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3 Fatherhood and Incarceration as Potential Turning Points in the Criminal Careers of Unskilled Men

Over the past thirty years, three interrelated trends have profoundly affected the lives of low-income men. First, wages for low-skilled men employed full-time and full-year have declined sharply, as has the proportion of men who do work full-time and full-year. The drop has been substantial for African Americans and Latinos, but especially dramatic for unskilled whites (Bound and Johnson 1992; Katz and Murphy 1992; Lerman 1993), a trend that continued even through the economic expansion of the late 1990s (Holzer and Offner 2001). Second, rates of marriage for low-income and minority men have declined dramatically, driving up the proportion of these men with noncustodial children (Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan 1995). Third, incarceration rates have also increased, especially for low-income and minority men (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1990, 1992).[1]

What does the confluence of these trends mean in the lives of unskilled and semiskilled men? There is substantial evidence that criminal involvement increases when men are unemployed (Farrington et al. 1986), when their wages are low (Doyle, Ahmed, and Horn 1999; Grogger 1998), and when entry-level jobs are scarce (Shihadeh and Ousey 1998). Conversely, offenders tend to desist when they find stable employment and show commitment to their jobs (Shover 1996), especially if this transition occurs when they are older (Bachman and Schulenberg 1993; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Uggen 2000). Attachment to the military has a similar effect, and timing also matters (after the age of twenty-two, military service tends to disrupt adult bonds to family and work) (Sampson and Laub 1996). Young men also tend to turn from crime when they marry and maintain a stable marital relationship over time (Laub, Nagin, and Sampson 1998; Laub and Sampson 1993; Sampson

and Laub 1990, 1993), though the relationship may also be sensitive to age in that a very young marriage can worsen offending behavior (Bachman and Schulenberg 1993). Robert Sampson, John Laub, and others explain these variations in criminal involvement (which persist after controlling for prior delinquent activity) by utilizing aspects of social control theory (Hirschi 1969) and the life-course perspective (Elder 1985; Hagan and Palloni 1988).

Social control theory, which draws from Émile Durkheim's work on anomie (1951), posits that individuals engage in deviant behavior when their bonds to society are weak or disrupted. The life-course perspective examines "pathways through the age differentiated life span," in which age manifests itself through "expectations and options that impinge on decision processes and the course of events that give shape to life stages, transitions, and turning points" (Elder 1985, 17). "Turning points" are key events that occur at a particular stage in an individual's life course (see also Hogan 1980) that may alter his or her trajectory—in this case, a criminal one—by either increasing or decreasing "social bonds to adult institutions of informal social control" (Sampson and Laub 1990, 625) and thus act as either a brake on or a spur to criminal involvement. The life-course perspective recognizes that individuals differ in their adaptations to similar life events and that these responses can lead to different pathways (Elder 1985, 35). The change can lead an offender to desist completely, offend at a lower level, or trade one kind of offense for another (Laub and Sampson 1993).

Turning points may steer a young man away from a criminal path and toward a more normative trajectory (Elder 1985; Warr 1998). However, these need not be unidirectional. In a qualitative reanalysis of data collected on a sample of delinquent and nondelinquent white teenaged males born between 1924 and 1935 (Glueck and Glueck 1950, 1968), Laub and Sampson (1993, 17), analyzing declines in job and marital stability, have found that when these social bonds were disrupted, criminal and deviant behavior increased. In a similar vein, Julie Horney, Wayne Osgood, and Ineke Haen Marshall (1995, 655) consider whether an individual's offending behavior is influenced by "local life circumstances that strengthen or weaken social bonds" over time. They find that men committed more crime during the time periods when they were using drugs and committed less crime during the time periods when they lived with a wife.

GOAL OF THE CHAPTER

Our goal in this chapter is twofold. First, we examine all men in our sample who reported any criminal activity in their past (including those with no imprisonment or incarceration history) and look for any evi-

ɔming a father has functioned as a turning point in their ɔries. We do not limit our analysis to the time of the birth since we find that it is often a higher-order birth that ıs most salient (perhaps because they are older and at a stage in their lives). In particular, we want to explore ɣent of fatherhood, when combined with fear of being as a deterrent to future criminal activity.

ing and desistance literature routinely considers men's cutions of the workplace, school, and marriage as well as mobility or immigration and even exogenous or "chance" being drafted in wartime or being part of a cohort with to a social good like the GI bill. Given this theoretical were startled that we could not find a single study that experience of paternity as a potential turning point, de- and Laub's (1990, 611) observation that "in later adult- inant institutions are work, marriage, parenthood, and community."[2] This was particularly surprising because studies emphasize the origins or onset not of criminal f desistance from it (see also Uggen and Piliavin 1998). in this chapter is entirely consistent with the social con- perspective advanced by Sampson and Laub; it is dis- emphasis on fatherhood as a potential source of adult ɔlementary to our investigation here of the effects of fa- ɔmewhat older fathers is Anne Nurse's contribution on (chapter 4 in this volume). Nurse finds, as do we, a gen- esire on the part of young fathers to maintain relation- r children. Yet as she documents, that desire is heavily ıe relationship with the child's mother, a factor that is n our research as well.

drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing han et al. 2001b) show that unmarried fathers often con- romantic relationships with the women who bear their hildren, and some say they plan to marry their child's ver, an even greater proportion say they intend to stay ir children's lives no matter what happens between them- r children's mothers. The fact that more than eight in ten ers surveyed actually attended the birth of their child or d and mother while they were still in the hospital attests nce these men place on their bonds with their children al. 2001a; also see chapter 2 in this volume for more dis- Fragile Families study). For such men, who seldom marry mployment until they are well into their thirties (if at all), netimes the only event that has the potential to act as a

Second, we look at the effect of imprisonment and incarceration on low-income noncustodial fathers' ability to form and maintain social bonds with their children. In this second part of the analysis, we limit our focus to those men in our sample who have been imprisoned or incarcerated since becoming fathers and analyze their life-history narratives to identify the role that incarceration may play in either weakening or strengthening these bonds. If social bonds are important predictors of within-person variations in criminal activity over time—and if the salience of the father-child bond for fathers in this group can be demonstrated—policymakers will have to ask whether incarceration policies inadvertently increase criminal behavior by affecting fathers' ties to their children. On the other hand, we must give equal consideration to the possibility that for some fathers, especially those with particularly high offending rates, incarceration may play a restorative role, allowing bonds that were largely latent to begin to form or re-form.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Existing data can and have been used to analyze relationships between some of factors outlined here. However, these data have some serious limitations, and our data some distinctive advantages. Most important, noncustodial fathers are seriously underrepresented in large data sets, and this is especially true of low-income, never-married, and minority fathers (Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Hanson 1998). According to estimates made by Irwin Garfinkel, Sara McLanahan, and Thomas Hanson, it is fair to say that, with the exception of the Fragile Families Study (which surveys only new fathers), for low-income and minority noncustodial fathers, the underrepresentation problem in most large surveys is so severe that it constitutes something of a crisis. Although we do have indirect data on these men, drawn from the reports of the women that bear their children and the heads of the households they reside in, little is known about these fathers' own perspectives. We have been able to interview a large number of such men and have enjoyed a high degree of rapport with them in the interviewing process.

