

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE REWORKING OF SETBACKS AND MISSTEPS AS A PATHWAY TO GENERATIVITY FOR LOW-INCOME FATHERS

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For fathers who have experienced significant setbacks and missteps over their life course, attainment of normative fathering roles can be difficult. The aim of the current study was to provide insight into how men, who had not fulfilled father expectations, reworked father roles in order to be an active and generative presence in their children's lives. A secondary analysis of 28 life history interviews was conducted. The researcher examined how a father's setbacks and missteps influenced his relationship with his children and how he incorporated these events into his narrative identity and translated them into parental generativity. The strategies used to overcome the barriers created by setbacks and missteps were examined. Of particular interest were how the fathers communicated the negative aspects of their identities to their children, the narrative sequencing used, and how they reworked fatherhood roles and mainstream social norms as a means to parental generativity.

THE REWORKING OF SETBACKS AND MISSTEPS AS A PATHWAY TO  
GENERATIVITY FOR LOW-INCOME FATHERS

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science  
2006

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people:

To my husband Paul- The unwavering support and endless encouragement you have given to me throughout my time in graduate school and the writing of this thesis has been invaluable. You are a daily inspiration. I love you.

To my family- Dad, Mom, Larry, Pa, Grandpa Westrum, Caroline, Shane, Laura, Dan, Derek, Laura, Mary, Angela, Paul, Lorretta, Ejike, Franca, Udo, Peter, Christy, James, Gertrude, and all of my nieces and nephews. I have been lucky to have you as my cheering section throughout graduate school and the writing of my thesis! Your prayers, caring natures, and genuine interest kept me going.

Dr. Kevin Roy- Thank you! I am so grateful for the time, energies, and expertise you have put into guiding me through the process of my thesis. You provided me with the opportunity to write on a topic I am passionate about and I have learned a great deal under your direction. I have appreciated your kindness, flexibility, and patience.

Dr. Carol Welinich and Dr. Jaslean LaTaillade- Thank you for your invaluable input as committee members. I have appreciated your encouragement, insights, and suggestions. I am additionally thankful for all you have taught me, as clinicians and instructors, throughout my time in the graduate program.

Class of 2004- I feel so fortunate to have gone through the MFT program with such compassionate and talented classmates. Thank you all for your camaraderie, I will value your friendships well beyond the program.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Statement of the Problem

What is the definition of a successful father? Many people, when asked this question, come up with a similar answer. To be a successful father, a man must have a job to provide for his family, he should be married, and he should be a homeowner living under the same roof with his wife and their children. This widespread conceptualization of fatherhood has been labeled the “package deal” (Townsend, 2002). Simply put, the elements of the package deal are: work, marriage, home, and children. Although the package deal is widely understood, it should not be overlooked that achieving the four components is not guaranteed, and in many cases this view can serve to exclude a large number of fathers (Townsend, 2002).

Not all men are afforded the same opportunities and access to resources. Where they live, whom they know, the resources they have, and where they go to school can all impact their journey across the life course. For instance, men with limited employment opportunities in economically-depressed areas will have difficulty finding jobs and building the resources to purchase a home for their families. These obstacles combined with the widespread conceptualization of ideal fatherhood can make the transition to fatherhood difficult. These contextual difficulties will be eased or heightened depending on the life choices the men make.

Incarceration is a contextual barrier to parenting that a growing number of men have to overcome. Many of the generative fathers (n=21, 75%) in the current study were either incarcerated at the time of the interview or were incarcerated at some point in their



lives. For these fathers, and over 668,000 other fathers in State and Federal prisons, incarceration presents an additional challenge to involved and generative fathering (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). In 2000, the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that 1,372,700 children had a father who was incarcerated. In reviewing statistics reported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2003, one can draw the conclusion that the barrier of incarceration is an obstacle that an increasing number of fathers and families are facing. By midyear of 2002, more than 1.8 million men were incarcerated in State and Federal prisons and local jails. Since 1995, this number has been increasing at a rate of 3.6% annually (Harrison & Karberg, 2003). The research on self-reports of incarcerated men indicates that most have had difficult childhoods, with 30% having experienced parental substance abuse and 12% physical or sexual abuse as children. In addition, these men typically have had limited educations, and are considered low-income, with 69% of the men, at time of arrest, having an income below the poverty level (Johnston, 1995). Also, 58% of incarcerated fathers reported drug use in the month before their offense (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

In effect, many fathers who are or have been incarcerated have experienced multiple challenges over their life course. Similar to the men in the current study (n=21), the pathways to generative fathering may have been complicated by substance abuse, unemployment, and turbulent childhoods. How fathers overcome the barrier of incarceration as well as the other barriers that arise from multiple setbacks and missteps throughout their lives is important to consider because it influences paternal identity development, generativity, and the ability to meet the expectations of fatherhood. Gaining a better understanding of how the fathers in the current sample have developed

generative fathering identities and roles may be a step towards understanding how to assist other fathers who have faced similar challenges to becoming generatively involved with their children. This research has implications for increasing the effectiveness and types of policies that are developed to promote the relationships and involvement between fathers and their families. Policies that take into account and address the multiple setbacks and missteps of some fathers provides options for those who may not otherwise have many, if any, to pursue.

Unable to adequately meet or follow the common role expectations of fatherhood, some men are left with few options. These fathers can either disengage from their families, or they can rework, for themselves, acceptable and attainable father roles. For instance, a father who is unable to provide financially for his children may put a greater emphasis on the importance of quality time spent with his children. The main challenge posed to fathers who have experienced obstacles to adopting generative fathering roles is to rethink what it means to be a generative and nurturing father. Recasting the roles of a father and tailoring it to their strengths may rebuild paternal identity. Strengthening a father's identification with his paternal identity can in turn serve to increase his generative expressions as a parent (Christianson & Palkovitz, 1998).

How do setbacks and missteps lead to opportunities for the development of generativity? For some fathers, a way to rework their roles as a father may be to share the negative aspects of their narrative identity through the stories they tell their children. Some men may discuss with their children their struggles with alcohol as a warning not to drink. Other fathers may tell life stories that led them away from graduating from high school in order to encourage their children to complete their educations. Storytelling to

promote both identity development and to pass along moral lessons has been shown to be an expression of generativity (Erikson, 1950; McAdams, 2004).

The fathers in this study all faced the challenge of redefining what it meant to be a father. Each father's narrative was a unique glimpse into how he identified with the roles of a father, and how he was working or had worked to overcome the barriers between him and fatherhood. Even though unique, the narratives in the sample were strung together by a common thread of contextual challenges, similar missteps and setbacks, and the strong desire to be generatively involved with their children. The exploration of the life history narratives offered insight into how some fathers are able to exhibit resilience in their roles as fathers and how they might overcome the challenges to becoming generative forces in their children's lives.

### Purpose

This study examined how fathers, who had experienced multiple setbacks and missteps, had incorporated these events into their narrative identity and how they translated them into parental generativity in both acts and values. More specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

- How do multiple missteps and setbacks in a father's life impact the relationship he has with his children? How does a generative father narrate the missteps and setbacks in his life and the impact they have had on his family? What narrative structures (e.g., redemption sequences, contamination sequences, circular narrations) does the father use to narrate these events?

- Which strategies does a father, who has experienced multiple setbacks and missteps, use to promote generative involvement with his children? In particular, how does he generatively communicate the negative aspects of his identity to his children? How does he rework the negative example his own father set as a parent and/or the mainstream social norms in order to find a pathway to generative involvement with his children?

The exploration of these questions was driven by the desire to better understand how men, who have faced difficulties in meeting mainstream society's norms for successful fathering, used the negative aspects of their identity, stemming from setbacks and missteps, as a generative avenue. The current study contributed to the growing body of literature on generative fathering by sampling a population that is often overlooked in the literature.

## Review of Literature

### *A Theory of Generativity and Theoretical Expansions*

Erik Erikson (1950) first introduced the theory of generativity. His (1950) concept of generativity has been expanded by a number of theorists through defining different types and modes of generativity, and through different models that incorporate and define a variety of generative components. In addition, a growing body of literature has explored the concept of generativity and fatherhood.

### *Generativity and Erik Erikson's "eight ages of man"*

Erik Erikson's (1950) "eight ages of man" is a sequential theory of human development that spans the human life cycle. Erikson postulated that a person

experiences a psychosocial crisis at eight different stages during his or her lifetime. Each of the crises, which are defined by the struggle between two opposing tendencies such as generativity versus stagnation, is produced by the intersecting cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor changes within the individual. These changes challenge the organizing structure of the personality and how the person interacts with the socializing environment and the outside world (Erikson, 1964). A stage becomes dominant when a person comes to a “crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (Erikson, 1976, p. 5). How the different crises are dealt with at each of the different stages ultimately shapes the person’s personality.

A person’s age does not define the eight stages nor does age dictate when the crisis will arise, although the stages are associated with chronological ages (Erikson, 1950). All eight of the “positive” qualities are present with their “negative” counterparts throughout the human life course (Erikson, 1950, p.274). Although the labeling of each of the stages may seem to suggest an either-or outcome, the task of each stage is to find a balance or “favorable ratio” between the two traits (Erikson, 1950, p. 271). The personality is the culmination of balances that are struck between opposing traits (Erikson, 1950). The “lasting outcomes of the favorable ratios” at each of the psychosocial stages are called strengths or basic virtues (Erikson, 1950). Each of the basic virtues will be included in the following discussion of the “eight stages of man.”

The first psychosocial stage of Erikson’s theory is trust versus mistrust. This stage is associated with the first year of life when an infant depends solely on adult caretakers to meet his or her basic biological needs. If the infant’s needs are adequately and consistently met, the infant is able to form sound attachments and a trusting attitude.

Achieving a favorable ratio between trust and mistrust, the strength of hope becomes a basic quality throughout the life course. The second psychosocial stage is autonomy versus shame and doubt. This stage is associated with the second and third year of life. During this time a toddler is experiencing great developmental change on both motor and cognitive levels. The toddler begins to take personal responsibility for some aspects of self-care and starts developing a sense of self-control. A toddler who achieves a favorable ratio between autonomy and shame and doubt develops the strength of willpower or free will. This strength refers to “the unbroken determination to exercise free choice as well as self-restraint, in spite of the unavoidable experience of shame and doubt” (Erikson, 1964, p. 119).

The third psychosocial stage is initiative versus guilt. This stage lasts between ages three to six. During this stage the child is maturing both physically and intellectually. The challenge at this stage is for the child to attain a certain degree of independence. The child is exploring the world and with this exploration comes the broadening of the social world to include others outside of the nuclear family. The strength of purpose is achieved when a favorable ratio is maintained (Erikson, 1950). Purpose refers to the ability of a person to imagine and work towards goals (Erikson, 1964). The fourth psychosocial stage is industry versus inferiority. This stage usually begins around the age of six and lasts through puberty. The child enters society and begins to interact with members of the community and also begins attending school. Children at this stage receive systematic instruction in different industrious skills by the adults in their world and begin to earn recognition through the things he or she produces. Children who are able to achieve a favorable ratio between industry and inferiority

develop the strength of competence (Erikson, 1964). The individual feels competent that they can begin a task or project and complete it successfully.

The fifth psychosocial stage is identity versus role confusion. This stage is associated with adolescence when youth are growing and experiencing extreme physiological changes. Erikson stated (1950) that the main challenge of this stage is the adolescent's struggle to form a clear sense of identity. Forming a clear sense of identity involves developing a stable identity and often entails adopting an ideology or system of values (e.g., religious, political) that fortifies the forming foundation of the person's identity. Youth are also faced with the knowledge that they will soon be taking on adult tasks and with this knowledge they begin to ask themselves, "Where am I going, and who am I?"

Erikson (1950) noted that young people can be extremely cruel and often exclude those they view as different. What is different can range from the color of one's skin to the style of dress or manner of speaking. Youth want to be part of the in-group, and it is this in-group that sets most of the criteria for what is acceptable and what leads to social exile. Adolescents are "eager to be affirmed" by their peers (Erikson, 1950, p. 263). Achieving a favorable ratio between identity and role confusion leads to the strength of fidelity (Erikson, 1950). Erikson (1964) described fidelity as being a sense of commitment to a selected system of values.

The sixth psychosocial stage is intimacy versus isolation. This stage occurs when an individual reaches early adulthood. The main concern during this stage is to develop and establish intimate, lasting, and open relationships with others. Erikson (1950) stated that intimacy involves a person's "capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliations and

partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises” (p. 263). Erikson (1950) postulated that it was during this stage of development when many young adults marry and become parents. “The crisis of intimacy is likely made possible and necessary by the ... intensifying biosocial need to survive through the culturally defined roles of spouse and parent” (Snarey, 1993, p. 18). Achieving a favorable ratio between intimacy and isolation leads to the strength of love (Erikson, 1950).

The seventh psychosocial stage is marked when the crisis of generativity versus stagnation occurs. In summarizing the journey towards the peak of generativity, Erikson (1974) wrote:

In youth you find out what you *care to do* and who you *care to be*- even in changing roles. In young adulthood you learn whom you *care to be with*- at work and in private life, not only exchanging intimacies, but [*sic*] sharing intimacy. In adulthood, however, you learn to know what and whom you can *take care of*. (p. 124)

Erikson (1950) described generativity as the central developmental task of middle adulthood and as being “primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (p. 267). The concern or drive to be generative does not imply that an individual will be generative only in the wanting or rearing of children nor does it imply that generativity is a natural quality derived from becoming a parent. Generativity itself is a broad term encompassing things such as “productivity” and “creativity” and includes both biological and psychosocial components (Erikson, 1950, p. 267). A generative adult is an adult who contributes to future generations and the community. These contributions



can be made in a number of ways such as in the caring for others, promoting the development of others, creating art, and developing ideas. Adults who are unsuccessful in attaining a favorable balance between generativity and stagnation “often begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own-or one another’s-one and only child” (Erikson, 1950, p. 267). If a favorable ratio is attained, the strength of care is achieved. Erikson noted (1950), “care is the broadening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident-a concern which must consistently overcome the ambivalence adhering to irreversible obligation and the narrowness of self-concern” (p. 608).

The eighth and final stage of Erikson’s psychosocial theory is ego integrity versus despair. This stage is associated with late adulthood. During this stage Erikson (1950) stated that the “fruits” of the seven stages ripen in the individual who has “taken care of things and people,” who has come to accept both his or her successes and failures, and has had children or generated “products and ideas” (p. 268). If this is not achieved despair dominates and is expressed in the “feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life...” (Erikson, 1950, p. 269). A favorable ratio between ego integrity and despair leads to the final strength Erikson listed, the strength of wisdom.

#### *Kotre’s four types of generativity*

As previously stated, generativity is a complex and multi-faceted concept. Though not explicitly defined by Erikson, it was implied in his works that generativity included more than biological acts. John Kotre (1984) built upon Erikson’s seventh age of man by characterizing four major types of generativity. According to Kotre (1984), “generativity may be defined as a desire to invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self” and that the investments made are done to achieve

“material and symbolic unity with an extensive and enduring future” (p. 10). The four types of generativity that Kotre (1984) defined are: biological, parental, technical, and cultural. In the relationships between individuals from an older generation to individuals from a younger generation, there is the possibility for the expression of all four major types of generativity (Kotre, 1984).

