to light Richard’s shortcomings and poor parental role performances. Program participation encouraged Richard to allocate his own resources and energy toward conducting an internal assessment of his behaviors and interactions. His changes in cognition affected his behavior and expectations of himself. He explained,

Interviewer: What position in your family are you most comfortable carrying out now?

Richard: Being a role model for my children as well as my grandchildren. That’s my goal. Lead by example, by being in this program. I talked about doing for years, but never did. Now I am.
Interviewer: How would you say your involvement in criminal activity affected your place within your family?

Richard: Tremendously! It stagnated the family not just me but the family. When you’re out, lost in a delusional world, you’re not thinking. The frontal lobe is not thinking, the dopamine part is thinking. As I look back, sometimes I don’t want to look back. I did a lot of stupid shit. I did it. It’s affected me now that I’m here. I refuse to escape. I take all the knowledge I can get it, and instill it in my children. A lot of things I haven’t learned as a child.

I came in using a bag a day, left here an even bigger addict from when I got here. That’s something that the family didn’t know. I explained to the family. I explained to the judge, I need help, drug use…the effects on the body. I came home a bigger addict. I am trying to do what I am supposed to do as helping with the bills and everything else, as a father, and a friend. I am not blaming them for me coming here…the things I missed out on…be in the program and be an example, sons already traveling the same road, if I don’t break the chain to this now who says my grandkids won’t follow?

His commitment to the therapeutic programming has better equipped Richard with tools and strategies to manage his obligations. Additionally, he will soon terminate his role performances and behaviors associated with prisoner, which will remove the barrier of enacting his familial roles. Richard expressed determination in redeeming himself in the eyes of his family and society.

Summary

Restorers encountered a catalyst that forced the prisoners to reevaluate their behavior, performances, and values. Such agents that actuate change included situational urgency or a crisis, role expansion, receipt of intrinsic gratification, and dissociation of role obligations connected with the prison. In most instances, the redirection of the prisoner’s approach to doing time was unexpected and unplanned. Restorers were able to settle into their pre-prison role and utilized visitation sessions and other forms of contact to aid in their role restoration process.
CHAPTER 10

Discussion

Prisons separate prisoners from their families. Every individual sent to prison leaves behind a network of family relationships. Prisoners are the children, parents, siblings, and kin to untold numbers of relatives who are each affected differently by a family member’s arrest, incarceration, and ultimate homecoming (Travis, 2005, p. 119).

Prison, as a total institution is incompatible with an important element of our society, family. There exists a clear disjuncture between the two agents of social control. The structures of prison and family require differing role obligations and adhere to disparate value orientations. Throughout their sentences, prisoners face the curious dilemma of maintaining and integrating pre-prison familial roles, some which may have been dysfunctional, with the status of prisoner. The relationships and functioning of the families are transformed and offenders must adapt to being imprisoned. Consequently, the integration of familial roles into the carceral setting becomes an extremely challenging process marked by constant role conflict, strain, bargaining, and (re)construction and/or abandonment of pre-prison familial obligations and current expectations. Families develop strategies, utilizing available resources, even if limited, to respond to their members’ incarceration. Simultaneously, offenders transition into their newly acquired or reacquired primary role as prisoner and use their own and others’ resources in their adaptation to life behind the wall. The role of prisoner is clearly defined, constant and consistent, requiring continuous performance until the termination of the sentence. Obligations to the prison cannot undergo a bargaining process, demands must be met or the prisoner will face sanctions. In contrast, role performance in the family is less defined and responsibilities have the potential to be altered without
punishment. Given these imbalanced conditions, prisoners negotiate their commitments to the family since the prison will not tolerate the modification of responsibilities.

Despite the requirements of correctional institutions, it is imperative for inmates to remain embedded in pro-social familial roles during incarceration for myriad reasons, including (1) the family is the unit most likely to inform an individual, in this case, a prisoner, of his expected role performances, allocation of energies, and obligations, (2) the maintenance of inmate-family relationships is cited as facilitating positive in-prison behavior, successful community reintegration, and reducing recidivism (Bales & Mears, 2008; Braman, 2004; Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Hairston, 1988; Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008) (3) family members depend on prisoners to define their familial status and role expectations, and (4) prisoners rely on their families to provide support and stability post-incarceration (LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005; Martinez & Christian, 2009). It is important to note that in some instances it may not be in the best interest of the prisoners or their families to maintain communication or contact. Christian and colleagues (2006, p. 451) have found that families who maintain contact with incarcerated family members may “jeopardize their own social and economic capital in the interest of the prisoner and the maintenance of the family relationship.” Moreover, some incarcerated individuals are completing sentences as a result of harm inflicted on family members (e.g., endangering the welfare of a child, domestic abuse). Guided by a grounded theory methodological approach, the integrated theoretical framework of role strain and transition theories anchored the exploration of this important topic, which has not received adequate scholarly attention. The findings established that incarcerated men experienced role strain as a consequence of undergoing a process of constant role
bargaining and negotiating of expectations and obligations of their pre-prison and current roles. The absence of role clarity and presence of role conflict determines the degree to which the prisoner experienced role strain and the manner in which he transitioned into and out of familial roles. Prisoners’ role behavior shapes relationships inside and out of the facility. The findings rendered four emergent role negotiation pathways categorized as Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer, embedded in a typology labeled Incarcerated Role Negotiator (IRN). The IRNs demonstrated the pivotal role management strategies of the incarcerated men and suggest that the prisoners enact a range of roles throughout incarceration. Many of the inmates in the current study had a penchant for using one type of negotiation strategy most often, while few tended to develop a hybrid of role management strategies, dependent on the role obligations and relationships. Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer are fluid positions and accommodate inmates with extended or reduced role systems and strong or weak social support networks. Prisoners’ pre-prison investment in the family, role performances and behaviors, contact with role senders, and self-identity were influential in contextualizing the role negotiation pathways. Moreover, the results show that prisoners’ contact with role senders, especially in the form of visitation sessions highlighted the multiplicity of their role system and their ability and/or inability to enact familial roles.

These research findings square with existing literature on the collateral consequences of incarceration. In uncovering the diverse role negotiation strategies of prisoners that facilitate levels of familial role performance, the current research highlights the extensive reach of incarceration. “Men who are behind bars are the missing links in the social network of those who remain behind. Since these networks have limited
strength to begin with, the widespread reality of prison undermines their ability to provide social capital” (Clear, 2007, p. 10). Incarcerated men have a number of social roles to enact and perform. Failure to perform these roles behind the wall has moral implications for families, communities, and greater society. Laws intended to punish individual criminal behaviors have “strained and eroded the personal relationships vital to family and community life” (Braman, 2004, p. 221).

The development of Incarcerated Role Negotiators makes several important contributions to the field. The first specifically concerns the application of the integrated theoretical framework of role strain and transition theories. Current research misses the mark by limiting the application of role strain theory to only the experiences of the prisoners’ family members. The familial roles of the incarcerated individual and family member are compromised, altered, and renegotiated during incarceration, making it important to study these dynamics between inmates, families, and role enactment. Rather than limiting the scope of research on the collateral consequences of incarceration to focus on the impact on the family and community during incarceration and then again on the family, community, and formerly incarcerated individuals post-incarceration, researchers would be better informed by incorporating an exploration of the prisoners’ experience and felt strain in familial roles throughout incarceration. To fully understand the dilemma prisoners’ face, studies would benefit by widening the net to include the incarcerated individual’s entire role system, beyond individual assessments of spouse, father, and son. It is important to reveal how the obligations of the multiple roles interplay and influences the prisoners’ role performances. The dissertation study sets the
foundation for future works to further examine the negotiation of prisoners’ multiple roles.