In addition, qualitative data such as these can make several unique contributions to the body of research on low-skilled men. First, though the hallmark of quantitative analysis is measuring relationships between variables, the limitations of the data often mean that the processes or mechanisms leading to the outcome of interest remain opaque. Qualitative analysis can help shed light on the processes and mechanisms by which one set of factors leads to another, such as how the event of fatherhood might act as a turning point in some cases but not in others. Second, qualitative data can help reveal actors' motivations for a given course of action. Although we do not always take these accounts at face

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rly analyzed the data can help to inform theories that
about such motivations. Third, qualitative methods
respond to questions in open-ended narrative form
ixed-choice manner. The resulting accounts can help
ant correlates to outcomes of interest that might not
en considered. Fourth, qualitative interviewers often
egree of rapport with their research subjects and are
etter able to get accurate measures of sensitive issues
activity or family violence).
quantitative research using especially thorough sur-
hod makes a significant contribution. For example, in
volume, Bruce Western, Leonard Lopoo, and Sara
the Fragile Families data, find a statistically signifi-
tionship between incarceration and marriage among
s and mothers. This chapter (and Anne Nurse's chap-
e findings to interrogate the tenor, substance, and con-
ps between parents—from the fathers' perspective—
y contribute to or deter future criminal behavior.
ty of our approach, though, is that our data are cross-
longitudinal. Therefore, we rely on retrospective ac-
experiences and on interpretations that may, in some
than post hoc rationalizations of behavior. Given the
data, we cannot correct for this problem. Thus the
here must be interpreted cautiously. Nonetheless, be-
known about the life experiences and worldviews of
ustodial fathers or how they experience and interpret
ieve the following approach is justified and, at the very
e new hypotheses for future scholarship.

HOD

vn from verbatim transcripts of repeated in-depth inter-
three hundred unskilled and semiskilled low-income
ers living in two U.S. cities (Philadelphia, Pennsylva-
on, South Carolina) conducted from September 1995 to
ties were chosen to reflect variation in economic condi-
contexts. Philadelphia and its inner suburb, Camden,
had slack labor markets during the study period, but
rea's was one of the tightest in the nation. Both sites
support enforcement systems, but Charleston's is espe-
The law enforcement regimes of these locales vary as
have not explored these variations in depth. Generally,
tation of qualitative data is that the sample size is small

or equivalent data are not collected across all cases. This data set is unique in that we conducted a large number of interviews in a highly systematic manner. Our sample is evenly divided by race-ethnicity (black, white, and Latino in Philadelphia and black and white in Charleston) and by age category (fathers aged thirty and under and fathers over thirty). As a result, we have thirty fathers in each race-age cell in each city and a total sample of three hundred. For this chapter we have analyzed forty-five cases with incarceration histories and an additional forty-five cases with episodes of criminal involvement but no incarceration history. More than one-third of respondents report imprisonment or incarceration (jail, prison, or time served in an alternative institution such as a rehabilitation program or halfway house). Roughly two-thirds reported at least one episode of criminal involvement over their lifetime.[3]

We did not recruit our respondents randomly; rather, we used a targeted neighborhood approach. In each city, we used census data to identify census tract clusters with relatively high levels of poverty, because these were the neighborhoods that also contained the largest number of poor single-parent households. We had to assume that the fathers attached to such families could also be found there. Our initial list of target clusters, or "neighborhoods," contained all those neighborhoods with a poverty rate of at least 20 percent. This relatively low poverty threshold ensured that a sufficient number of white neighborhoods could be identified for the study (typically, the white poor are far more likely than their African American or Puerto Rican counterparts to live in mixed-income neighborhoods). From this list, we selected several target neighborhoods in each city that had demographic characteristics that typified the range of neighborhoods we had identified for each ethnic group. To offer one example, the Philadelphia metropolitan area contains a large number of predominately African American neighborhoods that met our criteria. But because they are concentrated in the cities of Philadelphia and Camden, we chose three Camden neighborhoods and six Philadelphia neighborhoods that roughly represented the range of social conditions (unemployment rates, poverty rates, preponderance of single-parent families) seen in the broader list of predominately African American neighborhoods on our list. Fewer white and Puerto Rican than black neighborhoods ended up fitting our criteria, so we interviewed in all of these communities rather than selecting among them.

Once we had selected our more than two dozen target neighborhoods, we then canvassed each neighborhood on foot, informally interviewing owners of local stores, representatives of local grassroots community groups, clergy, representatives of nonprofit social service agencies, neighborhood employers, and representatives of other social institutions (teachers, social workers, and other government agency rep-

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e neighborhood canvasses, along with data on male
n the census, gave us some sense of the range of low-
al fathers we might find in each neighborhood and
e might find them.
referrals from each of these sources and from direct
veen fieldworkers and research subjects at bus or train
y-labor corners, formal-sector places of employment,
vhere we learned neighborhood males tended to con-
ery stores, convenience stores), taking care to try to
ange of men we were expecting to find in each neigh-
our canvass. Men who were successfully recruited
e also asked for referrals to neighborhood men they
be unable to identify through these means. The result-
om random, but our intent was to maximize heteroge-
closely as possible the composition of the population

ur sampling strategy, all of our respondents earn less
r or $16,000 a year from formal-sector employment,
lege degree. All have at least one child for whom they
al father, most are not married and have never been
o-thirds are African American or Latino, roughly half
e drugs or consume alcohol at levels considered exces-
o live in poor urban neighborhoods. Considering the
rviews took place in a period of unprecedented eco-
r wage restriction alone means that the men in our
disadvantaged indeed. The fathers in our sample
with the criminal justice system primarily through the
ommon crimes include theft, auto theft, burglary, rob-
and these are often drug related). Drugs play a large
e tell in this chapter; though not all of the incarceration
ve observe results from drug involvement, most is at
related to the use or sale of controlled substances.
area of interest to us. Our father interviews contain
f their relationships, both with their children's moth-
children, their employment histories (including for-
l criminal employment), a recounting of their experi-
ninal justice system, and detailed information on their
sources, including informal work and crime) and ex-
hese data are potentially useful for understanding the
which involvement with the criminal justice system
r's bond with his children and whether familial rela-
fathers and children may affect criminal trajectories.
h we have used a focused life-history approach that is
graphic studies. Such an approach does have a serious

limitation in that it necessarily relies upon retrospective accounts of events that may have happened months or even years before the interview. However, quantitative longitudinal studies of criminal trajectories are rare, and qualitative longitudinal studies even rarer (for exceptions, see MacLeod 1995 and Sullivan 1989). The special advantage of the focused life-history approach to ethnographic interviewing is that it offers the chance for the respondent to give a detailed narrative about important turning points in his life, including his history of criminal offending, his interaction with the criminal justice system, and his formation and maintenance of social bonds.[4]