The first of the four major types of generativity is biological. Biological generativity relates to the “begetting, bearing, and nursing of children” with the newborn infant being the “target” (Kotre, 1984, p. 11). This is the only way material substances (e.g., genes) are passed on from one person to the next. The potential for biological generativity typically lasts for approximately 40 years for females and longer for males (Kotre, 1984).

The second type of generativity is parental generativity. Kotre (1984) defined parental generativity as “feeding, clothing, sheltering, loving, and disciplining offspring and initiating them into the family’s traditions” (p. 11). The “generative object” is the child (Kotre, 1984, p. 12). The biological parent is often the actor for this expression of generativity, although there are children who are cared for by persons other than their biological parents. Kotre (1984) noted that because of the lengthening in the human lifespan, a parent often has a great number of years left to live after caring for his or her own children. Biological and parental generativity can both be expressed through grandparenthood.

Parental generativity and biological generativity do not necessarily coincide (Kotre, 1984). It is possible for an adolescent who is going through puberty to become

pregnant when she is not ready to act parentally generative. It is also possible for an older adult to express the readiness to nurture a child but be unable to do so biologically.

The third type of generativity is technical generativity. Individuals who teach skills to others at a lower skill level are technically generative. The types of skills that are taught are numerous and varied. Skills include things from how to fight and how to steal to how to play a musical instrument, read, write, and cook. The teacher who is technically generative implicitly passes on “the symbol systems in which the skills are embedded” (Kotre, 1984, p. 12). The “generative object” is the one who is being taught as well as the skill itself. Technical generativity is expressed at different points in the life cycle. Teaching a skill is only truly generative when it “is imbued with the sense of extending oneself into the apprentice or attaching oneself to a lasting art” (p. 13). The act of teaching a skill and the skill itself is part of a broader cultural context. The teacher who is technically generative explicitly teaches how to do a skill while indirectly teaching the student the cultural significance of the skill (Kotre, 1984).

The fourth type of generativity is cultural generativity and involves “creating, renovating, and conserving a symbol system- the “mind” of a culture- explicitly passing it on to successors” (Kotre, 1984, p. 12). Kotre (1984) defined culture as an “integrated set of symbols interpreting existence and giving meaning and place to members of a perduring [*sic*] collectivity” (p. 14). What constitutes a culture varies widely and individuals often belong to a number of cultural groups at varying degrees. The “generative objects” targeted are culture and the person being taught (Kotre, 1984). The person who is culturally generative moves past teaching the mechanics of the skill and teaches the meaning. The teacher becomes a mentor. An individual can be culturally

generative at different time points in his or her life though most important forms of cultural generativity occur after biological reproduction (Kotre, 1984).

*Further developments of generativity as a concept*

Kotre distinguished between two modes of generativity: agentic and communal. The origins of his conceptualization lie in the work of psychologist David Bakan (1966). Bakan (1966) presented agency and communion as opposing forces. Agency relates to the behaviors that assert, protect, and expand the self. Communion represents engagement in a mutual and interpersonal relationship with something larger than the self.

Kotre (1984) linked the concepts of agency and communion to generativity as a way to differentiate expressions of generativity that seem to promote one's self-interest from those generative acts that promote the interest of the generative object. Generativity is agentic when the person aims to preserve him or herself through the generative object. Agentic generativity is displayed when a person attempts to mold the generative object as a replication of his or her self or when a person creates something to serve as a monument or tribute to his or her existence (Kotre, 1984). The agentially generative person has an almost parasitic relationship with the generative object. Love of the self is derived from the generative object, even at the expense of the generative object. The worst thing that could happen in this person's world is his or her own death (Kotre, 1984). In contrast to agentic generativity, generativity is communal when "life-interest is transferred to the generative object. The generative object is loved for itself, and the worst thing imaginable is its death" (Kotre, 1984, p. 17).

What if an adult is unable to achieve generativity or his or her generativity is impeded or threatened? Snarey (1993) coined the term “generativity chill” to define the anxiety an adult experiences when there is a threat to his or her generativity (p. 23). The anxiety that Snarey (1993) referred to is unique in that it is a direct result of the “awareness of the self as finite, limited, and bounded” derived from an experience where there is “the threatened loss of one’s child, creation, or creativity” (p. 23). Generativity chill can be experienced by an individual who has yet to become a parent, when infertility is experienced, or when a parent’s living children are threatened or lost by illnesses and accidents (Snarey, 1993).

McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) have most fully developed new dimensions of generativity. They have devised a conceptual model of generativity composed of seven different features or components. According to the model, the seven components of generativity are:

1. The *inner desire* for agentic immortality and communal nurturance which combines with;
2. Age graded societal norms experienced as a *cultural demand* to produce in the adult years an increasing and more or less conscious;
3. *Concern* for the next generation.
4. Ideally reinforced by a *belief* in the goodness or worthwhileness of the human enterprise, generative concern leads to;
5. Generative *commitment*, which in turn, may produce;
6. Generative *action*.

7. Finally, the adult apprehends his or her own generative efforts by constructing a *narration* of generativity, which becomes part of the larger life narration. (p. 8-9)

All seven components revolve around an overarching psychosocial goal of providing for the next generation(s) survival and well-being, as well as furthering the development of future generations. The source of generativity is found in the individual and the individual's social and cultural environment. The social and cultural environment often encourages and fosters a person's desire to be generative (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). Generativity is often viewed as a developmental expectation. When an individual becomes an adult, society expects him or her to fill the role of teacher, mentor, parent, and leader for the next generation. Fulfilling these roles is viewed as normative depending upon where the person is in his or her life cycle and by the opportunities available at any given time point within society. Society defines the appropriate timing for an individual's development of generativity. Therefore there is variation amongst societies (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998).

### *Fatherhood and Generative Fathering*

Within the last 30 years or so, the literature on fathering has become more extensive and varied (Palkovitz, 2002). Typically the research on fathering stresses the deficits of fathers instead of highlighting the positive qualities and aspects of fathering (Gerson, 1997). The research pertaining to generative fathering is growing and enriching the existing body of literature on fathering (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Generative fathering research has met some resistance from political and social critics who have seen this direction in research as supporting traditional patriarchal family forms. For example,

some feminist scholars have argued that involved and generative fathering is a way to usurp parental rights from women (Gerson, 1997). While these views exist, the body of research on generative fathering continues to grow. Through this research, strong evidence has been produced indicating that under the right circumstances, the majority of fathers have the capability of becoming involved and generative fathers (Gerson, 1997). Additional research has indicated the possibility of fatherhood serving as a catalyst for increasing a male's generative concern for the next generation (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992).

From the mid-twentieth century through today, there have been remarkable changes in the cultural role expectations for men and women in the United States (Bonvillain, 1995). The normative assumption of a father being a household's sole breadwinner has changed. As large numbers of women have entered the workforce fulltime, creating dual income households, a father's role as the sole economic provider has shifted. Mothers sharing the household's economic responsibilities, increasing divorce rates, and greater acceptance of out of wedlock births has punctuated the need for society to conceptualize a fathers' familial roles past that of economic provider to one that allows greater involvement with the care and nurturance of their children (Gerson, 1997).

According to LaRossa (1988), a shift in the cultural expectations for fathers has occurred. American society has seen a shift in the norms, values, and beliefs regarding fathering by viewing successful fathering to include being active in daily childcare, being expressive and intimate with children, and taking an equal part in a child's socialization. This shift is active in multiple and diverse contexts. How fathers negotiate these changes is typically dependent upon their cultural contexts (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005)

Despite the changes in the culture of fatherhood, the actual conduct (e.g., paternal behaviors, what the fathers do) has not kept equal pace (LaRossa, 1988). This is particularly true in the areas of providing and caregiving. From early on in life, male children are often socialized to avoid the view that involved fathering is necessary or desirable (Gerson, 1997). This could partly be explained by the fact that contemporary fathers have had few childhood role models for how to be an involved and equalitarian partner and father (Dienhart & Daly, 1997). Many fathers face social and cultural obstacles that limit generative thought and action. Obstacles include, but are not limited to, the pressures inherent with being the primary breadwinner in a family given the higher salaries men typically earn, inflexible work schedules and demands, relationships with male peers where experiences as fathers are rarely shared, and the “long tradition of idealizing motherhood and dismissing fatherhood” (Dienhart & Daly, 1997, p. 163; Gerson, 1997).

Even with shifts in the culture of fatherhood, men still face cultural barriers to generative fathering. Dienhart and Daly (1997) describe the cultures many men live in as nongenerative where the “values of family and home life are pitted against the values of productivity and performance” (p. 148). Men face cultural forces that detract from their commitment to being involved fathers and may even discourage involved fathering directly. The social contexts that encourage or discourage a father’s generative involvement with his children are crucial to understanding what leads some men to be highly generative and others to be less generative (Gerson, 1997).

Gerson (1997) has provided some insight to the question “Why do some men move toward generative fathering while others move away from it?” (p. 40). Gerson



(1997) suggests that the answer to this question can be found in both childhood and adult experiences. First, it is important to understand the influence of childhood experiences on a father's generative development. Snarey (1993) found that men whose fathers were not nurturing and were distant during their childhood years were more likely to display higher levels of care for their own children's social-emotional and intellectual development in adolescence. Whereas, men whose fathers were average to above average in nurturing were equally as likely to display low, moderate, or high levels of care for their own children's social-emotional and intellectual development in adolescence. Fathers who experienced a lack of parental generativity in their own childhoods may attempt to remake their own past and act more generatively as fathers, thus counterbalancing negative parental role models (Snarey, 1993). In a study conducted by Dienhart and Daly (1997), 18 couples, committed to sharing parental responsibilities, were interviewed to explore how they experienced fatherhood on a cognitive and behavioral level. Many men, in reflecting back on their childhood role models, saw their male parental role models as reference points for what to do differently with their own children and what they wanted to change in their lives. Dienhart and Daly (1997) have found "men typically seek to "rework" or compensate for deficiencies that they perceived in their own fathers" (p. 154).

The second part of the answer can be found by gaining an understanding of the adult experiences a father has had and the opportunities afforded to him as a parent. Gerson (1997) stated that there are two conditions needing to be met for a father to be generative. First, a father must want to be an involved, nurturing, and committed parent. Secondly, a father must be able to act on these desires. The events and circumstances of a

father's adult life will impact both the wanting to be involved and the ability a father has to satisfy his desire to be involved (Gerson, 1997). Three social conditions, occurring individually or in conjunction with one another, have been identified as important for fostering a father's generative orientation.

The first social condition is an equalitarian relationship with his partner, if he is in a relationship. Equal parental sharing includes: "equal participation in the routine, prosaic work...assuming equal responsibility for the children and their care...[and] making equal sacrifices" (Gerson, 1997, p. 44-45). A father's engagement in an equalitarian relationship with his partner is impacted by the emotional and moral support he receives from his partner and his ability to create a space and time from his work responsibilities to engage in equal parenting. The second social condition is to gain and maintain a paying job. Men with limited opportunities for paid employment can experience their desire to be generative as being "frustrated in the workplace" (Gerson, 1997, p. 41). The inability to be generative through the workplace can encourage men to become more involved in fathering as an alternative source of fulfillment and enrichment. Parenting becomes a productive form of labor and their paternal identity is heightened and further defined (Gerson, 1997). Third, fathers must have opportunities for developing and maintaining satisfying relationships with their children. A father's early and intense participation in the caring for his child can ignite desires and form attachments between him and his child that he did not think of or expect (Gerson, 1997). Experiencing at least one of these three social conditions appears to lead to more intense involvement in childrearing and a stronger generative orientation as a parent, though it is

not guaranteed that once a generative orientation is formed it will be realized (Gerson, 1997).

Strengthening a father's identification with his paternal identity can in turn serve to increase his generative expressions as a parent (Christianson & Palkovitz, 1998). Results from a study conducted by Christiansen and Palkovitz (1998), in which identity and intimacy had a significant positive correlation with generativity (N=196 fathers), points towards fostering a father's paternal identity and ability to be intimate with others. Doing so may be a way to assist fathers in reaching their generative potential. Challenging cultural beliefs that place fathers in roles that inhibit nurturance is necessary for a greater number of fathers to move towards more nurturing roles and express greater levels of generativity towards their children.

### *Social and Cultural Contexts for Generativity*

How generativity is experienced and expressed is undoubtedly shaped by social and cultural contexts. The tenets of generativity are present in the thoughts and actions of the generative father, but they are shaped, enhanced, or inhibited by the collective elements of a father's evolving environment. There are three social contexts that will be addressed in this study: race, incarceration, and socioeconomic status.

#### *Race*

Throughout United States history, African Americans have endured numerous oppressive forces, obstacles, and racism. From slavery to segregation the racist mistreatment of African American citizens has tested as well as shaped African American families. This analysis will be mindful of the relationship between race and generative fathering. It is important to consider "*How* [some] African American men view their

family experiences, *what* they are able or willing to do as family members, and even *when* they decide to do it [*sic*] are often directly affected by ethnicity” (Allen & Conner, 1997, p. 53).

Very little research has examined the relationship between race and generativity and many of the instruments constructed to measure and assess individual differences in generativity have all been created and utilized with mainly Caucasian American samples (Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, & Bauer, 2001). One such measure, the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS), is a frequently used measure of generativity that asks respondents to rate 20 statements on a four-point continuum. Each statement is designed to get at the extent to which an adult expresses generative concern (1992). To begin addressing this gap in the literature Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, and Bauer (2001) directly assessed how generativity related to social involvement among both African Americans and Caucasians in a sample of 253 community adults (n=139 Caucasian adults, n=114 African American adults) by using a number of measures including the LGS. Controlling for both mean education and income differences between African Americans and Caucasians, the researchers found that African American adults scored significantly higher on measures of generative concern and generative acts as well as on measures of social support, religious participation, and parenting as a role model and source of wisdom. The findings indicate the importance of being attuned to race and ethnicity in relation to generative fathering.

### *Incarceration*

The context of social institutions may impact generativity and the generative thoughts and behaviors fathers express. For a father who is incarcerated, the social institution (e.g., the prison or work release program) impacts the amount of contact, the

type of interactions, and the level of involvement he can have with his children. Despite these limitations, research shows physical involvement in child rearing is not a requirement for generative fathering. Instead, it is a father's paternal identity and his cognitive investment in his roles as a father that is more strongly related to generative fathering (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998; Snarey, 1993). The ways incarceration influences fathers' paternal identities, how it shapes fathers' views regarding their roles in their children's lives, and how this setback is translated into parental generativity for some fathers are all important factors to address.