The second contribution centers on making the critical link between prisoners’ role management strategies and the role of negotiation. The process of bargaining and negotiation of role performances revealed the importance of reciprocal exchanges between the prisoner and his family. Prisoners and families engaged in mutual exchanges of prior investments for role enactment and fulfillment of obligations. Theses exchanges proceeded with prisoners performing in roles to receive continued familial support. For example, the Sustainer’s pre-prison investments and allocation of resources in the family prior to incarceration influenced his current familial status. Prisoners whose pre-prison investments were unreciprocated in the desired forms, such as maintained contact and/or monetary support, harbored resentment against their family members, as in the case of Deserters. These incarcerated men expected to collect on their pre-prison investments throughout their incarceration in the form of being maintained – providing financial and emotional support, inclusion in family business and activities, and continued contact. The findings demonstrate the importance of the exchange of resources between inmates and families and suggest that social networks may continue to be sustained and social norms reinforced during confinement.

The most significant contribution of the research is the identification of Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer. The incarcerated role negotiator categories are essential in providing insight to prisoners’ behaviors and relationships with family members. The IRNs give voice to the often neglected marginalized group of incarcerated individuals. For example, of all the IRNs, Sustainers have the highest levels of role
performance behind the wall and create a means to enact their roles within their current liminality. The prisoners sustained their families by providing emotional support, limited financial assistance, mentorship, advice, and encouragement. Additionally, Sustainers’ significant contributions in the family prior to and during incarceration were exchanged for continued loyalty from the family, access to the decision-making process regarding familial matters, and permission to assert his authoritative role. The Sustainer felt it necessary to be included in the family structure, because his family delivered messages to inform and reaffirm his identity and role expectations. Of all the IRNs, Sustainers were the most ingenuous in how they negotiated and integrated their familial role inside and outside the facility.

Among the four typological categories, Deserter most closely resembled existing models of dormancy and hard timing, meaning that incarceration represented an inactive and uninvolved period of familial role enactment (Arditti et al., 2005; Nurse 2002). Inmates disconnected ties with the outside world. These prisoners eliminated pre-prison obligations, even those deemed culturally unacceptable to terminate, such as father, and allocated resources exclusively to the performance of prisoner. Additionally, Deserters rejected relationships with their potential role senders thereby affecting the shape and expectations of their own familial roles and those of others. Throughout the investigation, it was uncovered that determinants such as traumatic life experiences and dysfunctional pre-prison relationships encouraged prisoners to adopt such an approach. Findings about Deserters also suggest that the absence of familial role performances and contact with role senders (i.e. family members) during incarceration may harm the mental stability of prisoners. Deserters, moreso than others engaged in creating “fantasy” relationships with
family members. The study provides a glimpse into their alienation from role senders (i.e. family members) and the concocting of these fantasy relationships. Because Deserters lack communication with outsiders, they provided an exemplar of prisoners allocating their role resources exclusively to their performance as prisoners. In doing so, the men expressed pride in their status as an in-prison job supervisor, or having more program certificates than others. During our interview, William energetically asserted that in his position as a power pro canteen employee, “I tell the other guys what to do.” With a similar expression of pride Bernard, brought a certificate of program completion to the interview session before knowing the purpose. The familial role of Deserters was entangled with feelings of resentment, of being shortchanged, and emotional ambivalence. The interplay of these dynamics produced a ‘why bother?’ attitude which led inmates to desert their familial role responsibilities.

The attributes of Dependents highlighted the variation of the typological categories and distinctively illustrated the importance of the prisoner-family social bond during incarceration. Most interestingly, Dependents’ families continued to willingly provide support throughout multiple periods of imprisonment. Two-thirds of these men previously served time. In addition, family members expanded their role obligations to accommodate these incarcerated men. Families accepted the Dependents’ pre-prison roles despite the fact that their own status was comprised. Dependents are similar to Sustainers in that both IRNs accept ownership for their behavior and are fully aware of the impact their imprisonment placed on their family units; however they diverge on enacting and performing role behaviors. Sustainers engage in high levels of role performance and compartmentalize their incompatible role sets. Conversely, by delegating their role
behaviors to a proxy Dependents expressed low levels of agency and commitment, but continued to express some levels of engagement and activity. The analysis uncovered that as the relationship between the Dependent and their support network progressed and strengthened throughout the incarceration period, the family’s expectations of the Dependent remained static. Prisoners incarcerated as teenagers 20 years ago were still viewed as teen boys by their family members. This static role relationship and view of the Dependents lends itself towards explaining the incessant support of the family. Individuals are willing to do more for those they deem incapable of doing for themselves, such as children/teenagers.

The typological category of Restorers situates well with current research on fatherhood that identifies a rebirth phase upon release from prison, in which men undergo a shift in intentions within the family and identify their release as “the beginning of a new relationship” (Arditti et al., 2005, p. 277). Yet, the dissertation project extends the research by uncovering the occurrence of a rebirth or restoration of familial roles inside the facility. Restorers previously adopted the role behavior and management strategy of Deserters by eliminating incompatible roles; however, a dynamic change agent altered their negotiation strategy. These men discussed determinates that actuated change in their behavior, such as, the terminal illness of a loved one, accepting familial roles due to romantic involvement, subscribing to new spiritual paths, and anticipation of their prison release date. Within the group of Restorers, there were high incidences of familial incarceration. Four of the five men have incarcerated sons and the fifth Restorer was incarcerated alongside his best friend. Interestingly, the findings suggested that visitation
sessions with family members were most important for Restorers because the visit presented the men with an opportunity to engage in roles that were previously abandoned.

The most compelling argument for the significance of the dissertation research is that the findings inform our understanding of the process of reintegration for the prisoner and family. The strategy taken to negotiate prisoner-familial roles behind the wall may influence prisoners’ role performances and relationships with family members on the outside. With an estimated 95 percent of State prisoners reentering the community (Hughes & Wilson, 2003), the breakdown of familial relationships and bonds during incarceration can result in irreparable damage to the prisoner, family, community, and larger society. The conditions of life inside correctional facilities has “become largely invisible even to the best informed Americans” (Simon, 2000). Prisoners have high expectations of receiving support in the form of housing, financial assistance, and employment, from their families post-incarceration. Research on parole and prison release success demonstrates that nurture, support, and attachment to the family during incarceration facilitates the successful reintegration into the community and reduces recidivism (Arditti, 2003; Hairston, 1988; Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Holt & Miller, 1972). The deterioration of familial bonds during incarceration alters the distribution of social capital and resources within the family structure, thereby influencing the decision of the family to provide instrumental support to the formerly incarcerated individual.
Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of the research warrant further study. First, the project sample included mostly Black men. Though disadvantaged communities of color are hit hard by policies resulting in mass incarceration, future work must be applied to a racially and ethnically diverse sample. The two Hispanic men in the study were coded as Sustainers, and visitation sessions were filled with a large percentage of Hispanic visitors. The research would benefit by considering the differences of role expectations across families with diverse backgrounds.