FINDINGS

The event of fatherhood can sharply alter how men perceive the risks and rewards of criminal activity, particularly because they believe strongly that street crime leads to either victimization (death or debilitation) or eventual incarceration. For those men who choose to activate the fathering role (whether with a first or subsequent birth), this belief is likely to make the risks of crime far less tenable. Additionally, the men we interviewed tend to value the ties to their children above all other social bonds that could potentially link them to institutions of informal social control. As a result, fatherhood in and of itself can prove a powerful turning point that leads men away from crime and toward a more mainstream trajectory.

For offenders who maintained contact with their children (or their children's mother) before their arrest, the event of incarceration has a pronounced negative effect on the bonds with their child and the child's mother. Social control theorists would expect these men to continue their criminal careers after release because of these diminished attachments. For offenders whose lifestyle has created a wedge between them and their families before arrest (usually because of severe drug or alcohol addiction), incarceration itself can be a turning point: an opportunity to take a time-out and reorient one's life. In some cases, fathers in this group use the experience of incarceration to rebuild severed ties with children (though often the romantic tie to the child's mother is not salvageable, a cooperative friendship may sometimes emerge). From the social control perspective, incarceration may have a rehabilitative effect for those men in this group who take advantage of the opportunity to reattach themselves to family.

FATHERHOOD AS A TURNING POINT

One common theme that emerged from our interviews was the dramatic impact that becoming a father often had on men's lifestyles. The stories

d us sometimes had the flavor of religious testimonies and
ctured into before-and-after accounts. Typically, these fathers
involved in selling or using drugs, hanging out on the corner,
ing with" several different women—a lifestyle several respon-
rred to as "rippin' and runnin' the streets." However, after
child was born, many reported a dramatic change in their be-
mad, a nineteen-year-old African American high school grad-
Camden who works in the formal sector, regularly spends
his daughter (though he provides only intermittent financial
e he describes the impact the birth of his daughter had on his

nged my life a lot. I was headed down the wrong path. I grew
the streets, everything from drugs to this and that. I mean, I've
jail before. But ever since she's been born, I slowed down a lot.
ow. . . . 'Cause it's like, before her, I didn't really care too much
nything. I really just lived every day for that day. But as of now,
ng every day for today and tomorrow.

iments were echoed by "Bucket," a forty-six-year-old African
father of one adult daughter and one twelve-year-old daugh-
has a certificate of general educational development (GED)
odd jobs (mostly window washing). Though he sees his youn-
ter twice a month, he offers no financial support. "I always
be a father. I always wanted a child. I waited until I was
e years old before I had my first child, but I always wanted to
r. Before I had her, [I was] in trouble. I was doing wrong
vas wild, crazy. It always seems as though I was getting in
of trouble."

s often enthusiastically embraced the lifestyle changes brought
heir new role and did not merely accept them with reluctance.
twenty-three-year-old African American college dropout (he
ut to help support his son) sees his six-month-old son fre-
d intermittently contributes a portion of his earnings from his
ormal-sector job. When we asked him how the pregnancy of
nd and birth of his son had affected him, he told us,

t has definitely changed my day-to-day life because I know that
whole nine months my girl was pregnant and to this date, I have
ke totally with her, if not physically at least like on the phone,
] "How is everything?" I don't talk to anybody like my friends
w I used to go to parties and things like that. And it is not be-
feel like "Oh darn, I can't go out." I want to be there. I want to
my son, you know. I would rather know what is going on with

him than be somewhere, because even when I am out, I am like thinking about him. [I have] reoriented [my life].

According to many of these fathers, their child's birth literally "saved" them from the streets. The salvation theme was fairly strong in virtually all of the interviews with fathers who maintained some level of involvement with their children. Even among those fathers whose involvement had lapsed, many still used this salvation motif to describe how their lives had been transformed by a child's birth. For some fathers, the first child was a sufficient impetus to leave the streets. For others, the transformation did not occur until a second or third child was born, when the father was older.

In addition to these retrospective accounts of lifestyle changes, the impact of fatherhood was also apparent from the answers fathers gave when we asked them to imagine what their lives would be like if they had never had children. Some men did tell us that things would be easier for them, that they could have finished school or taken advantage of better employment opportunities. But the overwhelming majority of fathers we interviewed believed strongly (even passionately) that their present situations would be much worse without the presence of children in their lives. The most involved fathers spoke most poignantly to this point, but many less involved fathers (and even some completely uninvolved fathers) said their lives would mean very little if it were not for the fact that they had fathered a child. The following quotes are representative of many others that we could have selected. Kevin, a twenty-one-year-old African American father with a GED, does not work regularly but "babysits" his toddler each day while the child's mother works. Kevin contributes financially when he picks up odd jobs on weekends. "I think [my life] would be a lot different to tell you the truth. Yeah, [I would be] getting into trouble. No, I wouldn't be settled. I'd probably, you know, honestly, I'd probably be in jail or something like that, you know. [Having a kid] calms you down."

Lee, a forty-two-year-old high school graduate, lives with the mother of his youngest child and contributes to the household expenses as well as to the support of his older two children. "Without the kids," he said, "I'd probably be a dog. I hope not with AIDS. . . . I'm more settled now. [Being a father] has stopped me from doing something real stupid." Bucket, whom we described above, told us,

I'd probably still be doing the things I was doing. 'Cause when I did have my first child, it changed me. It stopped me from doing all this stuff I was doing before. So maybe I'd still be doing the things I was doing before if I didn't have her. . . . I was on the weed [and] drinking [a lot]. If I didn't have [my children], I'd still be doing that. . . . Because

n] I stopped hanging with different people, I stopped going cer-ces, you know what I mean. And I got an outlook on life that ferent.

icular, some men claimed that their status as fathers was in- with selling drugs, an activity that many had engaged in birth of their children. Robert, a twenty-three-year-old African father, asked whether he would consider selling drugs again his financial problems, replied,

want to keep it clean, and that is the hardest thing. I could do d probably make three times over [what I'm making now], and y get out of all of this [financial mess]. But I don't think that it make me a better person because it would make me paranoid, s I would be bringing an environment around my child that I not want. Beeping at twelve o'clock at night and things of that —because I used to do that type of thing when I was younger. I nced it.