According to Maruna (2001), active and former law offenders "may face unique personal and cultural demands for developing generative goals and plans" (p. 118). Pursuing a generative role might address certain needs incarcerated men have. Maruna (2001) has outlined four specific needs that can be met by generative pursuits:

1. *Fulfillment*: Generative roles can provide an alternative source of meaning and achievement in one's life.
2. *Exoneration*: By helping others, one relieves his or her own sense of guilt and shame.
3. *Legitimacy*: The penitent ex-offender who tries to persuade others not to offend is a well-known and established role in society.
4. *Therapy*: Helping others actually helps the ex-offender maintain his or her own reform efforts. (p. 118-119)

The generative father who has experienced missteps that led to incarceration may find incarceration to be a turning point in his life and develop a stronger sense of paternal identity and stronger adherence to his view of the roles a father plays. In becoming a

highly generative parent the father meets the above-mentioned needs as well as the social-emotional needs of his children.

### *Socio-economics*

In the United States, the majority of men are socialized to accept the idealized version of the American family. From a young age many males are taught, in different ways, that the normative role of a father is that of a provider for his family (Bonvillain, 1995). Being a provider can mean different things in different contexts but overall men consider the main responsibility of the provider role to be that of a financial provider (Roy, 2004). Fulfilling the provider role is not possible for every father.

Not all fathers are afforded the same opportunities and access to educational resources, employment, and other stepping-stones that lead towards the realization of the financial provider role. For low-income fathers, like the fathers in the current study, unemployment and not realizing the financial provider role needs to be looked at in a larger societal context. Limited employment opportunities for low-skilled men and declining wages are two barriers to the fulfillment of this role (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 1997). Low-income fathers might adapt to this challenge through seeking alternatives to the financial provider role, such as becoming more involved with their children in other ways or providing material items to meet their children's needs (e.g., food, clothes) (Roy, 2004). Understanding the social constraints and context low-income fathers are a part of may lead to a greater understanding of how low-income fathers conceptualize and expand upon the provider role.

### *Life Stories and Narrative Sequences*

An effective way to trace the emergence and process of generativity is through family storytelling (Kotre, 1999; McAdams, 2004; Pratt, Norris, Arnold, & Filyer, 1999). Pratt and Fiese (2004) have identified three significant purposes of family storytelling. First, storytelling provides opportunities to act through which family members learn how to narrate life stories. Second, moral messages and lessons within the life stories may be passed in order to socialize and provide moral guidance to the family. Lastly, the narrative materials that comprise life stories may lay a foundation on which family identity and personal identity are formed. The functions of storytelling to promote identity development and to pass along moral lessons are both generative avenues (Erikson, 1950; McAdams, 2004).

McAdams (2004) argued that family stories regarding episodes or periods of human suffering where resolution gives way to growth and/or redemption seem to pass strong messages of generativity from one generation to the next. For fathers who have experienced past setbacks and missteps, sharing stories about how these missteps and setbacks came about, how they coped, and how they were ultimately resolved has the potential to be poignant lessons for children as well as a potential influence on the children's malleable identities. A father's storytelling to his children not only provides them insight into *how* their father became who they are in the present, but also into his evolving narrative identity: who he is in the here-and-now (McAdams, 2004).

In addition to teaching their children through their stories, the fathers who have experienced marked setbacks and missteps may narrate these events as life-narrative turning points or life transitions. Many different life-narrative accounts follow

redemption and contamination sequences. Attending to the narrative sequence a father follows when telling these stories is important for gaining insight into how the misstep or setback impacted the father's understanding of self (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Bowman, 2001).

### *Narrative identity*

Narrative identities are people's explanations and beliefs about who they are and how they came to be who they are (McAdams, 2004). A person's narrative identity is an internalized and evolving story (McAdams, 2004). Starting from late adolescence, an individual's narrative identity begins to develop and evolve as he or she travels across the life course. It is constructed in a way that reinforces, sustains, and justifies the life choices, decisions, and commitments an individual has made. A narrative identity is formed, molded, and edited by a collection of materials gathered throughout an entire lifespan and influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they are created (McAdams, 2004). Each of the fathers in the current study had constructed a unique narrative identity that was composed of his experiences of life events and shaped by the cultural and social context of his world. Of particular interest was how the fathers' setbacks and missteps shaped their narrative identities as well as how they communicated this to their children.

### *Redemption sequence*

McAdams (2006) defined redemption as "the deliverance from suffering to an enhanced status or state" (p. 14). The concept of redemption, as it pertains to life stories, are those sequences where a person describes the experience of a bad scene or negative emotional state (e.g., fear, guilt, shame) followed by a positive or good outcome of the



negative experience (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). It is not the factual accuracy of a redemption sequence that is important. What is important is the way the events are storied because in the telling lays the narrative strategies for making the self (McAdams, 2006).

McAdams (2006) has identified two types of redemption sequences. The first sequence type is characterized by the telling of a negative event (e.g., “I got arrested and locked up in work release”) which later turns positive (e.g., “I now am able to send money to my kids and I have been sober for 11 months”). The second sequence type is characterized by the telling of a negative event that, over an extended period of time, benefits the self or others (e.g., “My father wasn’t around much when I was a kid”; “I spend quality time with my kids; I want to be more than a financial provider”).

McAdams (2006) stated that the findings from the research he and his colleagues conducted suggest that highly generative adults use more redemptive imagery in their life-narrative accounts than less generative adults. There were no differences between European American and African Americans who both cited redemptive themes. “For highly generative adults, the redemptive self-with its affirmation of life’s second chances-helps to explain, justify, reinforce, and sustain a generative approach to life” and being generative may make it easier for generative adults to frame life-stories in redemptive sequences (McAdams, 2006, p. 23). Based on McAdams (2006) statement of past research findings, the sequence in the narratives can ultimately lead to a greater understanding of the father’s level of generativity.

### *Contamination sequence*

In life storytelling, contamination sequences are story sequences where the telling of a positive event or emotional experience is followed by how it was ruined or turned into a negative experience or bad outcome (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). For instance, a father may tell of his joy at the birth of his first child and follow this with how he has to pay child support that he cannot afford. In a contamination sequence, the actor appears stuck in a stagnated life where problems cannot be overcome. Most every person, especially adults, can recall contamination events in their lives. For some people though, their life story plots are dominated with contamination sequences. Research has found that individuals whose life narratives are weighted with contamination have low-levels of generativity (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). It is also possible, and past research has indicated, that the way people narrate their life stories may speak to their quality of life, mental health, and how they experience living (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Following the sequences present in the fathers' life narrations may reveal more than previously stated; it might reveal how they experience their lives and their overall mental well-being.

### *Decontamination*

In addition to redemption and contamination sequences, McAdams (2006) postulated that some people attempt to decontaminate their past through the act of confession. More specifically, people seek to confess their wrongdoings when they feel bad about an outcome and have assumed the blame. By acknowledging their wrongdoing, the confessor hopes to right the wrong, make amends, and to "reinstatement the good situation that preceded the bad" (McAdams, 2006, p. 224).

McAdams (2006) stated that in addition to making amends and redeeming what was damaged, confessions could also serve to “restore the integrity and wholeness of narrative identity” (p. 227). For example, if a father thought his life was contaminated by bad events and he felt responsible for the missteps, he might confess in hopes to undo what he had done and in the process open up new opportunities for growth. Fathers’ confessions may provide an opportunity to act generatively with their children and a way to gain some freedom from the “vicious circles” perpetuated by their setbacks and missteps (McAdams, 2006, p. 28).

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

The theoretical frameworks of symbolic interaction and life course theory were used to guide the current study’s analysis of the data. A brief overview of each theory as it relates to the data analysis will be presented. The discussion on the theoretical frameworks will conclude with a concise discussion of conceptual links that bridge the two theoretical frameworks.

#### *Symbolic interaction*

The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism was used to better understand how fathers, who have experienced significant missteps and setbacks, come to define and act in their roles as fathers as well as how they construct their generative paternal identities. Symbolic interactionism, with its focus on how meaning is acquired and generated, assisted in organizing and understanding how the generative fathers created meaning to make sense of their world. Additionally, the framework encompasses fathers’ motives as constructed from the meanings available to them and relevant to their social and cultural contexts. For instance, this theoretical framework assumes that in

order to understand a person's behavior, one must know the meaning the person assigns to it (White & Klein, 2002). Understanding the meaning a father placed on the sharing of his life stories regarding missteps and how he defined the meaning of the context and situations he was a part of helped the "listener" understand the generative nature of the act.

From the framework of symbolic interactionism, two important concepts were essential to analysis: the concept of the self and the concept of roles. The notion of self is a fundamental part of symbolic interactionism and was helpful in guiding the understanding of how a father constructs his narrative identity. The self is a "symbolic representation of that which did an act (I) and that which was acted on (me)" (White & Klein, 2002, p. 65). According to Mead (1934), the "I" (the actor) is spontaneous and unpredictable and the "me" (object) constructs actions on interpretative thought and takes into account one's personal goals and abilities as well as the expectations of others in their environment (Winton, 1995). Therefore, a person's "self" is constructed through his or her active awareness of the perspective of I and me. The self as "me" takes on the perspective of "specific others" in its attempt to view its behavior from the role of another ("How would my child see my action?"), and is "constructed from the perspective of the 'generalized other' (e.g., 'How would others in society see my action?')" (White & Klein, 2002, p. 65).

The second important concept is that of role. There are several important aspects of role. In general, roles are characterized by position and rules of behavior that govern the position. The rules a person is expected to follow dictate the expectations both the individual and others have for how the person will perform the role. Rules for different

roles can be different for different people based on the social and cultural context in which socialization occurred and can also change over time (White & Klein, 2002; Winton, 1995). It is critical that role expectations are clear to both the person in the role and to the others with whom the person interacts. It is nearly impossible for a person to “successfully” fulfill a role if the expectations are not made clear. If the expectations are unclear or the person in the role does not have the adequate resources to enact the role, role strain results. Role strain can lead the person to feel uncertain about whether or not he or she is able to fulfill the role, makes for a hard transition to the role, and impacts the person’s role identity (White & Klein, 2002).

### *Life course theory*

Life course theory focuses on the systematic changes experienced by individuals as they move across the life course and transition from one stage to another (e.g., young adulthood, parenthood) (White & Klein, 2002). With this focus, the life course theory provided a framework for considering how time and social context influence the adoption and altering of social roles. These roles are linked to the positions individuals hold within their families. For instance, the most basic positions a male has in his family’s kinship structures are: husband, father, son, and brother. Age graded norms, or social rules, govern how a role should be filled and what behavior is appropriate for the position. The age-graded norms of any position can be different depending on the society, the culture, or in the context of time (White & Klein, 2002).

Additionally, life course theory provides a context for exploring deviations from the normative family life course. The normative family life course is typically determined by the mainstream expectations shared by most families, communities, and

social policy though they may be fulfilled in different ways according to the fathers' cultural contexts. Life course theory postulates that once an individual is out of step with societal expectations, it is often very difficult to get back on a normative course. This difficulty is amplified by the fact that a deviation in one area of life may be disruptive to other areas (White & Klein, 2002). For example, many of the fathers in the current study had experienced unemployment due to changes in their local economy (Roy, 2005). The limited availability of employment opportunities had put many fathers out of step within their position as working adults and had affected their position as fathers because they were not attaining the societal norms and familial rules within their families as providers.

Life course theory can further the understanding of how the many disruptions and missteps experienced over the life course can shape the paternal identities of fathers. It can provide greater insight into how the sharing of the negative parts of identities might ultimately be a means to build a generative connection with their children. Storytelling and expressing the desire to have their children learn from their missteps is a way for fathers to overcome the past and to work towards crafting a second chance for being involved, generative fathers. These actions may guide fathers back towards the norm and perhaps aid their children in following the culturally dictated norms of their life course.

#### *Bridging the theories*

The main link between symbolic interaction theory and life course theory that guided the analysis was the concept of roles. Using both theories helped with the conceptualization of how roles are constructed overtime and how they changed historically and across the life course. Both theories spoke to the expectations or norms

that govern roles, which was helpful when exploring the narrative accounts of the transitions and different social contexts the fathers in the current study had experienced.

The theoretical orientations of symbolic interaction and life course theory served as frameworks in which to understand how the fathers in the current study had met or had not met father role expectations, such as the expectation of provider. For the fathers who had been unable to meet the role expectations, how they reworked the role to incorporate their resources and experiences was explored. In turn, exploring how these highly generative fathers had shaped the roles of father offered new conceptions of generativity.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Overview of Qualitative Research Methods and Narratology

Qualitative research methods with a “narrative turn” were used in the analysis of 28 life history interviews (Appendix A) from highly generative fathers who had experienced multiple setbacks and missteps throughout their lives. In the life history interviews each father was given the space to share his evolving fathering narrative and to share how he had come to construct his paternal identity. The qualitative research method attended to the social context of the father, thus allowing for a more accurate understanding of his experiences, behaviors, and emotions (Nueman, 2003). Also, the qualitative analysis illuminated the rich histories of the fathers and provided an opportunity to explore their narratives as to how certain missteps happened and how they were used as turning points in their own lives and in their roles as parents. Using this method, a clearer sense of what motivated the fathers to be involved with their children and to act generatively was attained (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 2004). The strength of using qualitative methods in this undertaking was that this method allowed for the examination of meaning, contexts, and processes (Patton, 2002).

In the analysis, narratology, or narrative analysis was used. A central tenet of this approach is the idea that “stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 116). Therefore, to understand a father, his narrative identity, and how he acts within the roles of father, it is important to understand different dimensions of his human experience (e.g., cultural, sociological, psychological). Examining his “story” or personal narrative regarding his experiences



surrounding fatherhood provides insight into the cultural and social patterns from the father's individual perspective (Patton, 2002). By following this vein of thinking in the current analysis, it was hoped that a better understanding would be gained on how fathers' incorporate their missteps and setbacks into their narrative identities as well as how they communicate the negative aspects to others and with what purpose.

### Recruitment of Participants

The data for the current study came from two data sets collected by Dr. Kevin Roy (1999, 2003). At both sites, the men were selected as a result of their active engagement in a community-based program as well as on their openness to sharing their thoughts and feelings about their place in their children's lives. Active participants from a fatherhood program in Chicago where Roy was a case manager and researcher were recruited. At the time of data collection, the community center served a sizable number of African American noncustodial fathers through employment training and placement; parenting classes; educational; housing and drug treatment referrals; and co-parental counseling. Fathers were referred to the programs at the center through friends and family or child enforcement agencies. Most of the men in the Chicago parenting program sample lived in Southside Chicago communities in public housing projects that were being torn down or remodeled to encourage the growth of mixed-income communities. The fathers had limited employment opportunities due to a large decrease in industrial jobs.

The data from the second sample was collected at a work-release facility in Northern Indiana. The facility housed men who were serving sentences of up to two years for charges of driving while intoxicated, possession of illegal substances, non-

payment of child support, and fighting or domestic violence. Men in the facility were mandated to work one or more jobs in the surrounding community. Outside of work responsibilities, the men were formally restricted to the work-release facility. For 18 months, Roy and colleagues facilitated a life skills class for incarcerated men. The class was structured around an 11-week curriculum that aimed to enhance the men's coping strategies, decision-making skills, knowledge of child development, effective parenting practices, and build social, educational, and vocational skills. Roy and colleagues recruited fathers enrolled in the class to participate in the research project.