Secondly, it is necessary to further explore the relationship between inmates’ role performances and their in-prison behavior. Research ought to investigate the frequency of infractions and type of infractions across the IRNs. The research may reveal that IRNs who engaged in increased familial contact and continuously enacted familial role obligations have decreased rates of institutional infractions. In contrast, findings may uncover that men who engaged in familial role performances and received increased familial contact have greater opportunities to participate in specific forms of misconduct (e.g., prohibited contact, drug smuggling) and have increased rates of infractions. Likewise, the strain associated with maintaining disparate roles may negatively influence inmates’ in-prison behavior. Significant findings on these relationships will invariably influence the practices and programming of correctional institutions. In extending work on this topic, rigorous research designs must identify the post-release performance of the typological categories. It is necessary to determine the characteristics associated with successful community and family reintegration.
Another aspect of the research that deserves additional investigation is that of role enactment during visitation sessions. It is suggested that scholars utilize the IRN profiles as a lens to view role enactment in the visiting room. Likewise the research should extend to further examine prisoners’ pre-prison familial roles and relationships. The analysis process revealed that an influential factor of role enactment during incarceration is the prisoner’s pre-prison investment in the family. What was the precursor to the inmate’s incarceration? How has the prisoner’s role performance evolved over the course of multiple sentences? It is irrational for criminal justice scholars and leaders in the field to assume that incarcerated men who did not maintain familial roles prior to or during incarceration will successfully reintegrate into their roles, family, and community upon release. Analysis of these questions would require a longitudinal or life history methodological approach and narrowing the focus to one familial role (e.g., father, son, partner, or sibling). For this vein, future research should investigate the high incidences of familial incarceration among prisoners. It was revealing to learn that a number of men are incarcerated alongside their sons or in fact, fathers never met their sons due to their incarceration.

The description of Dependents hinted at the presence and possible importance of religiosity and spirituality within the family unit. Extant research has explored the link between religiosity as a protective factor of involvement in criminal activity, and the connection between religiosity and resiliency. Research on familial relationships, particularly those relationships held with prisoners would benefit from analyzing the relationships between religiosity, support, and resiliency. Lastly, Hairston’s (2001) outlined agenda for future research on responsible incarcerated fatherhood and public
policy appropriately aligns with the current work. She calls for a “deeper and broader understanding of what it means for fathers and children to parent from prison” (p. 130), the collection and analysis of national statistics on incarcerated parents and their family characteristics and responsibilities, assessments of policies and programs centered on promoting responsible incarcerated parenthood and replication of these best practices, examination of the impact of correctional system policies and regulations on family maintenance and relationships, and the inclusion of studies that examine public policies designed to protect the public from former prisoners and maintain a safe prison environment (Hairston, 2001).

**Practical and Policy Implications**

The discovery of the Incarcerated Role Negotiators - Sustainer, Deserter, Dependent, and Restorer - provides insight on prisoner-family relationships and addresses the knowledge gap across multidisciplinary works related to familial roles, relationships, and reintegration. Specifically, the findings have several practical and policy implications for local, state, and federal agencies that manage and/or serve correctional populations and their families.

These findings suggest that correctional system policies are reformed to consider the importance of presenting incarcerated men with increased opportunities to engage in familial role performances. Daily operations and policy directives should be redirected and refocused to simultaneously meet the security needs of the public and institution while facilitating pro-social prisoner-family relationships. The first operational and administrative policies that require consideration are prison location and prisoner placement. Researchers find that, “New prisons are often built in rural, depressed areas
far removed from the homes and communities of the populations they house” (Hairston, 2001, p. 122). In the current research, the Prison of Focus (POF) was located in an area accessible by public transportation; however, the prisoners’ families resided in areas as far as ten hours away from the facility. Likewise, findings highlighted that a number of the incarcerated men were completing sentences with family members in the same or separate facilities. Family members of these incarcerated men faced the burden of visiting multiple prisons. Administrative decisions on prisoner placement needs to develop placement strategies that take into account the location of prisoners’ families, the possibility of other incarcerated family members, and the complexity of prisoners’ family units.

The restrictiveness, arbitrariness, and degradation associated with the implementation of policies governing prison visiting make maintaining contact through visitation challenging for prisoners, families, and friends. New Jersey’s Department of Corrections has provided extended visiting days for inmates and their families (i.e. Family Day) which occur a few times a year and allows families to engage in lengthier visiting sessions; however, conjugal visitation has been restricted. The findings suggest the importance of enacting familial roles in lengthened time periods limiting the frequent transition from prisoner to family member. The Department of Corrections should implement overnight family visitation similar to the State of New York which permits family reunion visits in specific state prisons. Facilities should also increase the opportunities that inmates and their families have to connect in visitation sessions by permitting contact visits throughout the week.
Telephone calls provide a means to maintain frequent prisoner-family contact and enables inmates to communicate with members in different households (e.g., children living in different households) (Hairston, 2001). In most instances, the families of the prisoners are burdened with paying the collect call bills originated from the correctional facility. “The receiving parties are captive audiences and charged the maximum allowable telephone rates with huge profits being divided among telephone companies and the corrections department or other state units” (Hairston, 2001, p. 125). Researchers have found that collect calls from prison can easily average $15 to $150 a month depending on the department of corrections contract, family member phone plan, and number of times a prisoner is allowed to call home (Christian et al., 2006). The research suggests that legislators and leaders in the department of corrections rethink the consequences of these “exorbitant rates” on prisoners’ families (Hairston, 2001, p. 126). The failure to acknowledge the impact of these policies on prisoner-family relationships will further perpetuate familial dysfunction behind and beyond the prison walls.

The research also points to conceptualizing interventions to complement the policy recommendations. The findings suggest that interventions (1) build on or restructure prisoners’ existing negotiation pathways, (2) enhance prisoners’ ability to provide tangible and intangible contributions to their families, (3) utilize a strength-based approach to focus on the inmate and family strengths, and (4) incorporate the experiences of family members and inmates in program development phase. The following section will provide practical and cost-effective programmatic and policy implications needed to address the concerns/needs of this population.
Restructure the negotiation pathway - The IRN profiles enable practitioners to distinguish the mechanisms used by prisoners to perform familial roles during incarceration. By understanding the negotiation strategies, practitioners can identify areas of strength and deficit and suggest cost-effective measures that prisoners can implement to build on deficits or increase strengths. This approach may require examining the life history of the prisoner and providing clinical therapeutic interventions such as family therapy. It is suggested that correctional institutions link with community-based healthcare organizations to facilitate independent counseling sessions with inmates and family members, and sessions with both parties. Additionally, in utilizing the negotiation pathway as a gauge of role performance, practitioners should engage in conducting continual assessments of prisoners’ role performances. An inmate classified as a Sustainer may encounter some difficulty that results in a transition from Sustainer to Deserter, and abandonment of his familial roles and relationships. To build on the prisoners’ deficits related to familial role performance, institutions may consider hosting visitation sessions targeted to particular family members. For example, local reentry centers in northern New Jersey host homework nights for parents and children. These visitation sessions are specifically for incarcerated fathers or mothers to assist children in completing school assignments. Other family members are not permitted to participate in this visiting session. Similar initiatives may afford the family and inmate tangible and intangible rewards.

Enhance the ability to provide tangible and intangible support - The findings suggested that the ability to invest in the family during incarceration was of great importance to some men. Inside the facility, the institution can provide support for men’s
familial roles that exist outside. Being unable to invest may have resulted in abandonment of familial roles. For example, though prisoners make minimal wages, Sustainers continued to send earned money home. Their contribution was also important to family members who relied on these tangible deposits prior to incarceration. Correctional facilities may institute savings programs that automatically withdraw a pre-determined and agreed upon portion of the inmate’s pay. Once the amount is substantial (e.g., $50), a check is mailed to the inmate family, or other agencies requiring payment, such as child support. Such a strategy contains practical skill-building lessons for the prisoners, such as teaching how to manage and budget money, balancing checkbooks, and other general banking lessons. Another route would be to increase prisoners’ wages, thereby presenting the opportunity to make substantial contributions (Arditti et al., 2005).