FRAGILE TIES

rd perception among scholars is that incarceration has nega- on the father-child bond. This makes sense, in that jail time removes the father from his children's lives, in terms of both roximity and economic contributions. Fathers in our sam- ell into the severed-ties group had several characteristics in

he vast majority offended either infrequently or moderately. ost had combined their criminal activity with some sort of nployment that, though not always formal-sector work, was n and of itself (that is, "under-the-table" employment). Third, generally reported no heavy drug or alcohol use before any episode of incarceration. Perhaps for these reasons all the men p had established some sort of bond with at least one of their at involved a pattern of regular visitation or financial support some cases the bond extended to the child's mother, in others

ese fathers, the event of incarceration proved devastating to ith their children and their children's mothers. Virtually none ers reported that their child's mother had "stayed" with them e period of incarceration; in virtually every case, the mother he relationship or became involved with another man. Because e generally the conduit through which fathers' communica- children must flow, the severing of the romantic relationship

with the child's mother nearly always posed problems for fathers who wanted to maintain a connection to their children.

Second, fathers in this group sometimes claimed that their children's mothers used the fact of incarceration as a justification for prohibiting the father from any subsequent contact with his child or to "talk trash" about the father to the child, thus lessening the child's motivation to remain strongly bonded to the father. Several fathers in this group, for example, found upon release that their children and their children's mothers had moved away or had simply disappeared.

Third, even when mothers attempted to preserve the father-child tie during the period of incarceration, the mere fact of incarceration often means that fathers miss out on those key events that serve to build parental bonds and to signal to the community that they intend to support their children both emotionally and financially. These key events include attending the child's birth or observing developmental milestones such as walking and talking. The father's absence at these crucial moments, we argue, can weaken his commitment to the child and, years later, the child's own sense of commitment to his or her father.

The harmful effects of incarceration can be seen in the case of Mark, a thirty-two-year-old African American in Philadelphia who works under the table as a sandwich maker at a convenience store–delicatessen. Mark has an eleven-year-old daughter whom he sees several times a month and to whose support he contributes intermittently. Mark, one of five children, grew up with his mother and grandmother. His father left the family when he was quite young, and Mark has not seen him since he was seventeen years old. After graduating from high school, Mark went to work as a janitor, and at this time met his daughter's mother, who was still a high school senior. They had been together two years when his daughter was born. When she was five years old, he was arrested for selling drugs.

> It was a situation because why I started selling was because of my daughter. That is an excuse, true, but my daughter didn't have nothing for that Christmas . . . and it sent something inside [of me] and it just totally blew my mind. And I knew friends and family that was [selling drugs] and I always could have got into it but I didn't want to [before]. . . . This was Christmas, and . . . I couldn't get nothing [for her]. And to a dad, I don't care if he is doing drugs or anything, if a dad is out there and he love his child and he love his kids and if he can't get them stuff for that special occasion, it sends something through them.

Mark's plan was to sell drugs for just a short period of time, make a lot of money (he claimed that he made about $700 a day when he sold drugs full-time), and then move back into the legitimate workforce. He thought

sk of imprisonment was minimal because he had never been of any crime before. "You know what? I thought I could outystem. I said, 'This is my first time. I never did anything [be- get caught], I am [only] going to get probation and I could hat.' [But] it didn't happen that way." Instead, he was arrested e weeks after he began dealing and was sentenced to one year "[I was sent to a] prison where it is murderers and rapists and ot coming home for three hundred years, and it totally sent me though I was going to go crazy and I didn't think I was going t."

e he was locked up, Mark's girlfriend started seeing another he found out about it through the prison grapevine. Although back together when he returned from prison, she was still g" on him, and he decided to move back in with his mother. riend then married the man she was seeing, and they have rehd a son together. Mark feels that his time in prison is to blame ng a wedge between him and his daughter's mother.

> vouldn't have got locked up, I would have still been with her, in ense that it would have never happened—she would have never no one else. [But] I can't say that the blame was hers; I can't say the blame was my daughter's. The blame was [on] me and myself. myself in that situation and [now] it is up to me to think with a head and take it on another level.

tinis is a forty-year-old African American father currently servntence for parole violation in a halfway house in Philadelphia. a two-year-old son by his current girlfriend and two teenaged from a previous relationship. Although his eighteen-year-old more forgiving of his father's lapses, his seventeen-year-old er had become bitter over his going back and forth to prison ne was growing up. Just before we interviewed him, Martinis had ome effort to restore his relationship with his daughter, but he l that he had a lot of history to overcome.

> he beginning we were [close]—all the way up until the age of eight nine were we close. But after me keep getting myself in trouble [go- back and forth to prison], I guess she kind of gave up on me. I s never around, and I guess it hurted her. We just recently had a nversation on the phone, and I had to explain to her where I was. t just where I was literally, but my mindset and why I made the isions I made, and why I was incarcerated and why I did certain ngs. It wasn't like I wanted to be away from her. I told her that I ed her dearly, and we had a little rapport. . . . Actually we [hadn't en] speaking to each other. My kids' mother said, "You are the adult.

> Go down there and talk to her and get y'all thing together so that y'all can have some kind of rapport." . . . I had to go ahead and do that, and we talked, and she cried and she explained why she feel the way she feel. She feel that she didn't have no dad and it hurted me to hear that, but it was the truth. I don't blame her in a way because I wasn't there.
>
> So now I have been trying to incorporate myself into her life again and in her daughter's life. She is coming around now; she is coming to accept me more. But I don't think she is putting her all in it, because she maybe feels as though she don't know if I am going to disappear again. I used to promise her this and promise her that, and sometimes I didn't come through. I am not a bad dad—they tell me that they love me and everything, but it is just that I am not always there for them when they really need me around.

His latest incarceration is already affecting his relationship with his youngest son, something that disturbs him:

> I am not there all the time . . . though I want to be, and it hurts me and it upsets me. . . . I can remember that my dad was never around and I was wondering what it was like to always have your dad around. So I always tell myself that I would want to be around for them and sometimes I found myself doing [to them what happened to me], by me being incarcerated and not there in the years when they were growing up and their little personality starting to develop. . . . I know that it upsets the mother. . . . She wants me to be part of his life. [She] calls me now and she says, "Marty, Rahmere doesn't really even know you. . . ." I missed all that time with Rahmere when he was an infant. He was born May of last year and he didn't know who I was. And she was like, "That is your dad." She came twice [to visit me]. . . . But she didn't bring him. I was very disappointed. . . . I seen him through pictures but I didn't really get a chance to see him personally until I came home in May [of this year].