### Sample

For this specific sample, participants were purposively sampled from the two larger data sets. Each data set consisted of life history interviews collected by Dr. Kevin Roy and colleagues for the Chicago parenting program data set from 1997 to 1999 (N=40) and the Indiana work release data set from 2001 to 2003 (N=40). From the 80 life history interviews, a total of 14 men from the Chicago parenting program data set and 14 men from the Indiana work release data set were selected purposively, to reflect experiences of high generativity and racial/ethnic diversity, for this study. Selection of men was based on their accounts of generative acts and values as fathers, a history of setbacks and missteps, and that they maintained a level of involvement with their children. In previous analyses the selected men were determined to be highly generative (Roy & Lucas, 2006).

The sample of men included 16 African American fathers (56% of total sample), 10 European American fathers (36%), 1 Asian father (4%), and 1 Native American father (4%). The men represented a range of ages, with 32% of the men (n=9) between the ages

of 17-29, 47% of the men (n=13) between the ages of 30-39, and 21% of the men (n=6) over the age of 40. The break down for educational achievement was: 21% of the men (n=6) dropped out of high school, 39% of the men (n=11) earned their GEDs or completed high school with no further education, and 39% of the men (n=11) had completed high school and attended technical school, community college, or a four year college. Thirty-nine percent of the men (n=11) were unemployed at the time of interview. Seventy-five percent of the men (n=21) in the sample had been incarcerated at some point in their life. Eighty-two percent of the men (n=23) reported past or present substance abuse.

At the time of the interview 6 of the men (21%) were married; 10 of the men (36%) were divorced, separated, or widowed; 8 men (29%) were engaged or in a committed relationship; and 4 men (14%) were single. Ten (36%) of men had had children with multiple partners. The average number of children per father was 2.75. A large majority of the fathers in the study were noncustodial parents. All of the men reported having regular contact with at least one of their children. Please refer to Appendix B for an overview of general demographics and Appendix C for a breakdown of setbacks and missteps.

### Data Collection

Roy and colleagues (1999, 2003) used multiple methods to collect the data in both sample sets. Firsthand observations of ecological conditions affecting the fathers and their families were documented. Field notes were taken during meetings at the correctional facility and at the community center in Chicago. The field notes supplemented the life history interviews in that they further recorded the men's

statements as to their involvement as fathers. In this analysis, life history interviews will be used (Appendix A). Field notes will not be used in this analysis.

Life history interviews were conducted with each father on an individual basis. The interviews lasted two hours and were tape-recorded. The life history interviews solicited the men's narratives regarding their family and work histories. The interviews recorded the men's reported experiences as fathers; the meaning fatherhood held for them; their level of involvement with their children; and the hopes, fears, and perceived challenges the men had for themselves as fathers and for their children. The interviews were structured to gather data on the fathers' accounts of their personal goals and plans, and their plans for involvement, present and future, with their children. The timing and sequencing of life events were also recorded retrospectively. When all data were collected, the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed, and both the interviews and field notes were coded for fatherhood and generative themes with the QSR N6 (a.k.a. NUD\*IST) qualitative data analysis program. Profiles were developed for each father to help identify patterns and commonalities.

#### Method of Analysis

A secondary data analysis was conducted combining the two data sources (Roy, 1999; Roy, 2003). Life history interviews in both the Chicago parenting program and Indiana work release samples were transcribed and entered into QSR NUD\*IST by Dr. Roy and colleagues. Using QSR NUD\*IST simplified the analysis of the data by providing a method to organize coding categories within the analysis, increasing the ease in which the data was coded and recoded, helping in organizing multiple levels of coding, and allowing for the creation of data printouts for further analysis.

A modified grounded theory approach, involving three phases of coding, was used. The grounded theory approach involved the use of sensitizing concepts that directed “special attention to the words and meaning that [were] prevalent among the people being stud[ied]” (Patton, 2001, p. 278). Sensitizing concepts that guided the current study’s analysis and served as starting points for the analysis were the concepts of generativity, in particular generative acts and generative beliefs (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), narrative identity, father/child involvement and communication, decontamination, reworking/retelling fathering roles, narrative sequencing, and setbacks and missteps and their influence on the father/child relationship.

To better understand the setbacks and missteps fathers have experienced, it is necessary to discern between the two. Setbacks were defined as structural or environmental factors, outside of the father’s control, that influenced and shaped his behavior. Missteps were defined as personal decisions made by a father that hindered his relationships with his children and negatively affected their quality of life. Due to the influence of both structural and cultural factors that led to some of the missteps, certain events were defined as both. For instance, incarceration could be viewed as a setback and a misstep in that some fathers faced cultural and structural factors that put them at greater risk for becoming incarcerated but the personal choice to commit the behavior that led to incarceration made the event a misstep. It is important to note that the setbacks and missteps each of the fathers experienced were recorded as such based on a father’s description or definition of an event.

The first phase of coding was open coding. The process of open coding began with the preliminary coding of a subset of seven interviews. Using the sensitizing

concepts, the seven interviews were coded. After the coding had been completed, Dr. Roy reviewed the coding and subcodes were discussed and created (Appendix D). After reaching an agreement on the coding scheme and Dr. Roy was satisfied with the coding accuracy, the seven interviews were recoded along with the additional 21. During this phase of coding, the life history interviews were read through line-by-line and condensed and organized into categories through the process of assigning codes and subcodes. For example, a father's account of being incarcerated for two years and therefore missing milestones in his children's lives would have been coded in the following categories: setback/misstep-incarceration; setback/misstep impact on parenting-absence. In addition to assigning codes, themes that emerged from the data were noted (Neuman, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Key events, critical terms, and themes were noted using analytical memos and/or notations in QSR NUD\*IST (Appendix E). If new themes are identified during this phase of coding, a code was created and they were further explored.

For each of the fathers in the sample, the overarching narrative that emerged from their life history interview was examined. Stepping back and examining the different aspects of a father's interview as a whole aided in the understanding of narrative identities. It also provided insight into how the fathers came to fulfill their roles as fathers and how they constructed their paternal identities.

The second phase of coding was axial coding. During the axial phase of coding the aim was to identify specific patterns and connections within and across cases as well as coded categories (LaRossa, 2005). After open coding was completed, axial coding began by printing out reports and reviewing the coded data within and across categories. The purpose for doing this was to look for relationships, attend to the context, and

identify intervening conditions. The exploration of the data was mainly guided by the initial coded themes from the open coding phase, although emerging themes were noted and explored. The aim was to identify the axis of the key concepts in the analysis and to examine how the categories and concepts clustered together (Nueman, 2003). Using inductive and deductive reasoning, major themes were defined in greater depth and others themes were eliminated. During this phase of coding, codes were consolidated and evidence was located and linked to support the themes in the research (Nueman, 2003). Cases that did not fit the themes (e.g., negative cases) were looked for as they could provide learning opportunities and increase the trustworthiness of the data.

The third phase of coding was selective coding. This phase began by reviewing the data and codes and organizing the overall analysis around the core concepts (e.g., missteps/setbacks) and ideas (Nueman, 2003). During this phase of coding, the major themes and concepts guided the search through the data. Cases that illustrated the themes and “told a story” were identified (LaRossa, 2005). Through the process of selective coding the data was organized to “tell a story” about the fathers in the study.

#### Trustworthiness of Data

Dr. Roy and colleagues (1999, 2003) utilized a range of methods to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data (as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance the credibility of the data, the researchers provided study participants with short verbal descriptions of paternal narrative identities based on the life history interviews and allowed the participants to clarify some of the initial codes and categories. Secondly, to enhance dependability of the data, Roy employed multiple coders to code the interview data (Roy, 2005; Roy & Lucas, 2006). To obtain consistent and credible data, Roy and colleagues

(2005) used retrospective calendar grids, meaning of life transitions, and field notes during the data collection process as well as collected data from multiple sources (e.g., the fathers, the researchers, the staff at the site).

### Researcher Role

As previously stated, this study was a secondary data analysis. From this position, I was removed from the contexts where the fathers in the study shared and constructed their narratives. Also, the opportunity to experience the process of the interview was not possible. Knowledge of the fathers was derived from, and dependent upon, the rich text of the life history interviews as well as the conversations with Dr. Roy regarding his experiences with the fathers in the sample.

My interest in conducting this study largely stemmed from my previous work experiences as well as past and present educational pursuits. My educational background is in psychology, criminology and criminal justice, and marriage and family therapy. This track of study has provided me with opportunities to work with families who have experienced setbacks and missteps. Working as a therapist with families, particularly low-income, court ordered clients, and as an early childhood educator in a bilingual community center in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington DC, I have witnessed the resilience of parents who have experienced a multitude of setbacks and missteps. The cumulative body of experiences I have had, both challenging and rewarding, have instilled in me the desire to further the understanding of what helps build a family's resiliency in the face of great odds. Gaining insight into this phenomenon may provide knowledge that is needed to develop interventions aimed at building family resiliency.



As I was exploring the data, I was mindful of my interpretations of the data. As a middle-class, European American woman, with no children, I was careful to examine my assumptions and interpretations of the data. I partly relied on introspection and largely relied on the discourse between Dr. Roy and myself to check my assumptions and interpretations.

## Chapter 3: Findings

### Setbacks and Missteps

The 28 life history interviews of the men selected for this study were examined and coded for setbacks and missteps. All of the fathers in the current study had reported experiencing setbacks and making multiple missteps throughout their life course. The setbacks the fathers experienced were viewed as structural or environmental factors, outside of the fathers' locus of control, that influenced and shaped their behavior. The setbacks included incarceration, neighborhood decline that led to community violence and proliferation of drugs in the community, lack of employment opportunities, and familial factors that shaped the life of the father when he was growing up. Missteps were viewed as personal decisions made by the fathers that hindered their relationships with their children and negatively affected their quality of life. Missteps included substance abuse, chronic unemployment, defaulting on child support, failed relationships, having a child at a young age, and domestic violence.

The setbacks experienced and missteps made were varied but connected in that setbacks were seen as influential in the choices the fathers made, because they often led the fathers into situations where they were at risk for making missteps. For instance, neighborhood decline and limited employment opportunities led some of the fathers to a crossroads where they had to decide how to support their families. On one hand they could work a minimum wage job and barely get by, or they could make fast money through selling drugs. Some fathers chose the minimum wage job whereas others made the personal choice or misstep of selling drugs. The following is a discussion of the

missteps and setbacks of the men in the sample. It is important to consider in the review of the findings that the fathers in the sample were selected based on both their high level of generativity and on the knowledge of their setbacks and missteps.

### *Community Decline*

A setback many of the men had to overcome was community decline. The decline of the neighborhoods the men lived in impacted the fathers' and their families' overall quality of life. Many of the men, particularly those from the Chicago parenting program data set, reported witnessing changes in their communities. The introduction of drugs and the organization of street gangs were identified as negatively impacting the communities where many of the men and their children lived. Some of the men stated that the jobs had moved out of the neighborhoods as a result of the negative changes. Others shared the stress of living in a violent atmosphere.

Neighborhood gang violence was recounted as having affected the men in their youth: "It was rough when we were little. We'd be in school...they'd go at each other...everybody would have to get under the table. Some days they'd tell you don't even go to school." Saul, like other men in the sample, recounted how neighborhood violence touched his family:

We witnessed three people getting murdered, in broad daylight, on a Sunday. I had to put my kids on the floor. We pretty much saw a lot as parents and children. Just to think my wife and children is on the bus in some of these areas, knowing how these guys is with these guns.

The economically depressed and stressful environment many of the fathers lived in could be interpreted as having placed the fathers in situations where the option

to make missteps was more tangible. Some of these missteps resulted in the fathers facing incarceration.

### *Incarceration*

Incarceration can be conceptualized as both a setback and a misstep.

Incarceration is a setback in that it is structurally restrictive to a father's involvement with his children and the process and experience of incarceration is often beyond the father's control. Structural and cultural factors may also put a father at greater risk for incarceration (e.g., neighborhood gangs, attractiveness of drug dealing because of lack of employment opportunities). The choices that led up to incarceration are what qualify incarceration as a misstep. Though some of the choices that led to criminal behavior were structurally driven, they were still the personal choices of the father.

Of the 28 men in the sample, 21 (75%) reported that they had been incarcerated at some point in their life. Fourteen (50%) of the fathers were purposively sampled from a data set of men who had been incarcerated. For a majority of the men who had been incarcerated, incarceration was not an isolated event and usually reflected a history of criminal behavior. As Leo, father of three shared:

I was going back and forth from county and state five months, six months, and come back out, do the same stupid stunt and six months later go back again. A year later I would go back in, and stay gone for a while, get back out. I went in and out about five times. I have been to, before this time, to the penitentiary. I didn't do a lot of time, about a year and a half. For the past five years, I have been in and out...I have six felony convictions.

For many of the fathers, their involvement with drugs and alcohol could explain this cycle of convictions.

### *Substance Abuse*

Like incarceration, substance abuse could be conceptualized as both a setback and a misstep. Substance abuse was a setback in that structural and cultural factors put the men at a greater risk for substance abuse (e.g., parental role model, proliferation of drugs in the neighborhood). Though acknowledging these structural factors, substance abuse was seen largely as a misstep because of the personal choice the men made to start using.

Incarceration and substance abuse were linked in that convictions that led to incarceration were overwhelmingly related to drugs and alcohol. Some of the men were incarcerated for selling drugs but most men either were incarcerated because of drug use, and/or the excessive use of alcohol which led to a string of citations for DUI (drinking under the influence), PI (public intoxication), and OWI (operating while intoxicated). Steve, a 24-year-old father, in a work-release program reported a criminal record similar to the other men in the study:

I've been in a jail a few times for 12 hours. For PIs and OWIs. One time for a week...The rehab, I don't know I stayed there for three weeks...They're all because of OWIs, public intoxications, possession charges. I'm in here for two felony OWIs. I had two possession charges...so...OWIs, PIs, and possession. Drinking, smoking bud.

Substance abuse led to various setbacks and missteps on both an individual and familial level for the men, beyond incarceration. Twenty-three (82%) of the 28 men in the sample disclosed the use of illegal substances and/or excessive alcohol use.

Substance abuse was often reported as taking root early in young adulthood through the modeling of behaviors seen from friends or a parent. One father, Richard, shared his experience with the peers he had as a young man. “It was hell. I didn’t really do anything. Hang around with a bunch of gang bangers. I’m just drinking and getting high. Going to party after party. I was nothing really but a downhill slope.” Another father, Neal, talked about the introduction of alcohol into his environment by his mother:

My mother and I of course had our problems. No dad in the house, she ran things, she worked all the time. Actually from 12 to 16 I raised myself. My mother drank heavily, plus work, she was an RN [registered nurse]. Me, I picked up drinking at that age. I didn’t hang out too much, but drinking, sex, were the thing in my life.