Implementation of a strength-based approach - Recognizing the many complexities of the families, practitioners working with these populations should build on the inmate and family strengths. For example, despite Dependents past criminality, their family members continue to serve as sources of stability and support. This highlights family members’ willingness to serve as a continual mechanism of social support. Practitioners can learn from these families by identifying their sources of strength and resiliency, and integrate lessons learned from Dependents’ families with other social support networks.

Incorporation of family members and inmates in program development – Interventions for prisoners and their families need to incorporate the target population of the program in the development phase. Based on the findings, family members may find it important to include faith-based aspects into programming. Likewise, prisoners can
help shape programming to meet their needs. When conducting interviews with the IRNs, many discussed that they conducted research in the law library daily. Why not use this capable resource to assist in developing programming and training modules and tools, and possibly implement the initiative? Consequently, inmates acquire hard and soft skills that can be transferred beyond the prison, enhancing their employability.

The dissertation research results validate and inform existing works on the importance of prisoner-family relationships. The findings show that reciprocal exchanges between incarcerated individuals and their families influence role relationships. Furthermore, family members and prisoners rely on each other during incarceration. Incarcerated men do not only deplete resources, but some make instrumental contributions in the family system. The dissertation supports that incarcerated men are not isolated individuals existing in a vacuum; rather, the imprisoned men are morally connected to role responsibilities and obligations behind and beyond the wall.
APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Uncovering Incarcerated Persons’ Perceptions of Visitation

STUDY DESCRIPTION
You are being asked to participate in a Rutgers University research project about your perception of visitation. Interviews will be conducted with 30 incarcerated men in New Jersey’s prisons. You will be asked a series of questions about your visitation experiences in the current facility. You are welcome to participate in the study even if you have not received visits. Please respond to the interview questions as thoroughly as you are able. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. You may be contacted for permission to conduct a follow up interview. Your participation in the study will be completed after 1 or 2 interviews.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY
Your participation in this interview is voluntary. Participating in this research project will not affect your visits, visitors, phone calls, standing in the institution or before the parole board. Refusal to participate will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may end your participation in this interview at any point and if there are specific questions you do not want to answer you do not have to.

INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL
All of your responses will be kept completely confidential. The researcher conducting the interview is ethically bound to maintain your privacy and personal rights at all times. Your responses will not be revealed to prison officials, parole officers, or any other individuals. Your responses will never be described in any papers or reports using your name or on an individual basis.
Please do not tell us any information about past or future crimes that are unknown to the authorities as we cannot guarantee confidentiality of that information; if the authorities ask us about these crimes, we may have to disclose that information to them.

Additionally, I must report to the authorities, information you tell me about harming yourself or other people, or any plans to escape.

You should also be aware that New Jersey law stipulates that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the abuse to the authorities.

**NO KNOWN HARM OR RISK INVOLVED**

There is no known harm to you as a result of your participation in this study. Please be sure to inform the researcher if you have any questions, feel uncomfortable at any time, or wish to end your participation in this interview. There is a chance you will find it upsetting talking about visiting. If talking about incarceration bothers you, you should make a request to meet with prison counseling staff. If you are worried about your family, I can give you a list of agencies that answer questions and offer support to the family members of incarcerated individuals. You can share this with them.

Your time is greatly appreciated, and the information you give is very important. The indirect benefit to you is that you will contribute to our understanding of the lives and experiences of incarcerated men.
Please contact the researcher, Ms. Thomas, if you have questions about the research project.

Ms. Thomas, Researcher  
School of Criminal Justice  
Center for Law and Justice  
123 Washington St.  
Newark, NJ 07102  
Email: shenique@andromeda.rutgers.edu

You may also contact Dr. Christian, the faculty advisor for the *Uncovering Incarcerated Persons’ Perceptions of Visitation* research project at the following address:

Dr. Christian, Faculty Advisor  
School of Criminal Justice  
Center for Law and Justice  
123 Washington St.  
Newark, NJ 07102  
Email: johnnac@andromeda.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject, you may contact the sponsored programs administrator at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
3 Rutgers Plaza  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104  
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions for the Department of Corrections about approval of this research, you may contact the Director, Office of Policy and Planning at NJ DOC at (609) 984-4578.
CONSENT STATEMENT

I have read and understood the information above. The researcher has answered all the questions I had to my satisfaction. She gave me a copy of the form. I consent to take part in the Uncovering Incarcerated Persons’ Perceptions of Visitation study.

____________________________  __________
Signature                     Date

____________________________
Name, please print

____________________________  __________
Researcher’s Signature        Date
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE
DEMOGRAPHICS

- Which best describes your race or ethnicity?
  - White
  - Black or African-American
  - Spanish, Hispanic or Latino/a
  - American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Asian
  - Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
  - Other

- What’s your age?
- What is your current sentence length?
- How much time have you served?
- Have you been incarcerated before?
- If so, how many times have you previously been incarcerated?
- How long have you been at this correctional facility?

FAMILIAL ROLE(S)

- Who do you include as your family? (Support) Children?

- Tell me about the household you lived in before you were incarcerated. Who was living in the household at the time?

- What was your place in your family? What did you do? Tell me about how you contributed, what did you do for your family?

- What is your place within your family now? How is it different now? Tell me about the things that you are able to do for your family?

- What position in your family are you most comfortable carrying out now? What do you do in this position?

- What position in your family are you least comfortable carrying out now? What do you do in this position?

CRIMINAL ACTIVITY AND DOING TIME

- How would you say your involvement in criminal activity affected your place within your family?

- What’s your daily routine inside? Do you include your family in your activities? Does your family include you in their activities?
– In general, what’s your approach on doing time? Did you always have this approach? If not, what is different about your current approach to doing time compared to your former approach? Why has it changed?

CONTACT: TYPE & FREQUENCY

– Before you were incarcerated, have you ever visit someone in jail or prison? As a child? What do remember about those visits?
– What type of contact do you prefer (i.e. mail, calls, and visits)?
– Do you receive visits? Calls? Mail?
– How often do you receive each form of contact (mail, calls, and visits)?
  - Daily
  - Weekly
  - Monthly
  - A few times a year
  - Once or twice
  - Never
  - Don’t know

– How often would you like to receive each form of contact (mail, calls, and visits)?
  - Daily
  - Weekly
  - Monthly
  - A few times a year
  - Once or twice
  - Never
  - Don’t know

WHO VISITS?

– Who currently visits you? Who visits most frequently? When do you expect for this person to visit again? [Possible family observation]
– How many visitors usually come at one visiting session?
– How do you share your attention between visitors?
– How often were you in contact with the person(s) who currently visits you before your incarceration?
PERCEPTION OF VISITS

- Tell me, what’s your take on visits?
- How do you prepare for a visit?
- What emotions do you go through during a visit?
- After a visitor leaves, what are your thoughts?
- What do your family members wear when they visit?
- How do you feel about the enforced dress code?

ROLE OF VISITS

- What role do visits play in your family relationships?
- During a visiting session, are you trying to create any special moments with your visitor? How so?
- Is there something that you and visitor do at every visit (i.e. get snacks, pray)?
- Do you and your visitor go to the yard when it opens? How is it different than the gym?
- Tell about taking pictures with your visitors.
- Is there anything that you would change about the visitation program? What would that be?

VISIT TURMOIL

- Suppose you are expecting a visitor and he or she is unable to make the visit that day, what’s your immediate reaction?
- Tell me what it is like when you don’t receive visits. Does it matter to you the span of time between visits?
- Have you ever had an argument with a visitor? What happens?