Martinis's daughter was eight and his son was nine when he was first incarcerated for burglary. He thus had some time to establish a close relationship with them before he went to prison. He worries he has lost that opportunity with his younger son.

Donald, a thirty-year-old African American in Charleston, has two children, a teenaged daughter and a younger son, aged six. Donald says that his son does not like him very much because he was born when Donald was locked up—they did not meet until the boy was three years old. Donald's daughter is more forgiving because she had formed an attachment to him before he was incarcerated. She currently spends summers with Donald, and he is negotiating an arrangement with her mother that would allow the daughter to live with him full-time.

Because low-income men tend to become first-time fathers in their late teens and early twenties, at the very same time that they are most

engaged in criminal activity and are at highest risk of incar-
ny of our respondents with incarceration histories report
incarcerated for the first several years of at least one of their
ves. As we showed earlier, The Fragile Families and Child
udy finds that more than 80 percent of the fathers responsi-
births attended the birth or visited the mother and child in
immediately thereafter. Our data reveal that a father's pres-
hild's birth is a key event that signals to the larger commu-
ier's kin, the mother's kin, and peers) his intention to take
ial responsibility and, more important, to forge a solid emo-
with that child. Noncustodial fathers who have been present
ldren's birth often describe it as one of the most significant
eir lives. On a practical level, many states allow voluntary
of paternity in-hospital, and missing this opportunity to form
to the child means that the father's name is often not on the
certificate and that the mother, the state, or the father can
at tie only through more difficult and costly means later on.
are incarcerated when their children are born miss this cru-
nity, and we speculate this may have consequences for their
d emotional investments in their children.

nes the contemporaneous occurrence of childbirth and incar-
nts seeds of doubt as to the child's true paternity. Julio is a
ar-old African American father living in Charleston, South
s daughter was born exactly nine months after he was incar-
ich led him to doubt whether she was really his child. Julio
oubt "haunts" him, yet he is hesitant to have a blood test,
is view, the child is already bonded to him, and he is afraid
er.

recounts a similar situation with his son:

> out [my son's mother] was pregnant when I was incarcerated
> guy came in that I knew from school, and he said he'd seen
> nd that she was pregnant. And I was like, "Whatever," you
> was like, "By who?" So I ended up getting in touch with her
> d her mom's house collect and . . . she was like, "Yeah, I preg-
> pregnant from you." . . . I was like, "Whatever, not me. . . .
> , we dated off and on from seventh grade up until high school
> know we messed around and . . . you never got pregnant [all
>] from me." And she was like, "Yeah, it's from you, and what
> vant to do?" and I was like, "I'm not doing nothing. I'm going
> ing in here for while. I'm locked up." And one night, I was
> the cell after a few months and I was like [praying], "God, if
> ild, show me it's my child, and just let me know something."

y Donald's mother visited him in prison, something she had
before, and reported that the child had been born. As both

events happened only a day after he had prayed, he took them as a "sign" yet told us he had nagging doubts.

Both Donald and Julio were incarcerated for a period of several years. Yet our data show that even quite short periods of incarceration can mean that fathers of very young children regret having missed out on milestones in their child's development. Rick, a young African American father living in Camden, was spending just three months in jail when his son turned a year old. He was quite upset that the time away from his family caused him to miss out on the transition from infant to toddler: "That was last August, and my son had just . . . started walking and talking. And when I went [to jail] they barely let me see him. And when I got out, he was walking and talking. . . . That crushed me. 'Cause, you know, I wanted to see all that, you know. My first son."

Although incarcerated fathers must be separated from their children, one may wonder about the role of visitation in keeping fathers and children connected. In 1999, according to figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1.5 million children had a mother or father in prison (Mumola 2000). Although about 40 percent of imprisoned fathers reported weekly contact with children by phone, letter, or a visit, nearly 60 percent of incarcerated fathers reported never having seen their children since their admission to prison (Hairston 1998). Although our interviews did not address this question directly, our fathers who had served time seldom reported having received visits from their children, or even their children's mothers, while they were in jail or in prison. For a few, this was largely because they were sent to prison at an institution that was too far away for someone with no access to a car to visit. However, several others told us that serving time was harder if one remained in contact with one's friends and family on the outside. For this reason, they voluntarily cut themselves off from outside relations. Donald, who had been to prison several times, told us, "Normally when I'm locked up I don't accept visits. I don't write if I'm locked up and I don't do any of that, because it makes your time hard, you know, worrying about what's going on out there and thinking about what's going on out there; it makes it hard. You focus on getting this time done and getting this over with."

Mark was one of the few fathers whose child visited him regularly. His daughter was five when he was sent away for one year. Initially, it was her visits that kept him going. Yet toward the end of his sentence, he could not take the strain of constant reminders of home:

> And the only thing that kept me going [when I was in prison] was my daughter. . . . [She] came to see me every weekend, every weekend my daughter's mom brought her to see me—every weekend, when I was in the state, when I was still here. And the last three months of my sentence, they sent me all the way up there by the Poconos. . . . [It was too hard for her to] make it, and I didn't want her to make it. She tried

of times, and I kept denying it, because the closer you get to leased] the harder it got when you see people from home. And u want to do is try to tune them out. [But] I wrote everyday, wrote me everyday. Boy, you should see how many letters.

fathers are incarcerated, they must rely on their children's be the conduit to their children, though sometimes a kin r example, the father's mother) can also play that role. The nothers do this either actively by bringing children to visit in more passively by simply accepting collect phone calls or, , their letters. Yet as noted earlier, incarceration can sever not er's relationship with his children but also his relationship ildren's mother.

a father and his children's mother are still romantically at- en he is initially incarcerated. However, this is a vulnerable eir relationship, and virtually all of the men in our sample at their girlfriends had formed new attachments while they ison. Tom, a thirty-year-old white father from Philadelphia, en imprisoned for selling drugs when his oldest child (now rs old) was born. While in prison and unable to continue a ucrative career selling drugs, he lost his house (bought with eds) and his girlfriend, who took up with someone else. Al- n did not return to selling drugs after his release, his child's uld not let Tom see his son unless he was paying regular ort—something he found hard to do because his prison record out of most conventional employment (see chapter 8 in this t the time of the interview, Tom had not seen his son in five

vas in prison for less than a year and was planning on getting ner with his daughter's mother when he was released. Yet as away, she met a man who drove a bus for the local transit nen Mark came home and started working for McDonald's, im back but still maintained a clandestine relationship with nan. When Mark found out about it, he broke off the rela-

s going to get back together: marriage and everything. But she totally honest. I had much love for her and she didn't know how ove I had for her. . . . [I didn't really blame her, because] I proba- uld have [had another relationship] too [if she was serving time]. couldn't be person enough to tell me—she kept trying to creep . . . I suspected it, and at that time I had people coming to me lling me about it]. . . . So I did find out, and she still denied it, m that point . . . it was just like a thing, "I can't never trust you

now." . . . If I wouldn't have got locked up . . . she would have never met no one else.