Another father, Harold, shared a similar story:

I started drinking at a really young age - that’s where my addiction started. My mom and them used to have parties, and they’d all sleep drunk, leave these half cans of beer. Half a shot. We would go clean house, they wouldn’t know the difference because when they woke up they would still be drunk.

Many of the men spoke of their problems with addiction. They shared narratives filled with the powerful negative influences substance abuse and addiction had in various facets of their lives. Addiction made it difficult to maintain steady employment, it took resources from the family, and addiction often led the fathers to be absent in the lives of their children. In addition to sharing their struggles, most men shared the positive strides they had made towards recovery and their hopes for positive changes that would lead to

more stability. Through the help of programs like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, sponsors, or reaching a turning point (e.g., “hitting bottom”) many of the men reported attempts and shared plans to stay sober. As Earl, 39, stated:

You got to just take it one day at a time. And just go forward. There are times that I want to fall back but you can't because if you do you are going to go right back to square one. Then you'll just have more stuff to throw on you so.

And some men, like Harold, realized the road to recovery would be difficult and not all transgression forgotten:

When I was on drugs, these things never meant anything to me because I wanted that so much. Now, I see things in a different realm. I got to have a lot of acceptance now, because I know that a lot of things that I did haven't cleared up. Your past goes with you...with some people it goes on and on and on, they never forget.

For many of the men, abusing substances evolved into more missteps that included domestic problems such as failed relationships and domestic violence. It also made it more difficult for the fathers to maintain steady employment and pay child support.

Though substance abuse and addiction did not fully account for all of the missteps and setbacks, the role it played in a large number of these negative events was apparent in the men's narratives.

### *Failed Relationships*

Twelve (43%) of the men spoke of their failed relationships as missteps and often related the end of a relationship to other missteps they had made. The men identified the

misstep of infidelity on both their part and that of their partners as a reason for relationship failure. Earl shared his perspective on the failure of his first relationship:

It wasn't bad, but we had a lot of problems on a count of drinking, cause I'd go to work and as soon as I'd get off work, she never knew when to expect me home...It wasn't nothing to get drunk and drive clear to Indy just to see the girls. There's times when I'd be gone for two or three days before I'd even come home.

The men's narratives also exposed the deteriorative nature of drugs and alcohol on their relationships. As presented in Steve's narrative, the influence of substance abuse on a relationship could at times be interpreted as a recursive negative event:

I started hanging around a bunch of different people and started drinking a lot and doing a lot of drugs. My girlfriend, she was mad. We just had a son when I started working over there... This went on for probably a year and a half. She got tired of it and we broke up. [I'd] miss my family and stuff. I'd go out and drink more and use a bunch of drugs, try to forget about her.

The above example exemplifies the cyclical nature of missteps and the negative pattern of addiction within personal relationships. The process of substance abuse influenced the quality of Steve's relationship with his girlfriend, the relationship failed and Steve increased the frequency drinking and doing drugs.

### *Domestic Violence*

Six (21%) of the fathers told of domestic violence instances in their relationships. Overall, the men did not go into great detail about the violence and often talked about it



in the context of other events, such as listing a conviction that led to jail time. One father, Marley, did go in to greater detail and expressed a lot of regret and guilt. Unique to his discussion of the domestic violence was the placement of his children in the telling of the story. He shared: “I’ve done some pretty horrible things in my life...She was eight months pregnant and I struck her. Man that killed me for the longest time.” In the other domestic violence event he shared, his six-month-old daughter was present:

She was going on and on and on, and I struck her again. This time I hit her on the nose and she bled. I remember [my daughter] crying you know for some reason I just blocked her out and we had this tugging match and I won [my daughter] back. I’m not like that man...I’m not a bad person you know.

But I did that you know and I didn’t give a shit about nothing else.

The guilt Marley expressed and the detailed description of the domestic violence and his feelings is unique to that of the other men’s non-descript accounts of battery. The abuse may have taken on greater salience because of the implications for his involvement as a father during pregnancy.

### *Fatherhood at a Young Age*

A misstep and setback some fathers cited as leading to a difficult transition to fatherhood and family life was having a child at a young age. Six (21%) of the men, who became fathers between the ages 18 to 23, shared their thoughts on the difficulty of having a child at a young age. The most common reason for why this was a setback was that they were not done “running amuck.” In pondering what the best age was for a man to become a father, Jon, whose first child was born when he was 18, stated:

Just coming from me, I haven't grown up yet, so I can't really say. I guess I was too young. I don't know if maybe there was people out there with more responsibility than me at that age, but I wasn't ready to be a father. I mean physically maybe. I mean I was holding down a job with the military but mentally there was no way. I wasn't ready.

Another setback the fathers identified in having a child at a young age was that they wished they had waited till they were "more stable." The concern about being able to support their children was not only expressed by these six fathers. It was an expressed concern of many of the men who also felt unstable and had difficulty maintaining employment.

#### *Chronic Unemployment*

Twenty-three (82%) of the fathers expressed difficulties maintaining and obtaining employment during their life history narrative. Most of the men's work history varied from sparse and largely unemployed to having a multitude of jobs for short periods of time. More men fell into the category of having held a large number of jobs. This could potentially be explained as a product of drug and alcohol abuse, though not always explicitly stated, a number of men, like Harold, did acknowledge this as a problem: "I've lost so many jobs because I'm high." At its extreme the work backgrounds of a number of the men can be captured in Ronald's description of his work history:

McDonald's I think was my first one [job] then I went to Payless, then I went to the car shop I think...I might have worked at Payless first, I can't remember to tell you the truth. I've had so many jobs since then. I can't remember it's been too long ago. I've had 100 jobs since then probably.

Many of the men worked in factories or minimum wage jobs in the service industry (i.e., Taco Bell). The difficulty the men had with employment often went along with defaulting on child support payments. Though some of these men sought employment they expressed a frustration over the lack of jobs in their communities, and that they were often under qualified for jobs that paid more than minimum wage. Sean, a father who was unemployed stated:

I have to try something, do all I can and see what I can do. There aren't the opportunities out there for what I'd like, especially with benefits. I look through the paper every now and then; try to find some warehouse or something. There is not much that I would have training in or anything.

For the men who were not working, child support payments often decreased or ceased altogether. A number of the fathers who did not make payments or failed to pay back-child support found themselves incarcerated. Defaulting on child support payments and the punitive actions that often followed was a unique misstep. This misstep was unique because of the public recognition it received. Some of the men were publicly sanctioned as failures as providers for their families and labeled "dead-beat dads."

All of the men in the current study had experienced setbacks and had made missteps in their lives. The setbacks and missteps that emerged from the data were often interconnected. For instance, incarceration was often a result of substance abuse, substance abuse often made maintaining employment difficult, unemployment led to defaulting on child support. In considering the different missteps and setbacks one must step back and look at the pattern and interwoven factors that influenced the choices the men made. All of the men have made choices both positive and negative. The setbacks

and missteps have not only shaped the lives of the fathers but also the lives of their families. In particular, they have shaped the fathers' relationships and parenting of their children.

### Influence of Setbacks and Missteps on Parenting

Setbacks and missteps were a prominent part of the fathers' life narratives. From struggles with drugs and alcohol to chronic unemployment, the men linked how their setbacks and missteps shaped their families. More specifically, the men spoke of the influence various negative life events had on their relationships with their children. It was found that the missteps and setbacks influenced the father/child relationships in four major ways: absence in the lives of their children, lack of resources for their children, placing their children at risk, and improvements in the father/child relationships.

#### *Absence*

When reflecting on how the various setbacks and missteps shaped their relationship with their children, the fathers (n=25, 89%) commonly cited being absent in their children's lives. While incarceration put a physical barrier between many of the fathers and their children, the missteps the men were making outside of incarceration served as complicated and challenging barriers. Troubles with drugs, alcohol, turbulent relationships, and unemployment were some of the missteps that kept the men from their children. Of these missteps, drug and alcohol addictions were most frequently given as a reason for absence. Seven of the fathers went into detail on how drugs and alcohol pulled them away from their children. A statement made by Ron, father of three who was incarcerated at the time of his interview, best represents the sentiments expressed by these men:

There was a lot of times too I would disappoint him. I would say I was comin' over and then somethin' would come up or a better opportunity than just going to "playin' with your little boy." Like another girl come along or somethin'. And I'd pick the alcohol or the drugs or the girl over the little boy. That's hard to face when you know you done crap like that.

The wall drugs and alcohol erected between a father and his children often led to incarceration and a more complete type of absence. One father, Charles a 30-year-old father of six, had a long record with the court system and shared his fears regarding the impact incarceration might have on his relationship with his children:

I don't like being in jail, but jail doesn't scare me. There's not too many things I'm scared of. The only thing that I've ever really been afraid of is...thinking that my children are going to hate me because I've been in here and haven't been able to spend as much time with them as I should.

Regardless of the reasons the men gave for being absent in their children's lives, it was apparent that a large percentage of them recognized and regretted the time they had missed and had plans for building stronger relationships with their children.

Following the narratives of the men in the sample, fathers often expressed the desire to rebuild relationships after a period of incarceration and/or sobriety. The men who had been absent from their children's lives often lamented the missed events, holidays, and milestones. One father, Henry, who moved away from his son after his relationship ended with the child's mother, is an example of the men's lament:

I just hate that I couldn't see those first things, like the first time he went roller-skating. I didn't get a chance to see him ride his first bicycle with

no training wheels...I want to see him grow all the way. I want to see him tie his shoe...I want to see him drive his first car. I just want to be there, through the growing process, the learning process.

For some men, not witnessing milestones was in and of itself a major setback; to others it was not being able to witness and teach their children.

Fathers expressed worry over the impact their absence would have on their children. From not being able to teach and guide their children as they grew to worrying about the hurt their absence caused, a number of the fathers tried to imagine the situation from their children's perspective. One father, Ronald, shared how he struggled with being incarcerated and away from his children for 16 months and how his son wanted him to come home:

I know it's hurting them, it's hurting my son, it's killing him. Every time he brings me back here he wants to come in for Thanksgiving or Christmas, "Daddy why can't you ask the police if you can come over here for a little bit." What the hell kind of answer do you say to that?

Despite the lost time and missed milestones, many of the fathers looked towards the future, towards repairing and rebuilding what had been non-existent or damaged. The men talked of becoming "stable" and "responsible" forces in their children's lives. Leo, a father who had been incarcerated on and off for the past five years, echoed a common hope many of the men had:

I owe them more than five years of their life when I was gone. I owe them a lifetime of love. If I can give that to them and they accept that I will be one of the happiest men on earth. I want to be there when my kids

go college. I want to be at their games if they play a sport, or be there and read them a book, or if they are a teacher I want to be sitting in one of their classes while they teach. I want to be there. I don't care what they do. I just want to be there.

Few of the men shared the feeling that all was lost when it came to their relationship with their children. There appeared to always be a glimmer of hope.

### *Lack of Resources*

The setbacks and missteps that led fathers away from their families often reduced the amount of resources available for their children's care. The money men had used to support their alcohol and drug addictions was seen as diminishing the amount of money available to support their children. Harold, a father who struggled with addiction and put his resources into that facet of his life, expressed his anticipation for the Christmas holiday and his newfound sobriety:

This will be my first Christmas sober... The holidays are what is going to mean a lot to me this first year. I want to be there actually having gifts for my kids. The only gifts I've had for my kids in the last 12-13 years are gifts my parents bought. Or someone else bought, my wife say, who spent her whole check and put some in my name.

Harold's statement illuminated that fact that the money spent on drugs and alcohol took not only from the everyday needs of the family but also from the special ritualistic times in the family such as celebrating birthdays and holidays.

The other major obstacle that men had to overcome in order to support their children financially was unemployment. When Richard, an unemployed father of two,

talked about being able to provide financially for his children, he plainly stated: “I want to be a father. I want to provide for my children. Mentally I think I’m fine. Physically I’m still young. Emotionally I have all the love in the world for them. Financially I’m broke as a joke.” Another father, Sean, who was unemployed, discussed how being unemployed shaped his ability to be a responsible father:

Income. Lack of income, it ties me up with lack of self-esteem. Depressed constantly, not able to do things for myself, let alone my children. It takes away from my children, too, a lot of times. If I had a job, I could get back on track.

In the angst that Sean expressed, a tension between taking care of himself and taking care of his children emerged. The fathers often talked about “getting focused” or becoming “stable.” As one father, Barry, simply stated: “If your not taking care of yourself, you won’t be anything to anybody else.” Many fathers spoke of needing to take care of themselves in order to become stable before taking steps to more fully supporting their children. Other fathers like Perry, who were incarcerated for defaulting on child support, had reorganized their priorities:

I was thinking more me, me, me, myself...which wasn’t necessarily a bad decision because I was thinking me, me, me, go to college, get the education, go to school. But I should have been thinking otherwise, that I need to support my children. So if I can’t, I need to find a fulltime job instead of going to school fulltime. I should of swapped it.



With reorganized priorities, Perry, who expressed difficulties with sustaining steady employment, was faced with the challenge of finding a way to balance his needs with those of his children when he was released back into the community.

### *Risks to Children*

The setbacks and missteps the fathers experienced led to some risks for their children. Thirteen (46%) of the fathers shared instances in which their children were at risk because of missteps or setbacks. Some of the missteps directly contributed to risks, such as Gary's report that "I drink beer and smoke around them" or Marley's recount of an incident of domestic violence where he and his wife had a "tugging match" over his infant daughter. Some of the risks were not detailed but were assumed based on the father's statements about Child Protective Services or the Department of Family Services being involved with him and his children. Other fathers expressed their concern with the neighborhoods that their children lived in. Sean, a father who had moved from an area he considered "pretty rough," expressed concern over picking his daughter up at her mother's house and seeing that the "front window had about four bullet holes in it." While it would not be considered a direct misstep on his part, the environment his daughter was living in was inevitably tied to the setback the father experienced in witnessing his old neighborhood deteriorate as drugs and gangs took root.

### *Improvements*

The setback of incarceration had a unique influence on the father/child relationship. Though there were definite negatives of incarceration, for 10 (36%) of the men, incarceration was also linked to certain improvements in the fathers' relationships

with their children. For the fathers who had been abusing drugs and alcohol and were incarcerated, the sobriety had an eye-opening effect. Separated from the drugs and alcohol, the men cited a greater level of involvement and improved communication with their children in both frequency and content. Steve shared: “[I] spend a lot more time with him [his son] now that I’m not drinking and using drugs. Now I pretty much dedicate my life to him.” Another father, Jerry, said that communication between him and his children improved. His children come to him when they have problems and he will “discuss a problem” whereas before they would have only talked to their mother. For the fathers who identified improvements in their relationships with their children while incarcerated and who shared their hopes and future plans for continued participation in their children’s lives, the negative event of incarceration appeared to be a turning point in redefining their roles as fathers.