VISITS & CHILDREN

- Do your children visit? Who brings them to visit? Tell me about your relationship with them (the person bringing your children)?
- How do you make your kids feel special?
- What do you and your children talk about during a visit? Family members? Spouse? Friends?
- What would you like to accomplish in a visit with your children? Spouse? Parent? How do you go about doing so?
(UN)MEMORABLE VISITS

- Suppose you could only receive visits from one person, who would that person be? What makes a visit with this person stand above the others?
- Tell me about your most memorable visit? It doesn’t matter whether it was a “good” or “bad” visit, but what made that visit memorable?
- Have you had a memorable phone call or letter? What made the phone call or letter memorable?
APPENDIX C: PRISONER LETTER SUBMITTED TO PUBLIC HEARING

Received permission to include original letter written by a focus group participant. Letter was presented and recorded at the New Jersey reentry public hearings. Identifying information has been removed. Views presented in the letter are not that of this author.
Visits, Telephone, and Contact with Family

In all of its handbooks, all of its literature, all of its mission statements, the New Jersey Department of Corrections (DOC) encourages families to take an active role in the life of their loved one during his her incarceration. In fact, some of those statements go on to say that the family is essential to the rehabilitative process. That's the theory.

The reality is far more nefarious. Every aspect of contact with family, friends, and loved ones is expensive, fraught with intentional hurdles and humiliations, and meant to be as controlled and difficult as possible. The administrative side of the DOC, the side which writes grand encouragements and speaks of things such as "rehabilitation" and "reduced recidivism", can boast all they want about family contact. The fact, though, is that the custody side, that side of the DOC which actually turns the keys and runs the prisons, thinks no differently today than did the jail guards of the 19th Century, and this translates into the hurtles and humiliations we'll speak of.

Visits

This is perhaps the most troubling aspect of family contact, because it is the one where prisoner and family alike are at one time under the control of the DOC. Visitors wait outside in long lines, in all weather, hoping to get inside the prison to visit their loved ones. Once they get inside the building, they discover a labyrinth of do's and don’ts which change from week to week, visit to visit, and vary according to what you look like and who you are visiting.

In 2005, I waited the required three months to make changes to my visit list, tracked down a "Visit Add & Delete Form", and added a friend named ________ [Female Friend Name] to my visiting list after she spoke of wanting to visit. About a month afterwards, the slip was returned to me marked, "Approved". I wrote ________ [Female Friend Name] to tell her. Five months later, she got up early on a Saturday morning, got in her car, and drove the three hours up here to visit me. She waited in line for over an hour, and finally got to the counter to register for the visit, only to be told she is not on my visit list and ordered to leave. A week later, upon finding out, I submitted a remedy form, along with a copy of the approved visit request. The remedy response said only that "this individual is not on your visit list". No mention was made of the approved visit request.

According to the rules, you are permitted to add and delete visitor names or make any other changes to your visit list every 90 days. No other changes are allowed. The problem is, on most housing units the Visit Add/Delete Request forms are simply not available. Staff is either unsure of where how to get them, or simply unwilling to do so. Traditionally, the memo distributed to announce the change period would be accompanied by a supply of forms. In recent years though, that has not been the case. By the time some prisoners can get a copy, it is past the time for filing them. (The change period usually only lasts a week.) Too, on some
units the memo announcing the change period is never posted, and no one is told. If you do manage to successfully submit the request, you will most likely never receive notification of its approval. Of the half-dozen visit changes I've submitted, only three were ever marked "approved" and returned to me later. So you never know if anyone was approved or not, or even if the request you receive marked "approved" is actually valid.

In June, 2008, my mother flew to New Jersey from ________ [Town Name], Florida, for the funeral of her sister. While in New Jersey, she came to the ________ State Prison to visit me. She was 68 years old. After waiting in line for more than 45 minutes, with two canes holding her up, she finally got in the door, only to be stopped and told that her tan pants are too close in color to the khaki uniform that prisoners wear, so she cannot wear them into the prison. She left the building and drove next door to the Holiday Inn, where she purchased a pair of $25 sweat pants to wear in to visit. She again waited in line and got into the building, only to be told that her sleeveless Florida blouse was not permitted, nor were her open-back sandals. She left to buy new apparel, returned, and again attempted to register to visit. Once that was accomplished, she was still not in. Rather, she was told that she had to go back out and get a locker for her identification and the few dollars she had left, since none of that is allowed into the prison either. She got a locker, put her stuff in it, and came all the way in before someone told her that there were vending machines in the visit hall, but that they didn't accept currency. Apparently she would have had to buy some sort of debit card, in preset amounts, before entering, and use that for the machine. (Note: Any credit from these "cards" that she doesn't use on the visit is not refundable.) Finally, the very last person in the door, she maneuvered her way across the visit hall with her two canes, found a seat, and waited for me to come and sit down.

Registration is not easy, because only certain forms of ID are valid, and you're still likely to be questioned no matter how many forms of ID you have. You pass through a metal detector and the prying eyes of numerous staff members, each of whom seems to have different standards as to what is and is not permitted in the areas of clothing, footwear, jewelry. Occasionally there are drug-sniffing dogs brought in, along with officers using ion scanners and other equipment in the search for drugs being introduced into the facility. The regular officers always talk to the visitors like bad children, and disrespect them at will.

In the visit hall, prisoners are usually sitting off to the side when their visitors enter. The prisoners get up and go meet their guests, and they all go together to find seats. Prisoners are seated on one side of the rows, shoulder to shoulder with other prisoners, in chairs which are connected to one another; visitors sit on the other side of the row, also on connected chairs, also shoulder to shoulder with other visitors. It is always crowded, hot, and smelly, and the gym ceiling leaks relentlessly on rainy or snowy days. (All regular visits are held in the gym) You may hug & kiss your visitor at the beginning and end of the visit, but no more.
You cannot allow your children to sit on your lap. You cannot sit there and hold hands with your mother, your spouse, or anybody else. Officers prowl the visit hall glaring at everyone, constantly barking orders and directions and making threats of "losing your visits for three months". At different times throughout the visit, a group of officers will approach a row at random and order all the prisoners to stand and leave the room. For no reason, no suspicion, no indication of wrongdoing, those prisoners will be taken into a back room and strip-searched, then permitted to return to their visit. They very rarely find contraband during these sweeps, which only serve to humiliate the prisoner in front of his children & loved ones. The visits always begin much later than the scheduled time, and end much sooner, which reduces the amount of time one has to spend on the actual visit. Unnecessary interruptions such as these "sweeps" further reduce that time, and add a feeling of powerlessness and frustration to the visit.

In December 2007, a young lady came here to visit me, only to be told she was not on my visiting list, which is simply not true. -She had been on there for years. However, she was told to "Hang on, don't go nowhere" by a male officer, who proceeded to attempt to talk her out of her phone number. When that failed, he insisted that she take his, which she also refused. The officer then told her she could go, but that she need not bother visiting again because she'll, "never be on his list again."

The situation described above is an absolute abuse of power and lack of professionalism, and probably does not occur nearly as much as prisoners fear. Yet it is clear that it does happen, and that officers routinely speak and act towards visitors in an unprofessional manner. That particular young lady refused to give me the officer's name or to come forward and register a complaint. Not only was she intimidated during the incident, but was/is now afraid of what this officer might cause to happen to me within the prison should she make an issue of it. This is almost always the case, where loved ones are afraid of the consequences of complaining about staff conduct. Realizing this, some staff members take full advantage of the situation.

**Telephone**

There is no greater hustle in the system than the telephone. If the vendor selection process is/were fair, I can imagine all of the carriers lining up in rows, weapons & kickbacks in hand; ready to vie for the opportunity to service the prison market. These carriers earn millions a year in profits directly from the loved ones of prisoners.