Mark's statement—that his girlfriend "would never have met no one else" if he had not been incarcerated—raises an interesting point. In fact, despite his belief to the contrary, it is quite likely that Mark and his girlfriend would not have stayed together much longer, even if he had not been incarcerated. Relationships between unmarried parents are extremely fragile (70 percent of poor unmarried parents break up before the child's third birthday), and fathers who engage in criminal activity are particularly likely to alienate their children's mothers (see Edin and Kefalas forthcoming). Seen from this angle, incarceration may not directly cause a breakup but merely provide an additional impetus and opportunity for girlfriends to escape from a relationship a bit earlier than they otherwise might have.

This may partially explain our second finding that when fathers are imprisoned, their children's mothers may use the fact that their child's father has a prison record as a justification to completely cut him out of the child's life, even if they knew full well of his criminal involvement before the incarceration. In low-income communities, particularly African American communities, mothers feel considerable pressure to keep their child's father involved, especially because many of the mothers grew up without a father around and sorely felt the lack. For women who do not want to continue dealing with a father whom they view as a ne'er-do-well, incarceration provides a socially acceptable excuse to deny visitation or even to simply disappear. Rubén, a twenty-year-old Puerto Rican living in Philadelphia, had his only child at the age of sixteen. When he was nineteen, he went to prison on a drug charge and served a one-year sentence. Upon his return to the neighborhood in which he and his child's mother had lived, he could find no trace of either of them. The mother did contact him to let him know that they were okay, but she refused to tell him where she was living or to let him see his son.

If the child's mother is addicted to drugs or otherwise deemed unfit (abusive or neglectful), a criminal record can make a judge unwilling to let the child's father have custody of the child. Thomas, a twenty-eight-year-old white Philadelphia father, has a nine-year-old daughter and a nine-year-old son by different mothers. Thomas was convicted of attempted murder when he was in his early twenties. Subsequently, his son's mother, a drug addict, lost custody of the children to the state. He describes what happened next:

> [The state] took [my son] and put him in a foster home. After that happened, I had a court date the next week to see if I could get him. But

g happened—I think it was because of my criminal record—
no and they denied me. And my lawyer said only two things
pen. You have the choice of leaving that child in a foster home
n sign the rights over to the [maternal] grandmother, just tem-
[until you get yourself together and can convince the judge
are for the child]. . . . I didn't want him in no foster home so I

elationships between fathers and their children's mothers
and become acrimonious, as they often do, men with crimi-
may find themselves at a distinct disadvantage. Many fathers
heir former girlfriends use their records of criminal behavior,
e fact that they have been in prison or are on parole, as an
alk trash" about them to their children and to others. Bill, a
ear-old white father in Philadelphia, claimed that his "ex-
erm for her, though they were never legally married) kept
arole officer and "told lies" about him (claiming he had vio-
role in various ways) whenever she wanted something from
was hesitant to provide it. He felt powerless in this situation,
nce submitting to her wishes would not guarantee him ac-
hild.
e fathers with moderate or strong ties to their children or to
n's mothers, the threat of prison can act as a powerful deter-
nal behavior. Rick, a young African American father in Cam-
as still together with the mother of his 18-month-old son,

ee how those guys want to keep going to jail. That's crazy to
's what I be tellin' these guys, man. The most I did was three
n jail. . . . That's a place I don't want to be, I know that. . . .
Don't see how these guys all just take little times of their life
missin' a lot, man. Then they get out, these things have
Most of the people I know be doin' two-, three-, four-year
s]. Three months, man [was too much for me]. . . . Yeah, it is
tion to go back to selling drugs], but see, my son. That's really
me, and my time that I did in jail . . . that three months.

brother Craig has been to prison several times. He now
abor rather than selling drugs, because he has a child and
nt to be like his father. "[My father] passed away when I
wenty-three or twenty-four. He was in and out of prison.
ally why I try to do what I do [work day labor rather than
because I do not want to be like that when my children [are]
"
es the threat of prison does not lead fathers who are at-

tached to their children to completely disavow drug sales, but it does slow their rate of offending dramatically. Lee is a forty-two-year-old African American father of three children by three different mothers. He maintains some contact with all three of his children. He has had any number of jobs since graduating from high school (construction, vending, factory work) but now works primarily through formal-sector day-labor agencies. He supplements his day-labor income by doing side jobs for friends and neighbors (yard work, moving) and by selling crack.

Lee sold drugs quite regularly before his son, now aged seventeen, was born. "This was my first [child]. I was nervous. I said, 'What am I going to do? Suppose I get locked up for selling drugs. I'm in jail. I can't provide [for his child's mother and the child].' . . . So I straightened up." Lee is one of many fathers who say they tried to leave their illegal activities behind when they had children. Like these other men, Lee's reasons were threefold: he did not want anything to interfere with his ability to support his child financially, he did not want prison to come between him and his son relationally, and he wanted his son to think of him as an "upstanding" guy rather than as a criminal.

He sees the oldest child, who lives in Colorado, only once a year but is on excellent terms with the child's mother. He corresponds regularly with her and in that way maintains a line of communication to his son. She tells her son that his father is a "good guy," which pleases Lee. He sees his middle child only sporadically (about once a month), whenever "people, places, and things" take him to that part of town and the mother allows the visit. The child does not know that he is her father, and she calls him "Mr. Eddy" rather than "Daddy." He hopes that someday the mother will tell the child that he is her father. This child also gets cash or a bond on her birthday but no other support.

Lee lives with his third child and spends most evenings at home with her and her mother. Lee speaks often about the importance of being honest with his kids and of providing for them. Both, he feels, are compromised by any criminal activity that might end with incarceration.