### Narrative Sequences

Attending to the narrative sequences the fathers used was important in that narrative sequences have been found to be a reflection of an individual’s hope for the future and an indicator of generativity (McAdams, 2006; McAdams, 2004; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). According to McAdams (2006), a person who narrates his life stories using redemptive sequences, as opposed to contamination sequences, tends to have higher self-esteem, a greater ability to cope with adversity, and the ability to exert narrative control over the challenges he faces. In addition to a better overall psychological well-being, research has shown that the narrative sequences used to narrate life events is linked to generativity. The more redemptive the narration, the more generative the person tends to be and vice versa (McAdams, 2006; McAdams, 2004; McAdams & Bowman, 2001).

Based on this premise, the narrative sequences in the fathers' life history interviews were explored and coded.

Redemption and contamination sequences were the main focal point of the narrative sequence coding. A new code, labeled circular narrations, was designated for narrations unique to sequencing in that they fluctuated from positive and negative scenes in the retelling of a life event. The life stories were also coded for the decontamination of a life narrative by way of confession.

### *Redemption Sequences*

Redemption sequences were identified in 21 (75%) of the 28 life history interviews. The redemptive sequences followed a typical pattern of: a negative life scene, a turning point or marked event, and a positive or growth scene. The redemptive sequences heavily centered on themes of family and personal growth. The turning point for redemptive sequences typically involved: sobriety, incarceration, and mandatory or non-mandatory support programs that linked the fathers to resources. Turning points also included prominent life events from becoming a father to being robbed. The events themselves were not redemptive; redemption was in the meaning the men assigned to the events or turning points, in retrospect, when they shared their life stories. Kyle, 19-year-old father, shared how becoming a father was something he had not wanted and that it was a time in his life when he had been "mixed-up emotionally" and was "reckless" and "unsettled." From this negative scene he continued to narrate the birth of his child as a turning point in his life that led to redemption:

And to think about it now it was a blessing, because from that point is when I went through a lot of my changes for the better, because I realized I

had to change for my daughter. I was...partying, doing a lot of drinking, just experimenting and doing anything, just about everything...When I thought about the fact that I had a daughter coming that was going to rely on me, I kind of felt compelled to change myself and take a look in the mirror.

Redemptive scenes of personal growth centered on themes of “becoming a better person” and finding stability and focus. Richard, who had experienced a number of hardships, expressed how his difficult past could shape his future and that of his two daughters:

You can take different bits and pieces from the past to reinsure a hope that your future does not go into the same thing that already happened...I can smile in the end to know where I came from and where I’m at now. To know that I’ve had so many obstacles to cross, and it seems like walls after walls that I just could not climb, but somehow I got over them. I made it to that next day...I’m trying every possible thing just to make myself better... No matter how hard it seems like the road gets, as long as you believe in yourself and have the faith. Hey you’ll wake up to a beautiful, brighter day.

A third, less frequent but notable theme of redemption sequences, included overcoming the difficulties of unemployment or being left out of the workplace. For some, redemption in the workplace was found through sobriety, for others diligence led to management positions and benefit packages for the father and his family.

Another element of the redemptive sequences in the fathers’ narratives was an emphasis on God or faith in a higher power. A little over half of the 21 fathers included

God or a higher power as a factor in their redemption. One father, Harold, who was seven days away from being released from incarceration, spoke of the power God had in his redemption:

I love the Lord I'm saved...I'm not ever going to lose focus...My mind is clear. I got a good job... Once I show Him I can deal with these, He'll bring more into my life. I know whose I am, I'm finding out who I am. I want to see myself just growing and improving. Then I can pass that onto somebody I see struggling. Going through the same thing I'm going through. I want to be positive... A house divided against itself won't stand. I've been divided within myself for 13, 14 years. You don't know how good it feels to come together within yourself. Watch everything around you pull together.

For Harold and other fathers in the sample, God or a higher power was a pivotal and powerful force of change. For these men, faith appeared to play a role in the journey down the road to redemption and had a place in the men's hopes for remaining on that road.

#### *Contamination Sequences*

Contamination sequences were identified in 22 (79%) of the 28 life history interviews. Contamination sequences were most often used to narrate events where positive scenes within the family had gone bad. The negative effects on both the family and the father as an individual were typically shared. The fathers used contamination sequences in narrating childhood stories and their present day situations. A good example

of a contamination sequence comes from Henry who used a contamination sequence to narrate his relationship with his father, his childhood hero, after his parents broke up:

Well, all while I was coming up it was okay but when I left my father everything started going down hill. Grades and everything...I just went into my own little world...I didn't really want to do anything. And then when I got to high school, moved back with my father. And his wife, she wouldn't let him do nothing for me. And whenever I was around him, you could feel the tension in the atmosphere... He was my hero. And now I move back and it was like that is my father. And that's when I felt the whole world was messed up...it was like when I was young, nobody or nothing separated me and my father...then he wasn't my hero no more. It was like he didn't care. And if he didn't care about me how am I supposed to care about myself.

Contamination sequences were often found in childhood and early adulthood stories. The men described events such as their parents breaking up, like in Henry's story, or a death in the family that marked a downward turn in their life narration.

Turning points that led to the contamination of a positive scene were not limited to the past but also were found in the narration of more recent events. Contamination sequences were found in the father's narration of their work histories, relationships with significant others, and incarceration. When asked how incarceration had changed his relationship with his five-year-old daughter, his three-year-old daughter who he had nicknamed his "shadow," and his 1-year-old son, Charles related the changes in a contamination sequence:

Like I said with [my three-year-old], how close she was with me. The last time I went to...see my family, she wouldn't even come up and give me a hug...She came up and said hi to me but as far as letting me touch her, letting me give her hugs, letting me hold her, she pretty much stayed away from me... [his five-year-old daughter] said "Well looks like we got to go out and find a new dad." [when she heard he had been arrested again]. I don't even think [my son] knows who the hell I am.

For most of the men who had been incarcerated, the experience of being incarcerated was seen as having both redemptive and contaminative influences on their life. For some men it brought them closer to their children through more frequent visitations, for other men it created a greater distance.

The last finding on contamination sequences regarded the narration of how the environment a father lived in shaped his life. Contamination sequences often emerged due to setbacks and environmental factors. From the decline in the fathers' neighborhoods to events that occurred when they were children, all of the fathers dealt with factors that limited their personal agency as a parent and as an individual. The decline of the neighborhoods in which some of the men grew up and lived in was found to be pivotal in some contamination sequences. Many of the men in the Chicago parenting program segment of the sample grew up on the south side of Chicago. Frequently the men related the noticeable negative influence drugs and gangs had on their surrounding communities. Some of the men talked about the beauty of the old neighborhood and how their life took a turn when the neighborhood they lived in changed:

Growing up, the neighborhood was beautiful. Me and my brother had paper routes, and we had a big yard. We were in a baby mansion...There were gangs, but it wasn't like it is today. No dope selling on the corner. We would walk around the neighborhood and everybody loved us...I never really got into too much trouble...Our house burnt down while we were at school...[and we had to move 17 blocks away]...We [he and his brothers] had problems there...I saw new things there, and fast money, and I fell off in high school. I used to sell then. I was only interested in going to school because of I was on the football team. I got kicked out of school. There were gangs in the school, and I went to the tenth grade.

For the men in the sample, negative life scenes were not uncommon. What made the contamination sequences unique was the sullyng of the positive that preceded the negative event.

### *Circular Narrations*

In addition to coding redemption and contamination sequences, a code was developed to capture the multiple clusters of positive and negative expressions the men used when narrating their life histories. For many of the men in the study, their life history contained a catalogue of negative life events. Some of the negative events were setbacks brought on by things beyond the fathers' control whereas other events were a result of the fathers' missteps. Within the telling of a negative life event, many fathers fluctuated between positive and negative sentiment. An example of a circular narration was taken from an interview with, Jon, a father who was incarcerated and throughout his time in the work release program had begun to see his biological son:



Work release helped me get to see him more. I mean I really don't get to see him a whole lot, like I said I only have four hours on my passes and by the time I drive all the way out to West Point to my mom and dad's to see him I got to turn around and come back. But it's ok at least he knows I drove out there to see him, that I do care. Hell I don't know.

The above passage fluctuates from the positive experience of Jon seeing his son more, to the negative of not being able to see son for very long, to the positive of the act being perceived by his son, to ambivalence. Another example of a circular narration comes from a passage of Harold's experiences playing football and the friends he had growing up. Much of his life narration flows in positive and negative fluctuation. The following is an example from his narrative that illustrates the fluctuation:

One guy, my best friend...we played [football]...from 7th grade through 12th grade, every day we were together. We were tight. He drinks now, but he always kept me positive. I was just rebellious. I just had to mess up, when things were going right. But I had some good people in my life. My friend, ended up in Palatine... He went onto college, worked with Federal Express; he's got a real good job now. Couple other guys; everybody's doing well, but most of the guys fell to the drugs.

The life narratives of the fathers were told in circular patterns where there sometimes appeared to be tension between the negative and positive. A statement made by Harold provided an explanation for this tension:

I have been so fluctuating. I been up and down for my whole life... It seem like I had so many obstacles. Like I take one step and somebody or something always pushes me two steps back. I can't give up.

Like Harold, many of the fathers shared a life story that chronicled a series of missteps and setbacks. The cyclical nature of some of the missteps and the setbacks, such as in addiction and recovery, perhaps augmented the instability and translated into the sequences the men used in narrating their lives. This cyclical experience, of moving one step forward and getting knocked two steps backs, was a relentless and life long process because of the setbacks they had faced over their life course. For some men, finding redemption in this process was difficult, but when they did it provided a way to salvage a sense of agency and hope.

#### *Decontamination and Confession*

The final narrative structure coded involved statements made by the fathers that served to decontaminate the past. More specifically, these statements included confessions or the fathers' acknowledging of their past missteps and how the missteps shaped their relationships with others in their family. The confessional statements fell into three categories: confession to family, confession to both family and self and/or anonymous other, and confession to self or anonymous other (e.g., during course of interview). Of the three coding categories, the vast majority of confessions fell in the category of confession to self or anonymous other. This category included confessional statements the men made in the course of their interview that acknowledged missteps and the role their missteps played in the setbacks they faced. For many of the men, the

interview may have been the first time they linked these events together or stated the connection out loud.

Out of 28 life history interviews, 21 (75%) contained confessions to self or anonymous other. Most of the confessions assigned blame to the self and acknowledged the influence of the missteps on their relationships with their family, particularly their children. These confessions typically revolved around drug and alcohol use. When asked what being a responsible father meant, Gary offered the following confession:

What they [children] see in you, they interpret it and they see it as an example. I drink beer around them and I smoke around them and I don't like that. I try to go out to the porch. I don't want them to have second-hand smoke. That is not being responsible. These are things that I have to work on. These are the things I dislike in myself.

Like the other fathers who made similar confessions, Gary acknowledged his wrongdoing and recognized what he needed to change and work on.

The other notable subject of confessions made by some of the fathers was their failure to provide for their children. These confession narrations were about failing to provide and not prioritizing their resources. A confession made by Richard is a good example of this type of confession:

I mean I try to do what I can now, but in all reality, that's not really enough...If I had five dollars and it's a choice of me going to the movies or something for my child, of course I have to give it to my child. But I haven't always been in that mind frame. It use to be, look man this is my last five dollars and stuff.

The fathers making this type of confession shared their shortcomings and missteps that took away from their contributions to their children's resources.

Of the three original categories for coding confessions, the coded data from the two categories, confession to family and confession to family and self/anonymous other, were combined into a single category. For the most part, confessions to the family and self/anonymous other were heavily directed towards what the father had told his family and were often a simple reiteration to the interviewer when he retold the familial confession scene. Eleven (39%) of the 28 life history interviews contained confession statements to family members. The most typical audience for a father's confession was his children. The content of the confessions centered on missteps of drug and alcohol use and the reasons for incarceration or absence. Jimmy, a father of three who had been incarcerated for convictions related to alcohol abuse, shared a confession he made to his children about his incarceration and his acceptance of the responsibility for the consequences:

Like I told them they can't blame anybody but me. All blame lies right here. I'm your daddy. I'm the one that booked on you. It wasn't like you ran out and left me. Like I said, even my 10-year-old, I let her know I did it. It wasn't nothing you did...I did it to myself that's the reason I'm in here, this is why I'm in here, this is exactly what I've done.

Another father, Barry, talked about his recovery from drug addiction and his confession to his daughter upon graduating from a recovery program: "I trusted her with the truth of my life...I talked to her sister too. I tell them I have nothing to hide today. What you see is what you get. The cover's been pulled off."

After a long history of setbacks and missteps, some fathers broke the pattern and unspoken nature of the negative aspects of their lives and identity. The fathers appeared to confess their setbacks and missteps in order to reconnect with their children and guide them away from making the same life choices. In the next section the findings for the second research question will be addressed. The question explored how fathers shared the negative aspects of their identity with their children and how the fathers were generative in this sharing.

### Strategies Used to Promote Generative Involvement

The setbacks and missteps the men in the current study faced presented challenges to their successful fulfillment of the roles of fatherhood. The research showed that the fathers often devised strategies that promoted generative fathering. The range of strategies the men used included confessions, reflecting on own fathers, and reworking norms. How the fathers used the strategies to increase generative involvement and the motivations behind them are presented below.

#### *Confessions*

A father's act of confessing his missteps can serve the purpose to decontaminate the past and restore the "integrity and wholeness of [his] narrative identity" (McAdams, 2006, p. 277). Eleven (39%) of the fathers in the sample reported sharing confessions with their children about the negative parts of their identity. It was found that in the admission of wrongdoing the fathers attempted to create a space for growth and recovery in their relationships with their children. One father, Derek, when asked how his relationship with his daughters had changed over his year in a work release program

stated that it had “grown stronger” and that he “no longer had to fill in the holes by pretending.” Through incarceration, Derek was led to confess to his daughters his unspoken history of arrests and alcohol abuse. In the process of “letting the cat out of the bag” his relationship with his daughters improved.

Improvements in a father’s relationship with his children were one reason for confessing. Another reason was to provide guidance to their children toward making constructive and healthy life choices. In essence, the fathers chose to share the negative parts of their selves in the generative belief that it would contribute to the betterment of their children’s lives. This finding will become evident through the following discussion regarding the communication strategies used in the act of confession.

The fathers in the sample used three main strategies when confessing and sharing the negative aspects of their identities. These strategies included: honesty, teaching moral lessons, and setting an example as a role model. The strategies emerged through the collective voice of the fathers’ narrations regarding their motivations for talking to their children about the missteps they had made. In general the three strategies often coexisted in a father’s confession to his children.

The strategy of being honest was a common thread woven through all of the confessions. It is notable as a separate category in that the fathers in the sample placed overt importance on being open and honest with their children in their explanations of their missteps. This desire to be honest is well captured in a statement made by Leo, a father of pre-teenagers:

I can’t lie to my kids, I can’t lie no more. I owe this to my sons... There is nothing that I don’t tell them. I told them when I was locked up, and I let

them know the things I did and why I got locked up. I told them about the dope and a lot of things as far as doing the wrong things...I feel that it is real comfortable to let them know what went on in my life and let them know so that hopefully they won't do it.