Each month, I call my mother in _______ [Town Name], Florida, to give her my love and see how everything is going. My mother, elderly and on a fixed income, loves hearing from me, and rues that the calls are only 15 minutes long. I call only in the evenings, on weekends, to keep it as cheap as possible. When the bill comes, she is charged between $25-28 for the call. For ONE call.
Dozens of cellular telephones are confiscated at this facility each week. If you are caught with a cell phone, you lose your visits for a year, go to administrative segregation for a year, and are charged in the courts with a third degree crime. Cell phone users pay up to $400 for the phone inside the prison, can usually only risk using it late at night when their cells are locked down till morning, and many are forced to hide it in the only place which can't be easily searched: wrapped in plastic in their rectum. That's right; they shove their cell phones up their asses, and leave them there throughout the day. What could possibly justify the risks of being caught with one of these things, or the pain and humiliation of having one jammed up your ass all day?

The phone systems delete process is the same as that for the visits; every 90 days, you obtain a request, mark your changes on it, and submit the list. You may or may not get a receipt telling you the changes have been made, and the process can take a month or more to happen. Once the changes are made, you may call the people who were on that list. If they have a contract with a large phone company that the prison system carrier deals with. Otherwise, you are forced to open an "account" with the local carrier. Currently, the carrier is named Global Tel-Link. So when someone you wish to call does not have Verizon or one of the other large companies, your loved ones must send Global Tel-Link a check or money order to prepay for your calls. However, there's a catch. There are surcharges attached to these accounts just as there are for all prisoner accounts, so using this prepayment process means calls are even more expensive overall. And even if you prepay for your calls, you are still charges collect rates for them! The rates for these calls are astronomical, and most families are forced to limit their incarcerated loved ones from calling very often, if not stopping them completely. Each year, the phone company apparently sends a check to the DOC or the State, which is their share of the profits. This is another way of charging loved ones for the crimes of prisoners.

[Inmate Name] was born in the Dominican Republic, and came to America with his older sister five years ago. One day a man in the corner bodega asked him to deliver a package for him, no questions asked, for $500. [Inmate Name] accepted, and soon found himself in prison for drug trafficking. He wanted to call home for Christmas, but could not. The phone system will not allow him to make collect calls out of the country. If your family is not in America, you cannot call them from within the prison system. When this system was initially installed, and probably when this company was awarded such a lucrative contract, the idea was that prisoners would be permitted to purchase "debit cards" from the institutional canteens to pay the costs of their own calls. This has never happened, and there's no indication that it ever will. The idea was dead by the time the ink of the contract signatures was dry. In addition, it only increases the costs of making a call, since canteen items face an additional 10% surcharge. (See section Canteen Surcharge) [Female Name] is a working mother whose husband is in prison. Occasionally she babysits local children to make ends meet. When her husband called last year on the
birthday of her 11-year-old daughter, [Female Name] was changing diapers, so allowed ________ [Female Daughter Name] to answer the phone call that was just for her special day. Hearing a mumbled voice on the other end, _________ [Female Daughter Name] knew she had to press a button on the phone to accept the call. So she pressed the only button she could understand the voice mentioning, and the line went dead. It was six months before she heard from her father again.

System service and response is nearly nonexistent. Connections are poor at times, and the recorded instructions never really clear. If someone on the receiving end - a child perhaps- presses the "remove" button by mistake when the call comes in, that number is removed from the prisoner's list for good. Yes, it is possible for the number to be placed back on the list. The prisoner is essentially powerless to make this happen though. The receiving end of the call must contact prison administrators, phone system administrators, etc., before this will happen, and even then it takes months to accomplish.

Mail & Packages

Policy: Mail is delivered to the prison daily, in bulk, and sorted by mailroom officers. These officers open the mail, search for money orders and contraband, and then forward the mail to the housing unit for delivery to the prisoner. All incoming mail should be processed every day, and all incoming money orders forwarded to the Business Office for processing.

As with most facets of prison, mail processing is governed by the officers doing the job. Conscientious, professional officers get the job done with little drama or complaints, and are hardly noticed. In recent months, this is more and more often the case. However, improvements are still possible. Periodicals are always late, always torn and tattered, and subject to not being delivered at all.

In October, 2007, I submitted the proper paperwork and money remit for a 3-month subscription to USA Today newspaper. I bought the paper to coincide with the NFL season, to keep track of my favorite team. When six weeks passed without a paper, I wrote to the magazine distributor I had purchased it from. When I received no response after a month, I wrote to the distributor again, as well as to the local post office and USA Today. By the end of February, 2008, I had hear from all three entities, informing me that the subscription had been delivered to this prison, this address, each weekday between 11/22/2007 and 2/22/2008, just as scheduled. I never received a single copy, and my regular housing officers -who deliver the mail to the prisoner every day- attested to this. Not ONE copy! I immediately submitted four complaints:

1. A "Remedy Form", which went to the mailroom Sergeant. The response was that I should "send more information" which I did. I never received another response.
2. A Tort Claim, to the Treasury Department, for the costs of the entire subscription. The response was that I was not entitled to file a claim, since these things should best be handled "in house".

3. A pair of "requests" to the Ombudsman, which is allegedly a prisoner's voice for dealing with such complaints. No response or interview was ever granted.

4. A "Claim Form" to the _______State Prison Administration, to obtain a refund. The only response was a note from an "administrative assistant", saying my request was denied because I "was out of time" to file it. (As is often the case with such people, there is no even-handed assessment of the problem, but rather a scouring of the documentation for an excuse to deny the claim) Note too that an "administrative assistant" is a secretary, no more or less, and certainly not the administrator, whose job it is to handle claims.

I was never reimbursed for one issue of the missing subscription, and no one was ever held accountable for the theft.

Periodicals. This is the most common problem with mail. Bored officers sorting a unit's mail see a magazine or newspaper that interests them, tear the address off if and do with it whatever they choose. In desks and officer stations throughout the facility, there are magazines and newspapers with the name & address of the receiver torn off. This has always been a problem, but one which has grown increasingly worse as prison policies which prevent officers from bringing in newspapers have toughened. This facility is littered with periodicals stolen from prisoners.

Photographs. It is never safe to have photographs sent in. Envelopes are cut open before being searched, and stapled closed afterwards. Photographs can slide out during this process, and are nearly impossible to place once the mail is finished being processed. Then the envelope is stapled shut, with the staple piercing the photographs. Once they are on the housing units, some unit officers will remove the staple and tear the envelope open prior to passing out the mail, just to look at the photographs inside. During routine searches, or the "trashing" of a prisoner's cell during a search, photographs are strewn about the floor regularly, and treated no differently than any other scrap paper, which is especially troubling when you consider that these photographs are usually Scrutinized during a search for signs of gang activity. In those instances, mistreatment of the photos is clearly an intentional act.

Packages. Prisoners are permitted to receive packages which are Legal, Educational, or Religious in nature, but only if mailed from a "Source of Sale". Families are not permitted to send a prisoner anything except letters, photographs, and money. The "Legal, Educational, or Religious" clause is subject to interpretation, meaning each officer working the package room has a different policy. Generally, if a family orders & pays for some legal, educational, or religious books to be sent to a prisoner, that prisoner will eventually get them,
once they've gone through the search and distribution process. The gray area concerns exactly what constitutes legal, educational or religious, and what is permitted according to that classification. For example, is stationary considered educational? (Not hardly. -You are not allowed to purchase 'greeting cards. Greeting cards!') Is a meditation rug or cushion considered religious? (You can get a Muslim rug in, but not a Buddhist rug of the same size. No cushions, either.) Families have no idea what is or is not allowed on any given day, so most are reluctant to spend money to purchase & ship something which will be denied and maybe returned to the source of sale for a refund.