> What makes a good father is being honest. Being honest and trustworthy in the community and outside the community. Being honest so that people will speak to you. That's the first part. . . . You walk with your kids and people speak to you, they respect you. . . . The second thing is being able to provide for your kids. When you take a walk with them or walk around the neighborhood, they say, "Hey daddy, I want an [Italian] ice or a Popsicle." You can't say "I can't do that right now." . . . [But] the main thing [is] being honest and truthful. Because if you're a liar and a cheat, nothing happens for you, nothing happens for your children because they'll tell them the dirt that you did. [They'll say] "Your father's a rotten motherfucker."

ged to stay pretty clear of the drug trade since his first son
enteen years ago, but the birth of each subsequent child has
his desire to stay away from the trade and its "fast
en we asked him what kind of father he wanted to be for
child, he replied, "To be strong. To put a home over her
ow her that education is the best thing to do, because fast
et you nowhere."
e twenties Lee was arrested twice for possession of mari-
shoplifting. Both times, he was released almost immedi-
he is not sure why. Lee considers himself lucky because he
en arrested for selling drugs and, though he continues to
off, these activities are nothing like those he pursued for
ars in his early twenties. He claims that he now sells drugs
ally and then only to "provide" for his family. In the two
eding our interview, Lee had sold to only three customers,
th we talked to him he had sold drugs only twice.

G SEVERED TIES

n these cases that incarceration can negatively affect fathers'
with their children, either directly or indirectly, by severing
hildren's mothers or being maligned by the women in front
ren to such an extent that the children want no contact with
The threat of imprisonment can also deter some of these
criminal behavior altogether, whereas others will reduce
imprisonment by offending only occasionally. However, it
to keep in mind that for some fathers it is not the time in
irst drives the wedge between them and their children but
iminal behavior that lands them there in the first place.
ers hoping to rebuild severed ties, the bond with their chil-
eir children's mothers had generally been destroyed before
. In every case we observed, this resulted from heavy use
ohol or illicit drugs. Substance abuse is extremely hard on
First, fathers who engage in heavy substance use often re-
elves from contact with those they care about (even from
n) because they are ashamed to be seen so "down and out."
even fathers whose own shame does not cause them to re-
elves often find that the children's mothers shut them out.
d to imagine why mothers do this: Drug addicts tend to
rom their own families) to feed their habit. They engage in
ehavior that can follow them from the streets into the house-
enerally offend at high rates to feed their habits. The debili-
e of the addiction often makes it difficult for these fathers to

combine their criminal activity with other more legitimate (and thus more socially acceptable) economic pursuits. Finally, they generally drink or smoke up all their "profits" from illicit work. None of these tendencies make them good father material in the eyes of their children's mothers. In fact, the involvement of such fathers with their children can be downright dangerous. It is for these reasons that fathers in this group who begin an episode of incarceration often feel they have nowhere to go but up in their relationships with their children.

Of course, not all fathers who had severed their ties with their children before incarceration used the experience to reorient their lives. Our sample, like nationally representative samples, contains a few serious offenders for whom nothing—not fatherhood, incarceration, or any other event—deters them from a criminal trajectory.

We also find that older fathers are more likely than younger fathers to use the event of incarceration to try to repair severed bonds with family. Although it is true that older fathers tend to have older children, making the reconnection potentially more difficult, each child a man fathers, from his first to his last, offers the potential for reconciliation, and these older fathers tend to concentrate their efforts on the youngest child (this is possible because the children often have different mothers).

In addition, we find some evidence in our interviews that fathers are more motivated to reconnect when they are somewhat older because they have learned that crime does not pay and they plan on going straight anyway. That is, the accumulation of experiences with criminal offending tend to change fathers' notions of how well crime—particularly the drug trade—pays in relation to more formal work. When such men transition to mainstream employment, they generally take jobs at the lowest end of local labor markets, as day laborers, factory workers, fast-food workers, and the like. This makes sense in light of the finding in chapter 8 of this volume that only 38 percent of employers in the four cities they studied would accept job applications from former offenders.

When the men we interviewed were younger, they were largely convinced by both street lore and their own early experiences that the drug trade paid better than these legitimate jobs. Over time, they saw that their profits fluctuated wildly, that their business constantly exposed them to long hours out of doors, and that drug dealing carried with it a substantial risk of death or imprisonment (this risk became palpable when they began to see more and more of their own street peers killed or disabled as a result of the trade). Even worse, they noted that because drug dealing often went hand in hand with drug addiction, over time their drug use escalated, and they drank or smoked up their profits, leaving them nothing to show for their efforts. Thus many had adopted the philosophy that "fast money don't get you nowhere" but "slow

money." It is interesting that fathers who had made the sue "slow money" in "menial jobs" thought they might o forge a reconnection with their children than if they had live the life" of a street hustler to "get the paper" (the things for their children. Provided they could kick their very fact that they expressed willingness to engage in me- eınployment, some said, was a powerful testimony to the ly got himself together."

y-one-year-old Puerto Rican father from Philadelphia, has son. In his son's infancy, Jose was a heavy drug user. He or burglary (to feed his habit) when the child was a few ter serving his sentence of three years, Jose could not find riend or his son. He told our interviewer, "I have not seen I don't [know where he is]—I know that I am his father, I know. . . . He is mine, but I have not been able to be a [first because of my drug addiction and then because of

fathers whose criminal lifestyle and the drug and alcohol often accompanies it has had them "rippin' and runnin' such an extent that they had virtually no relationship with before incarceration, time spent in jail or prison might ac- the necessary time-out they need to redirect their lives ugs and try to forge a pathway back into their children's rate how a spell of incarceration can serve as a turning fathers, we present the case of Jimmy in some detail.

forty-year-old African American father residing in Cam- ey. Jimmy's mother died young, and his older sister, who n of her own, raised him. He dropped out of high school me because his sister did not earn enough to provide him of clothing and shoes he wanted. To relieve some of the er, and to satisfy his own tastes in clothing, he traded o between ninth and tenth grade. Jimmy works as a land- held landscaping jobs on and off for nearly two decades, in jail and prison. Most of his employers pay him under y thinks he would own his own business right now were ngoing drug addiction and his criminal record.

r of Jimmy's children is a woman named Shirley, a fellow ith whom he has had an on-again, off-again relationship. rst child was born, Jimmy went to prison for the first time, he has thirty-four burglaries on record, all motivated by). When his children were six and seven years old, Jimmy risoned, and Shirley met and married another drug addict. married a second time, her drug habit escalated, and after

about a year of heavy using she lost custody of the children. Because he was in prison, Jimmy could not intervene. Currently, both children are in foster care. Jimmy regularly sees his daughter, whom he has taken with him to church on Father's Day, though he has not seen his son since his release three years ago.