The majority of the fathers articulated a want to communicate full and honest acceptance of responsibility for their missteps. The desire to be honest was often intertwined with the hope that in being honest about their wrongdoings, their children would be taught lessons that would lead them away from repeating the same missteps.

The intention behind honestly sharing past missteps and setbacks may have partly resided in the fathers' belief that in doing so they had a powerful teaching tool. The fathers in the sample shared wanting to teach their children about being responsible and used their own perceived irresponsibility to teach this moral lesson. Jimmy, father of three, shared a conversation he had with his son in which he spoke to him plainly about taking responsibility for himself and for his actions:

Take responsibility for yourself, even if it's a D on [a] report card, it's your D, be responsible, know why you got it, explain, I mean I know why I'm sitting here, I'm a damn drunk driver. I ain't gonna lie about it, no need to, that's what I am.... Don't hold your head down over it. You gotta go forward. You gotta move up.

In addition to taking responsibility for their actions, many of the fathers also hoped to use their missteps with drugs and alcohol as a teaching tool. The fathers shared with their children how the missteps and subsequent setbacks stemming from substance abuse and addiction had a negative affect on their lives. Morris, a father of a 14, 12, and 11-year-

old, explained how he was concerned that his oldest son might be experimenting with drugs and how he hoped the lessons he had taught his son about his own drug use might guide his son to abstain:

My, oldest one, I've become a little concerned with him and marijuana...I know that peer influence will send you there. But I'm hoping that seeing me, and knowing that's where I started, and where I ended up before I woke up and smelled the coffee...I keep telling him, you can't do it. I've explained what a functional addict is. I haven't denied it.

In sharing these lessons, fathers aimed to keep their children from making the same missteps and experiencing the same setbacks they had experienced over their life course. As shown above, the fathers taught through directly communicating with their children about their missteps. In addition to direct communication, the fathers wanted their missteps to serve as an example of what not to do.

Where some of the fathers in the sample strived to be a positive role model for their children, others fathers wanted their children to use them as a negative role model and to take a hard look at the example they had set through their missteps. This sentiment is well captured in Jimmy's narration of the active encouragement he gave his children to use him as a negative role model as it related to his drinking and incarceration:

Like I've always told them, use me for a bad example. Cause I really am...I got good aspects and all that but when it comes to just my habits [drinking], bad example. My attitude, my common sense, you can keep it. My habits, bad example.



Perhaps even more powerful is the hope some of the men held for their children's future. By being honest about past missteps and encouraging their children to see them and their missteps as negative examples, some fathers thought it might help them choose a different lifestyle than they had chosen. When asked to share his greatest hope, Leo stated: "My greatest hope is that neither one of my kids will grow up to be like me."

### *Breaking the Cycle*

The fathers in the sample expressed generative intentions in the act of sharing missteps and setbacks with their children. Underlying this generative act was a generative belief that by sharing their missteps and setbacks with their children they could interrupt the "vicious cycle" or the patterns of missteps they had been caught in throughout their life course. By interrupting the cycle, the fathers aimed to give their children a chance at an easier and happier life, a life that was better than their own. Henry, in stating what his greatest hope was, spoke the desire of many of the fathers by saying: "Its not really a hope, it's a prayer. That my son has it easier than I had. So he doesn't have to go through the trials and tribulations that I went through."

The trials and tribulations the fathers endured were often pinpointed as stemming from negative cycles that began in their childhood with their fathers. It was not uncommon for a father to state he learned lessons of what not to do by observing his father. For instance, when Harold was asked who taught him to be a parent he responded:

I can't say my [father] taught me. The reason I say that is because I look at all the things I figured that [he] didn't do for me and didn't tell me...I take all of the things that [he] didn't do for me and I do it for my son.

The fathers often reflected on the setbacks they had experienced as children due to the missteps their fathers made and expressed a want to do things differently as parents.

Though not always successful, many of the fathers strived for their children to experience a different upbringing than the one they had known. Most commonly the fathers emphasized building a relationship with their children in which the children felt loved and stressed the importance of “being there” for their children. Some of the fathers shared the lasting hurt and “hate” they had for their fathers for being absent or uninvolved, choosing work over their relationship, and/or disciplining them harshly. One father Kyle, whose father “didn’t really have any involvement in [his] life, he was just a person in it,” shared how he aimed to end the vicious circle by not repeating his father’s misstep:

My dad was one of those people with tunnel vision, always working and trying to pay the bills. Which I understand...you gotta work to pay the bills...Even though I know I have to work real hard and I have to pay the bills... I still find time to spend with my kids. [From my dad] I learned how to change the basic of a vicious circle...I seen what he had done to us kids when I was growing up and it’s not what I wanted in mine. It’s not fair to throw or cast them aside because I have to take care of other things, because I have to work... I grew up without a dad. I don’t want them to.

The majority of the fathers expressed that it was important to not repeat their fathers’ missteps with their own children. One of the fathers, Steve, shared his motivation most bluntly when he said that his greatest personal fear was “being like my dad.” According to Steve, he feared that if he repeated the missteps his father made with him, his children would hate him like he hated his father, thus perpetuating the vicious circle.

While the men did not want to repeat their father's missteps, some worried that their own children might repeat the ones they had made. This concern revolved around the want to protect their children from the disappointment and hurt experienced throughout their own lives. Derek, a father of two daughters in their early thirties, had experienced multiple setbacks that stemmed from alcohol abuse. He hoped his daughters did not repeat the missteps he had made in his life and acknowledge his role in raising them with a hope they would learn to live differently. When asked what his greatest personal hope was he stated:

That [my daughters] never experience some of the things I have. Divorce, arrest, firings, all the things in life, sometimes you can't avoid them, but it sure would be nice if you did. I think whatever I can do to contribute to those things not happening, I've already done. It's like building a paper boat, once you launch it, its on it own. Hopefully the paper holds together and I live long enough to see all that come about.

Derek, like many of the other fathers, wanted his children to take a different path than he had. He did not want them to experience the hardship that had repeatedly appeared in his life.

The fathers stressed the importance of not repeating the cycle or pattern of missteps they had witnessed or made. Many of the fathers' greatest hopes, fears, and accomplishments revolved around breaking the "vicious circle" or "pattern" and to give their children a better chance at a stable life. Saul, a father of three, best summarizes these findings when he shared the following:

I want to do all of the things that my father and mother did not do for my children. I said that I wouldn't want to bring my children up in the same pattern that I've grown up in... low poverty, struggling to get things...I said I'll always show affection and love to my children...I'll always be a better provider for my children...I look at the innocence in their faces, not because they have to have it but because I don't want them to go through the changes that I've gone through in life. Before I die I want to make sure that they're well off, so that they don't have to struggle like I did to get where they're going.

In Saul's statement lies the heart of the reason for changing the patterns of the past and ensuring their children did not fall into the same negative cycle.

#### *Reworking Social Norms*

In addition to reworking the example their fathers had set for them as a parent, some fathers in the sample emphasized a need to rework the social expectations of a father being first and foremost a monetary provider. The fathers discussed the potential limitations of this socially prioritized role on their familial relationships. When asked how important providing was and what made a father responsible, many of the men stated that providing, while important, was less important than spending active time with their children and making sure their children knew they were loved. Neal, an African American father of five children, spoke of this reworking of what it meant to be a responsible father:

Being responsible, most fathers think that that means being financially responsible...that's part of it. But it's not the whole thing. First you have

to accept that's your child. Then from that point you have to have the responsibility to spend time. Money's not always the key. You can't buy love from your child and you can't buy time for your child. How can a child get close to somebody who doesn't spend time? That kind of responsibility is more important than spending money...

Neal continued to discuss the view of how fathers today do not always have the means to fully realize the role of provider:

The way the society is now...it would be beautiful if a man could be the main provider for the family. But the realities state that not all African American men, or most men, are not the main provider. Society has shown that women have taken a big step in the workforce... So if you can't take care of your child financially, then...at least spend time. Time is more important. You see most kids nowadays out in the street. Both parents work. What happens to the children? They're out in the street. They had no time. If you spend time then you have a better connection with them.

Through the narratives of fathers like Neal, it appeared that the emphasis on providing for children emotionally and mentally stemmed from two different sources. Some fathers who were unable to make a significant monetary contribution to their children's upbringing placed more value on the time and love they could give to their children. One such father, Marley, had trouble maintaining steady employment. Though he was working at the time of his interview, he talked about the difficulties of providing at minimum wage. When Marley was asked about the importance placed on a father being the financial provider, he stated:

I think it should be love, the hugs, the kisses, the good times, the movies, the baseball games, the basketball games, the reading sessions, the walk in the parks, the running around the parks, playing soccer you know. Laughing, frolicking in the grass.

For Marley, and for other fathers in the study, they saw time and love as the most valuable thing they could give to their children. Though they acknowledged the necessity of money, the emphasis was placed on love and time. When Bill was asked about whether or not he prioritized the provider role he shared:

To me, that is the easy way out. Give them some money and then run off. The money doesn't comfort them at night. They can't say hey dollar bill I had a nightmare last night and expect the dollar bill to rock them and hold them. Money is there because it is a necessity. But if you give a child love and attention, money is the last thing they are going to look for.

Another source of a fathers' reprioritization stemmed from the deficit of love and quality time they experienced as children with their fathers. Some fathers shared their disappointment with their fathers not being active in their lives and showing them love and affection. These fathers acknowledged the importance of providing for their children but thought providing took a backseat to the quality of the relationship they had with their children. Gary, a father of four whose father had not been active in his life, best summarized this sentiment:

You are going to be there financially but that is not number one...number one is being there and showing them loving. The emotional part, and

physically being there, touching them, playing with them. All of that stuff is important because let me tell you, my dad wasn't there.

By being there and showing love toward their children, some of the fathers were able to give their children the thing they yearned for as children. Being there and showing love, was an important part of the definition of what made a father responsible.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how multiple setbacks and missteps shaped the men's relationships with their children. Attention was given to the narrative sequencing a father used throughout his life history interview because of the link between the use of redemption and contamination sequences within a person's narrative and their level of generativity. Redemption sequences are associated with people who express higher levels of generativity and contamination sequences with those who express lower levels of generativity (McAdams, 2006). In addition to examining the influence of the setbacks and missteps, how a father incorporated the negative aspects of his narrative identity into his generative communications with his children was explored. In particular, the strategies and motivations the father had for sharing his missteps and setbacks with his children were examined.

The men in the current study were purposively sampled from two existing data sets (Roy, 1999; Roy, 2003). In general the narratives of the fathers in the racially and culturally diverse sample told of similar setbacks and missteps. Despite the similarities there were a few differences between the samples that should be noted. The fathers in the Chicago parenting program were all African American men who lived on the South Side of Chicago. The structural barriers these men faced due to racism, violent neighborhoods, and the proliferation of drugs in their communities was more pronounced than what the men in the work release sample faced. The men in the work release sample differed from the Chicago sample in that they were predominately European American and they were all incarcerated in a work release program. Many of the men in the work release sample reported positive changes stemming from their sobriety and that this gave



them time to refocus their attentions back on their families. In addition to sobriety, the improvements may have stemmed from the men's removal from the structural forces that led to missteps. For instance, men in both of the samples shared the importance of finding new friends and leaving the "drinking/drugging buddies" behind if they wanted to make a lasting change. Incarceration provided a chance for the men to reflect on their life choices and reevaluate their social circles.

It was found that all of the men in the study had experienced a number of setbacks and missteps during their life course. The most common setbacks and missteps experienced were: substance abuse, difficulties surrounding employment, and incarceration. Additional missteps and setbacks experienced by the men included: defaulting on child support, failed relationships, having a child at a young age, domestic violence, and environmental stressors. The setbacks and missteps were found to influence the relationship between a father and his children in four main ways. The most common influence was that missteps and setbacks led the father to be periodically absent from or less involved in his children's lives. Two other adverse influences of missteps and setbacks on the father-child relationship included a lack of resources for the children and putting his children at risk. The fourth finding was that in some cases (n=10, 36%) fathers cited improvements in their relationships with their children. The fathers noted that this improvement resulted from their incarceration and was often linked to sobriety. The improvements the men reported included: reconnecting or more contact with their children and better communication with their children.

The fathers used different narrative sequences throughout their life history interviews. Coding was conducted for redemption and contamination sequences and it

was found that contamination sequences were slightly more prevalent. Redemption sequences were unique from contamination sequences in that a little over half of the men who used redemption sequences (n=11; 52%) mentioned the influence of God or a higher power in their redemption. Contamination sequences also contained a unique feature in that contamination sequences were often found in the father's narration of a childhood or young adulthood event. In both redemption and contamination sequences, there was always a stated turning point or event that marked the change from positive to negative or negative to positive. A narrative structure that emerged as the coding of the data progressed was categorized as a circular narration. Circular narrations were defined by the fluctuation between redemption and contamination sequences within the telling of an event. The rise and fall of the circular narrations appeared to be a reflection of the instability the fathers had experienced due to the multiple setbacks and missteps they had dealt with throughout their lives.

Another narrative structure explored was the use of confession to decontaminate the past. Many of the men in the sample made statements that fell into the category of confession. For the men who made confessions about their missteps and setbacks, the main audience was the self or anonymous other. These confessions typically related to missteps and setbacks stemming from substance abuse/addiction and failure to meet the role of provider. The men also spoke of confessions they made to their family, mainly to their children. The fathers stated that they made the confessions to improve their relationships with their children, reconnect, and to provide an opportunity for growth. Three main strategies were used in confessing past missteps and setbacks to their

children. The strategies included: honesty, moral lessons, and setting an example as a role model.

The fathers in the sample expressed generative concerns for their children's futures. The fathers shared the hope that their children would not have to experience the missteps and setbacks they had over their life course. They aimed to correct the missteps they had seen their own fathers make and to rework and expand the definition of responsible fatherhood to emphasize loving and being present as the most important thing they could do for their children.

The theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and life course theory aided in the analysis of the life history interviews. Symbolic interactionism guided my exploration of the role expectations the fathers in the current study met or struggled to meet. In the framework of symbolic interactionism, many of the fathers had not always fulfilled their own and/or society's normative expectations for the roles of a father, in particular as a provider. The interviews often illuminated the men's experiences with their own fathers and the negative and positive role models they had for how to be a father. For the fathers in the current study, who had not met the normative expectations for the roles of father, the ways they reworked the rules that govern the roles provided insight into how some fathers were able to maintain generative roles as parents and strengthen their paternal identities despite setbacks and missteps.

Additionally, life course theory provided a context for exploring deviations from the normative family life course. Many of the fathers in the current study deviated from the normative family life course that is set by the mainstream expectations of law and public opinion in terms of providing and caregiving for children. These mainstream

expectations were viewed as being shared by most families, communities, and social policy though fulfilled in different ways according to the fathers' cultural contexts. The fathers in the current study shared that many of the life course deviations had arisen out of their setbacks and missteps. Many of the fathers had been incarcerated, had abused drugs and alcohol, and had been uninvolved with their children for periods of time. Life course theory provided a framework for understanding how a father's deviations from the normative life course influenced his generative involvement with his children and his roles as a father.