**Other Forms of Contact**

Calling in. Families calling this facility in cases of emergency often experience disdain by those answering the phones here. This is especially true later in the day and overnight. Notifying a man in prison about the hospitalization or death of a loved one is a trying process, and with any luck the caller will reach the Social Services Department, which is the traditional avenue for handling such calls. Getting through to that department is the tough part.

Funeral visits. These are also troubling. A prisoner is only permitted to attend the funeral of an immediate family member: Spouse, parent, child, sibling. The prisoner is required to pay for all aspects of this visit, and fuel for the vehicle used to the salary of the escort officers. Even for local funerals, this cost is $500 or more. This money entitles a prisoner to a trip to the funeral home and back, five or ten minutes with the deceased, alone except for the officers escorting. (All others are removed from the room before the prisoner is allowed in. This includes loved ones.) That is all.

The Department of Corrections cannot have it both ways; they cannot preach a policy of encouragement but practice methods of exclusion. No rehabilitative technique will be effective in the complete absence of human compassion, and only family & loved ones can provide that compassion to many of the incarcerated.

**Fines, Surcharges, and Court Ordered Restitution**

A growing trend in recent years has been to add fines and other penalties to the sentences of criminal offenders to go along with their prison sentences. Such diverse interests as, "Law Enforcement Officers Equipment and Training Fund", "Safe Neighborhoods Fund", and "Violent Crimes Compensation Board" are all represented, and the average felony conviction today amounts to thousands of dollars in fines and restitution. There are dozens of different interests and groups now seeking a piece of that monetary pie, and the yoke placed upon the neck of individuals during and after their incarceration continues to grow.

Canteen Surcharge. In the 1990's, the state legislature passed a bill whereby all prisoner canteen purchases were subject to a 10% "surcharge", with the proceeds going to the Violent Crimes Compensation Board. They were creative enough in
their use of language that it does not appear to be a fine, but that's exactly what it is. This prison provides you with food, clothing, and toilet paper. Everything else you need to survive, from postage stamps and stationary to cosmetics to aspirin to sneakers to snacks to TV's/radios, are purchased through the canteen. There is no other source permitted for the purchase of these items. So you must go through the canteen for all of your personal needs, and pay this canteen surcharge.

Because it applies to all prisoners, it effects those who have been in the system for decades, and who were tried, convicted, and sentenced decades before the Violent Crimes Compensation Board even existed. Therefore, these people have been subjected to a punishment more onerous than what was even on the books when they were convicted, which certainly violates the ex post facto clause of the United States Constitution. Again though, creative language allows them to call it a surcharge, thereby bypassing scrutiny under the document upon which we base our society. Only in America.

The other interesting part is that, because every prisoner is required to pay this surcharge, it also applies to the tens of thousands of prisoners -the majority, in fact- who are in prison for non-violent and/or drug offenses. That's right; even non-violent offenders are required to pay this surcharge, even if it was applied after they were sentenced. How it is legal to add an additional 10% to every postage stamp without violating some law? How do you increase the tax on cigarettes by 10%? How do you raise canteen prices by a full 10% across the board, when prisoner wages have not increased since the 1980's. You do this by the creative use of language.

Fines & Court Ordered Restitution. The other side of the equation is the fines. Unlike the surcharge, fines are generally applied sentencing, and remain on your account until they are fully paid off. Any fines not paid off during the incarceration must be paid off as a condition of parole. A parolee will be violated without hesitation if payments are not made towards those fines regularly. (if it comes down to feeding family or going back to prison, how do you make a choice?) There is a schedule for how much is taken for these fines each month, but it is never .. less than one-third of any money you earn. At this particular facility, __________ State Prison, the average prisoner has a "tier sanitation" job, which pays $1.30 a day, five days a week. That's roughly $29.90 per month. Take away a third of that, ($9.87) for fines, and that leaves $21.03. Remember, all things purchased on canteen are subject to the 10% surcharge, so remove that and the pay is now about $18.93. Because they took money out, the prisoner is also charged a "transaction fee" of $1.00, which leaves $17.93. That's per month, and with what's left the prisoner must purchase whatever is needed for the month, from band-aids to toothpaste to cigarettes, and from stamps to legal mail. (In prison, any trip to see a doctor or dentist is $5.00 whether they treat you or not, and this comes off the top.) Prisoners have always been paid a meager stipend for the work they do within the prison, and on the surface it has not changed in the past few decades. However, the creative language mentioned earlier has allowed the system to reduce the amount of money paid to a prisoner to nearly zero.
As a final note, keep in mind that any money being sent in by family and friends is subject to these same fines. The source of the money is irrelevant, and loved one's sending a prisoner $20 for a birthday can count on losing a third, plus 10%, plus a transaction fee. The more prisons grow as a business, the more advantage the system will take of those it incarcerates, as well as those who love the incarcerated.
Visitation Observation Protocol

Date:
Time:

Descriptive notes:

Notes from correctional officer(s):

Reflective notes:

1. Describe the visitation setting.

2. How many inmates and family members were in the child-friendly area?

3. What time did the visitation hall become full?

4. How were visitors treated by the correctional staff?

5. Did the incarcerated men and their visitors look comfortable interacting with one another?

6. How were the men interacting with family members that appeared to be a spouse? Parent? Child(ren)? Describe in detail.

7. What visitor does the inmate focus most of his attention?

8. Is it possible to determine the inmate’s role within the family? How so?

9. Describe how inmates and family members greet each other.

10. Describe how inmates and family members expressed their goodbyes.

11. Did inmates play games with their child(ren)? What games were played?

12. How many family members purchased snacks from the vending machine? Did the process of purchasing the snacks and then eating them affect the visit? Describe.

13. Do any inmates have the same visitors? Describe the family.

14. Did the visits seem intimate/private (i.e. physical distance between men and visitors, children sitting on laps, etc.)? Describe in detail.

15. Were any inmate-family visits terminated? How many? Why? Who terminated the visit? What were the reactions of the inmate? Visitor?
16. How were visitors behaving before the visit? Describe their actions.

17. Do any families practice rituals when visiting, i.e. prayer, picture taking?

18. Did the correctional staff seem to be familiar with any specific visitors? Explain.

19. What happened when a visitor encountered a problem at the visit (i.e. attire not approved, inmate transfer, etc.)?

20. Were there any unique circumstance surrounding the visitation program today?
APPENDIX E: POF CONTACT REGULATIONS
Telephone Calls

For your convenience, telephones have been installed in the housing units throughout the institution. These phones are for you to use and maintain ties with family, friends, the community and the courts.

Phone calls may be made between the hours of 6:30 A.M. and end at 10:00 P.M. The telephone system automatically shuts off and on. The system has the capacity to prevent third party calls, block calls to predetermined numbers, prevent call transfers, and prevent harassment of extra-institutional persons and agencies. It has the capacity to identify the caller and call origination, and it will provide and interactive acceptance (or denial) of calls by receiving party.

All calls are limited to fifteen (15) minutes; all parties accepting calls will be advised that the calls are emanating from [POF]; thirty (3) seconds before the call is to end an advisory message will let the arties know the call is to end.

If you need to make an emergency phone call involving personal matters, have your housing unit officer contact the Social Services Department. Their social worker assigned to your unit will arrange for the call to be made. Depending on the circumstances, you may be charges for the call.

In the event that phone becomes inoperable, notify the housing officer who will contact Center Control. The Center Control will contact the Business Office during regular office hours 8:30 A.M. – 4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday so that a repairman can be scheduled.