Jimmy describes his most recent incarceration (he served an additional fifteen months because of a positive drug test while out on parole) as a "blessing in disguise." He "found God again" in prison and was able to "get himself together." He does not blame the loss of his relationship with his children's mother or his son on his repeated incarceration, because, he says, he was too busy using drugs and burglarizing factories to have much of a relationship with them anyway. Now, for the first time (and thanks to a cooperative foster parent who is a fellow Christian), he has been able to forge a relationship with his daughter. He thinks she loves and respects him now because "Daddy got himself together."

Jimmy's story shows that prison may function as a turning point and an opportunity to redirect one's life for those fathers whose lives have become so out of control (usually because of alcohol or drug addiction) that they need a powerful shock or a highly structured environment, like prison, to break their downward spiral. In Jimmy's case, his criminal lifestyle and the drug addiction that fueled it had already broken his bond with his children. Serving his most recent sentence, and the rekindled religious fervor that resulted, helped him to break the cycle of burglary and drug use and to "keep clean" during the three years since his release. Thus incarceration contributed both directly and indirectly to his rehabilitation as a father.

Jack, a thirty-three-year-old white father from Philadelphia, was convicted of five incidents of driving under the influence (DUI) in a single month after the mother of his children left him. Like Jimmy, serving time gave Jack the necessary perspective on his life and offered him an opportunity to renew a latent religious commitment. During his interview, Jack exclaimed,

> Jail was the best thing that happened to me! I sat down on Christmas Eve in jail. Christmas Day in jail. I reflected on what I'd done. So I did a little soul-searching. I remember I was in maximum security. . . . Every night my conscience would come to me and beat the hell out of me. . . . [Before imprisonment], when I was at home watching TV, my conscience would kick in and I'd turn the channel. . . . This was the first time my conscience actually had me alone so it could work on me, which it did. About four or five nights, whack, whack. . . . On the fourth night, I said, "Please, help me, God. I'm your son. I want to start again." And I felt forgiven. Well, that happened just before the first of January.

get him out of the neighborhood. He also broke into local stores and pawned the stolen goods to other stores nearby. By the time he was fourteen he had a crew of seven working alongside him, robbing stores and fencing the items to other local retailers, and reported making about $1,000 a week for the eight of them.

The first time he got caught was when he was twelve. He had stolen a bike that belonged to the son of a police officer who lived in O's neighborhood, and the boy's father made sure that O was put in juvenile detention. Over the next six years, he was in and out of juvenile institutions for various offenses.

When he was eighteen he stopped burglarizing stores and began pimping the woman who would become the mother of his three kids; he later reported having made a good living doing so. When he was nineteen, he pulled a knife on three policemen whom he claims were hassling him. They also found a pound of marijuana on him, for which he served his first sentence as an adult. Although his children's mother is now dead (she was murdered by a client while he was in prison), O occasionally sees his sixteen-year-old daughter, who lives with her mother's mother and now has a child of her own. Regarding his children, O says, "Sometimes I worry about how my children are doing because I'm not in touch with them, and I never really been in touch with them. I see them from time to time, but it really worries me because there is not a bond there." Despite these worries, O's lifestyle has not changed, and he has no connection at all to his two younger children.

CONCLUSION

The first conclusion we draw from these case studies is that for male prisoners with children, the same life event—incarceration—can result in several different pathways, depending on the father's prior situation and his response. For those fathers who have fairly solid ties to family and whose lifestyle before imprisonment had not driven a deep wedge, incarceration disrupts the bonds fathers have to their romantic partners and to their children. Following Sampson and Laub, we expect that such disruption might well have a negative impact on the prospects of the father's rehabilitation and may reinforce his criminal trajectory rather than reverse it. Perhaps lowering some of the barriers to contact with children while imprisoned would mitigate this impact (for a review of these barriers, see Hairston 1998 and Nurse 2000, 2002).

A second conclusion we draw is that for fathers whose lifestyle before incarceration has already driven a wedge between them and their children (and their children's mothers), incarceration offers the opportunity to rebuild severed social ties by curbing the destructive behavior

ration in the first place. For these men, the potential of
th their children may offer a powerful motivation to go
not present for nonfathers. Of course, not all fathers will
time in prison as a turning point to desistance, and fur-
ight be able to identify the confluence of factors that
effect such a turnaround while incarcerated.
lso find that fear of incarceration, when combined with
oming a father, can act as a powerful deterrent to crimi-
may reverse a father's career trajectory. For those who
ement in offending behavior before having a child but
cerated, criminal behavior suddenly becomes far more
aught with risk. Fatherhood, on the other hand, offers
ived rewards to men if they can manage to avoid those
ration or addiction) that might disrupt the father-child

se qualitative data show that crime can have two different
s low-income men use criminal activity only occasionally
their income from unstable or part-time work in the for-
nuch the same way that low-income mothers rely on kin
s jobs to supplement their meager incomes from welfare
ork (Edin and Lein 1997). Ironically, the pressure for these
additional income is most acute when they first become
st procure expensive items like strollers, cribs, and play-
nto crime to provide for these family needs or to get by
owdowns and layoffs is quite different from the patterns
nals like O or those fathers who steal or deal to support a
ne possibility is that the courts might try to distinguish
wo different faces of crime, perhaps by taking testimonies
of the father's children into account, and then factor this
cing process. It is also quite apparent that a major culprit
es between fathers and family is severe drug and alcohol
abuse. Although incarceration may sometimes help these
" enough to reconnect with children, more emphasis
on proactive policies that prevent substance abuse and the
ost inevitably follows.
n of the study is that because we cannot assess the repre-
f the sample, we cannot reliably estimate the size of the
dentified here. Moreover, owing to the qualitative nature
have drawn on, the size of the effects cannot be reliably
owing the relative size of the groups, as well as the size of
ncarceration for each, is vitally important for policy and is
tant direction for future research.

NOTES

1. A fourth important trend is that the proportion of low-income fathers who are involved in the child-support enforcement system has grown significantly, award amounts have increased, and child-support enforcement policies have become increasingly punitive: many states now routinely garnish wages, seize tax returns, prosecute fathers who flee across state lines to evade a child-support order, revoke driver's and professional licenses, and imprison men for nonpayment of child support (Garfinkel, Meyer, and McLanahan 1998).
2. There are, however, a few excellent studies of incarcerated fathers' bonds with their children, both within prison (Hairston 1998) and after release (Nurse 2000).
3. The median age at first fatherhood is lower for those men who are involved in criminal activity than for the general population (Lerman 1993).
4. Laub and Sampson (1993) advocate a "person-centered" approach to research on criminal careers (Magnusson and Bergman 1988, 1990), which focuses on "persons" rather than "variables" and examines the life histories of persons over time.
5. All names of interviewees and their friends and family are pseudonyms.

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