Deliberate misuse of violent damage will cause delays for an entire unit and repair costs will be charges to the inmate causing the damages.

Telephone Calls between Incarcerated Family Members

Telephone calls shall be permitted between incarcerated family members. Family members are defined as:

- Husband and wife
- Mother and child
- Father and child
- Siblings

Telephone calls between incarcerated family members shall be permitted if:
The family relationship has been substantiated through documentation found in the Classification folder or other appropriate resources.

The telephone calls have been approved by the Institutional Classification Committee (I.C.C.).

The full costs of the telephone calls are borne by the inmates involved.

The frequency, duration and time of the calls shall be approved by I.C.C.

**Authorized Visits**

On Saturdays, Sundays and seasonal visits, there will be three visits and registration periods. Visits will be one and a half (1 ½ hours) in duration, and limited to a maximum of one hundred fifty (150) inmates. The number of visitors per inmate is four (4).

7:45 – Visitor Registration Opens
8:45 – Visitor Registration Closes
8:45 – Visit Period Begins
10:45 – Visit Period Ends

11:45 – Visit Registration Opens
12:45 Visitor Registration Closes
12:45 Visit Period Begins
2:45 – Visit Period Ends

These visit/registration times are equally applicable to the Minimum Unit visit program.

Special Visits (extended, hospital, multiple, etc.) are permitted upon written request from the inmate to be visited. These requests are to be forwarded to Assistant Superintendent [of POF], who is the administrative person in charge of visits, for approval. The request should be at least 48 hours in advance.

Authorized Visitors—Before being allowed to visit any inmate at [POF], a visitor’s name must be added to the visit list. In addition a man’s relatives (mother, father, sister, brother, wife, child) with (8) additional parties may be registered for a minimum of ninety (90) days. After ninety (90) days, a visitor’s name may be removed and replaced by another, not to exceed a total of fifty (50) visitors.

Visitors may be added to an inmate’s visit card four (4) times a year. Visitor(s) dropped from an inmate’s visit card must remain off the card for a period of sixty (60) days and any visitor may only be on one inmate’s list except with the permission of the Administrator.
Visits from Children

Children under the age of 18 shall not be permitted to visit unless accompanied and supervised by a family member defined as a “relative” (See N.J.A.C. 10A:18-1.3).

In unusual circumstances, exceptions shall be made by special approval.

Procedures for Visitors Entering Institution

Advise your visitors of the following information:

- Anyone may visit you provided they have been approved and listed on your visit card.

- You are responsible for keeping the list of names on your visit card up-to-date.

Visitors must first report to the registration desk in the lobby. They should have their identification papers ready before going to the registration lobby. Make sure that your visitors have proper identification; otherwise, they will be denied entrance into this institution. Acceptable identification consists of any of the following:

- A valid photo identification card
- Automobile driver’s license
- Employment I.D. card
- Passport
- [Program Name] I.D. card

The County Clerk’s Office in each county will provide a photo ID for persons who require state identification. There is a small fee for this service. Contact the appropriate County Clerk for details.

All visitors entering this institution are subject to a pat search and search of their personal property that will be entering this institution. Visitors cannot bring money into the visiting area.

Persons with criminal records shall not be automatically excluded from visiting an inmate. Permission to visit should be requested from the Administrator by the visitor and the inmate.

Life sustaining medication is permitted, but will be held in LCP-V. Visitors will be escorted to LCP-V to take medication.

All visitors should be advised of the following laws of the State of New Jersey:
2C:29-6 – Any person who takes into or from any institution or place of detention or upon or from any land set apart or authorized by/for use in connection with or who directly or indirectly gives, sells, furnishes or otherwise delivers to any prisoner, inmate or patient in custody any drug, liquor, knife, dagger, pistol, explosive matter or any other article prohibited by law.

2C:20-6 – Any person without authority of the law who visits a jail, workhouse or penal institution or correctional institution and communicates with any prisoner therein without the consent of the officer or other person having charge thereof is guilty of a violation of the State of New Jersey Laws.

**Visit Hall Procedures and Regulations**

The housing unit officer will notify the inmate of his visitor’s arrival and write a visit pass.

All visits will be conducted in a quiet, orderly and dignified manner. Handshaking, embracing and kissing is permitted within the bounds of food taste at the beginning and the end of your visit.

No smoking is permitted during visits (smoking is permitted in courtyard only). You are allowed to carry closed, sealed cigarettes. Cigarettes are NOT to be taken out of the visit hall area.

Once a visitor enters the visit hall he/she will not be permitted to leave until the termination of visits.

Restroom facilities are available for visitors in the north side visit waiting room.

To prevent possible injury, all visitors (including children) must refrain from going near or using gym equipments.

Food and beverage will be allowed in the visit courtyards.

Inmates are not permitted to escort visitors to the exit door at any time.

After it is announced that visits are terminated, all inmates will proceed to the north count area. Lingering will not be tolerated.

Photo Project – It is the policy of [POF] to permit visitors to have photographs taken of themselves and/or inmates they are visiting.

Photographs should be taken showing good taste, sitting on each other’s laps is not permitted, hands should be seen at all times. Your visitor will pay for photos
at the registration desk. Photo project personnel in the visit hall will coordinate photo taking in order to maintain a smooth and orderly operation.

**Attorney and Legal Visits**

Legal contact visits are Monday through Friday, 9:00 A.M. until 3:00 P.M. Attorneys must contact the Administrator’s Office 24 hours prior to the intended visit. There will be no limit to the number of attorney visits. Your legal visits will not reflect on your regular visit list. All contact visits from the Probation Department, Legal Aid, investigators or any other public agency must be approved by the Administrator. Hours are the same as for attorney visits.

**Mailroom**

The mailroom at [POF] provides a variety of services and functions of particular importance to the general population. It processes money order, certified checks, packages, non-legal correspondence, legal correspondence and publications. Many of these services also impact on inmate’s families and friends. Therefore, it is important to understand the correct procedures and functions to follow.

**Receipt of Funds**

a. Cash and personal checks sent through the mail to an inmate shall be deemed as contraband and processed in accordance with N.J.A.C. 10A:3-6.7.

b. Money orders and certified checks shall be the only approved form of money received through the mail which can be accepted by the correctional facility for deposit in an inmate’s account.

c. When an inmate received money orders or certified checks by mail, the inmate shall be given a receipt and the funds shall be deposited into the inmate’s account.

d. Visitors to the institution may leave money to be placed into an inmate’s account but only in the form of a money order or certified check. **NO CASH WILL BE ACCEPTED.**
REFERENCES


VITA
Shenique S. Thomas

1979 Born September 21 in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

1997 Graduated from North Brunswick Township High School, North Brunswick, New Jersey.

2001 B.A. Psychology, Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia.

2003 M.A. Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, School of Criminal Justice, Newark, New Jersey.

2003-2005 Teaching Assistantship, Rutgers University, Newark.

2004 Rutgers School of Criminal Justice Research Grant. “Assessing the Impact of Parent-Child Contact on Prisoner Behavior.”

2004-2010 Instructor in Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey.


2006-2007 Rutgers School of Criminal Justice Fellowship.


2008 Gerhard O. W. Mueller Award recipient, Rutgers School of Criminal Justice.


2009 Rutgers School of Criminal Justice Research Grant with V. Pacheco and B. Muhammad. “Surrendering their lives to incarceration: Minority women and familial imprisonment.”

2008-2010 Employed as Deputy Director of Economic Development Research Group, Rutgers School of Management & Labor Relations, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

2010-Present Employed as Research Associate, Rutgers School of Criminal Justice, Newark, New Jersey.

2011 Ph.D. in Criminal Justice, Rutgers University.