### Generative Fathers and Contamination Sequences

The study produced a number of noteworthy findings. First, it was found that the generative fathers in the sample narrated their life history interviews using contamination sequences slightly more than redemption sequences. This finding differed from the literature on narrative sequencing in that research has shown that individuals who are less generative emphasize contamination in their narrative identities (McAdams, 2006; McAdams, 2004; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). In addition to contamination sequences, the men used circular narrations to articulate their life histories. Circular narrations provided a new way to conceptualize how narrative structures relate to generativity and identity development.

Even though redemption sequences were not the most prominent sequence used in the narrations, the fathers clearly expressed generative care and concern for their children (Erikson, 1950). The fathers were biologically generative through having children and expressed parental generativity in providing for their children's emotional, mental, and physical needs. Additionally, the fathers in the study expressed technical and cultural

generativity (Kotre, 1984). For instance, they shared accounts of teaching their children different skills and the larger, cultural meaning behind the skills taught (i.e., doing homework with children and talking to them about the role of education in future successes).

Though the fathers had been determined generative and their narratives illustrated their generativity, the narrative sequencing told a different story (Roy & Lucas, 2005). One explanation for this finding might be that many of the negative events that were narrated as contamination sequences stemmed from setbacks or structural factors that were beyond the control of the fathers and in some sense inescapable. For instance, a number of fathers spoke of their “beautiful” neighborhoods declining in the wake of gangs and drugs and how the decline of their family life often mirrored these changes. It could be argued that the fathers who used contamination sequences to narrate the sully of positive scenes by structural changes in their environment were no less generative than other fathers. The narrative sequence reflected the downward turn or contamination of their environment not their level of generativity.

Another explanation for the finding is that the telling of the contaminated life scenes was a redemptive act. According to McAdams (2006), the telling of negative life events in and of itself can be a redemptive act for it “sets an example and provides an impetus for change.” The men in the sample shared their missteps and setbacks as part of a research project. Even though the men may have used contamination sequences in the retelling of setbacks and missteps, they may have had generative intentions in sharing their stories with the researchers. Not only did the interviews provide the fathers with the opportunity to articulate and share, perhaps for the first time, the setback and missteps

they had experienced, the retelling of their life stories may have been an opportunity for them to illuminate the hardships and barriers they had faced as fathers with hopes of promoting social change that would aid fathers in similar situations.

The circular narrations that emerged from the data were unique to the current literature on narrative sequencing. A possible explanation for this finding might be located in the demographics for the sample of men purposively selected for this study. Where the existing literature on narrative sequencing and generativity (with exception to Maruna, 2001) tends to sample middle-class, European Americans, the current study sampled a racially diverse group of low-income men who had experienced multiple setbacks and missteps throughout their life course. The circular narrations may be attributed to the structural setbacks men in this demographic often experience. The structural factors complicated the fathers' journeys in that even if a father was able to take a step forward, he might not have the resources to maintain the advancement and thus get "knocked back two steps." For instance, a father in a violent neighborhood may win a housing transfer lottery to an apartment in a nicer neighborhood but the apartment building may be away from his place of employment and he does not have dependable transportation. This could cause him to lose his job; the loss of employment could lead to eviction and less resources for his family. The data suggests that the circular narrations are a reflection of the fathers' experiences with multiple setbacks that seem ever-present. The fathers' enduring struggles to overcome these setbacks in and of it self may be viewed as a generative act.

Another possible explanation for circular narrations is that some parts of the fathers' life histories may have been resistant to the forms of narrative sequencing

mentioned in the reviewed literature. On one hand, the circular nature of their narrations may have reflected their own difficulties reconciling the past. Perhaps, for some of the fathers, certain aspects of their narratives were too complicated, raw, or painful to story through redemption and contamination sequences. On the other hand, the circular narrations could have reflected the generative fathers struggles to find redemption in the setbacks and missteps they had faced in order to move from a contaminated script to one that was more redemptive.

### Generative Confessions

Second, the fathers' confessions to their children about past missteps appeared to be done with strong generative intentions. The finding on the generative nature of confessions and storytelling was similar to the findings from the reviewed literature in that it showed that generativity is traceable through family storytelling and confessions (Kotre, 1999; McAdams, 2004; Pratt, Norris, Arnold, & Filyer, 1999). Through storytelling and confessions, moral messages and life lessons may be passed down from one generation to the next; socializing and providing moral guidance to the next generation as well as promoting identity development (Erikson, 1950; McAdams, 2006; McAdams, 2004; Pratt & Fiese, 2004). Consistent with the literature, the fathers in the current study shared stories of their setbacks and missteps with their children motivated by the generative belief that they were socializing and providing moral guidance to their children. The finding also suggests there is a redemptive element in the telling of setbacks and missteps. Some fathers attributed the development of greater wisdom to their setbacks and missteps. The fathers expressed the belief that the wisdom they gained from the bad times in their lives might enable them to guide their children away from

making the same missteps and suffering similar hardships through passing down the lessons they had learned.

For many of the fathers, telling their life stories to their children could be defined as an act of confession. According to McAdams (2006), when people feel their lives are contaminated by the missteps they have made, they are motivated to confess these missteps as a way to decontaminate the past. In the current study, confessions may have provided an avenue for the fathers to right the wrongs they had made. These generative fathers, by confessing, took the responsibility for their missteps regardless of the cultural and structural forces that may have put them at risk. Similar to McAdams's (2006) findings, the fathers stated that their confessions provided them with opportunities for growth and connection in their relationships with their children and within their roles as fathers. Using the strategies of honesty, teaching moral lessons, and setting an example, the fathers shared the negative aspects of their narrative identities with their children. Through these generative acts the fathers often shared the hope that they would be ending the vicious circles they had been caught in throughout their lives. This generative act (i.e., confession) was agentic in that the fathers hoped to reinstate the positive that was contaminated by their missteps and salvage agency in the context of overwhelming setbacks. It was also largely communal generativity in that the fathers expressed the intent to better the lives of their children and to help them avoid the vicious circle (Bakan, 1966; Kotre, 1984).

### Reworking Fatherhood

Lastly, it was found that the fathers in the current study expressed the desire to break the "vicious circle" or patterns within their family of origin by reworking the



examples of parenting their fathers had set by emphasizing love and being present in their children's lives. The strategy to rework the negative role models of youth was not unique to this data set. Other researchers have found that fathers typically seek to rework or make up for the faults of their fathers (Dienhart & Daly, 1997; Snarey, 1993). What was unique is that this conclusion was drawn from a sample of fathers who were low-income and had experienced multiple setbacks and missteps. The finding seemed to suggest that these fathers were motivated to change the patterns or vicious circles by parenting their children differently than their fathers had parented in order to make up for their fathers *and* to help their children avoid the setbacks and missteps they had faced. The narratives of the fathers in the study shared the generative belief that by changing how they parented, they would be giving their children a chance at a better future or at least one better than their own.

A change that many of the fathers emphasized as important was being present in their children's lives and letting their children know they were loved. Wanting to be more loving and active than their fathers originated from two sources. First, for some of the low-income fathers, limited employment opportunities and minimum wage jobs made it difficult to fulfill the role of provider (Edin, Nelson, & Paranal, 1997). Facing barriers to meeting the role of financial provider, the fathers sought to rework the roles of father by emphasizing the importance of providing for their children's emotional development by being active and loving towards their children. This is important because it suggests that fathers who are shut out from assuming the traditional father role of provider, do not simply forfeit their roles as a father altogether. Instead the fathers reworked the role to one which love and being a part of their children's lives was most valuable. The second

source of the emphasis on love and “being there” above financial providing originated in the fathers’ childhoods. Many of the men in the sample shared that their fathers were not nurturing and were not present in their lives as children and young adults. These men shared the hurt and missteps that stemmed from this setback. As fathers, the men expressed the desire to act generatively towards their own children through being involved and emotionally supportive. Through reworking their fathers’ examples, the men found a pathway to generativity. They strived to make up for the deficits of their fathers by giving their own children what they perceived they had lacked as children.

### Limitations

As previously stated, the current study was a secondary data analysis of 28 life history interviews from two data samples collected by Dr. Kevin Roy. The secondary perspective on the data was limited because of the lack of first-hand experience with the fathers and the environment in which they resided. Throughout this project it was important that impressions and interpretations of the data be discussed with Dr. Roy so that meaning was not assigned to a man’s narration based on a misinterpretation of the interview data.

Another limitation of the study related to the generalizability of the findings. The sample was diverse in respect to age, race, and ethnicity but it was not randomly selected, there was no control group, and it was not a representative sample that reflected the general population. The men in the sample were purposively sampled based on three factors: they were highly generative (Roy & Lucas, 2006), they were fathers, and they had experienced setbacks and missteps. Fourteen (50%) of the fathers had been selected

from a work release program in Indiana and the other 14 (50%) fathers were participants in a paternal involvement program on the south side of Chicago.

The experiences the men had in Chicago parenting program and in the work release center limited the ability to speak broadly about the findings because the context of the programs may have influenced the responses the men gave to the interview questions. For instance, the Chicago parenting program linked fathers to resources and organized activities that encouraged fathers and their children to spend time together. These activities may have provided some fathers with support and encouragement towards a generative relationship with their children, support that other fathers outside of the program may not have had.

Lastly, a limitation to the research was that the findings were exclusively derived from retrospective narratives of the fathers. Because of the retrospective nature of the data, the findings were based on the fathers' recall of events and therefore the way they saw things might not have been a true representation of a relationship or an event. The inclusion of other family members perspective on how the fathers' missteps impacted the family would have increased the richness of the findings. For example, a father may have stated that his drinking did not take away from the family's resources but a spouse's perspective may have illuminated a mountain of debt. Gaining the children's perspectives on the father-child relationship would also have served to confirm or contradict the fathers' perspectives on the nature of the relationships. For instance, a father may have stated that he showed his son love but perhaps the son did not experience his relationship with his father to be a loving relationship.

## Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings from the current study were similar across age, race, and cultural lines indicating the shared powerful socio-cultural factor of class amongst the men. The implications for practice and policy are made within the framework of how to assist low-income fathers and their families who are affected by multiple missteps and setbacks. The implications derived from the findings might be useful to inform and promote therapies and policies that help fathers strengthen their paternal identities and reconnect with their children in generative ways.

One such finding was that in some cases (n=10; 36%) the setback of incarceration appeared to improve the father-child relationship. While some fathers reported incarceration as hindering the relationships they had with their children, other fathers shared that their relationships improved through more frequent contact, better communication, and a more focused outlook toward a stable future as an active and generative parent. With over 668,000 fathers incarcerated in State and Federal prisons and 1,372,700 children experiencing their fathers' incarceration, examining what helps fathers turn the negative setback of incarceration into something beneficial is important (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Identifying the beneficial aspects may provide suggestions for therapists and policy makers on what to emphasize and incorporate into therapy or policy. A few positive factors that were noted by the men included: recovery from addiction, psychoeducational parenting programs, finding support amongst fathers in similar situations as themselves, and time to rework and refocus on their roles as a father.

Policies and therapies that focus on strengthening a father's paternal identity may in turn strengthen the father's commitment to taking a lasting generative role in his children's lives (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998; Snarey, 1993). Promoting policies that allow more frequent contact with children could be an effective way to strengthen a father's paternal identity. For instance, prison and work release sites could develop programs that allow for greater contact between fathers and their children. For families who are willing and able to go to where fathers are incarcerated, supervised visits that allow for sleepovers in a family-friendly environment at the incarceration site could be a way to keep fathers and children connected or lead to their reconnection. For families who cannot or will not visit incarceration sites, web visits could be arranged. Prisons could implement programs using video web conferencing between fathers and their families. This program would rely on the cooperation of public or non-profit organizations that would allow and supervise web conferencing sites for families to use.

Removing some of the barriers fathers in this population face to pursuing generative fathering roles can benefit both the fathers and their children. Strengthening the fathers' generative roles and attachments as fathers may meet the unique needs of incarcerated men (e.g., fulfillment, exoneration, legitimacy, and therapy) and reduce the risk of recidivism, thus breaking negative cycles (Maruna, 2001). Promoting father involvement may also break the cycle in that the fathers' children have the opportunity to benefit from an active and potentially generative father figure. The typical male inmate today has had at least one family member who has been incarcerated (Johnston, 1995). Though this intergenerational finding is likely only a small frame in an overall broader picture of structural factors in a father's upbringing that led to incarceration, policies that

aim to keep familial ties intact could be examined to see how they influence the intergenerational instances of parental incarceration.

Overall all the findings seemed to point to taking a holistic approach toward assisting fathers who have experienced multiple setbacks and missteps. Through the data it was apparent that the larger structural context influenced the life decisions the fathers made. For instance, some of the fathers with limited employment opportunities in their communities made the decision to sell drugs, selling drugs for some led to drug use, and eventually using drugs decreased the amount of involvement a father had with his children. A father whose life followed this sequence would benefit from individual therapy to address his addiction, assistance in attaining and maintaining other means of income, and family therapy to assist all family members in reconnecting and repairing their strained relationships.

Finally, assisting fathers in finding solutions, highlighting their strengths, and identifying elements in their social context that discourage and encourage generativity could prove to be a helpful intervention (Gerson, 1997). For a father who is stuck in stagnant plots or vicious circles, identifying his strengths and finding hope may feel impossible. Programs that help fathers identify their strengths and externalize their missteps may aid them in overcoming the guilt stemming from past missteps. In addition to individual therapy, group therapy could be helpful in connecting fathers with a support network and a chance to see that their struggles and missteps are not just their own (Gerson, 1997).

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Life History Interview: Draft Research Protocol

### **Life History Interview: Draft Research Protocol**

Dr. Kevin Roy, Principal Investigator

I would like to spend some time today talking about your involvement with your family. I'm also interested in looking back and talking about your "life history," such as where and how you grew up, and your work and school experiences. I would like to better understand how your life has changed due to incarceration, but also about your decisions about your future upon your release.

Let's begin with now:

#### **Current Situation**

- How long have you lived away from your family and community?
- Are you currently working or doing other activities in the program? Tell me about them.
- How many children do you have? Where do they live?

#### **Father Involvement: Interaction**

- Looking back to your time with your children before incarceration, how would you describe your relationship with them?
- How often did you see your children? How much time did you spend with them in a typical week? What did you do with them?
- Talk about how your involvement has changed over time. Were you more involved at certain times in their lives?
- The birth of your first child is a powerful moment in fathers' lives. Tell me how you felt when you found that the mother of your child was pregnant.

- What is the best age for a man to become a father?

### **Father Involvement: Responsibility**

- What does it mean to you to be a responsible father?
- Is providing important in being a responsible father? Is providing more important than other things that you do as a father (spending time, bringing Pampers, child care)?
- Looking back on the time before incarceration, were there barriers that kept you from interacting with your children? Were there barriers that kept you from being a responsible father?
- Have you established paternity for your children? Have you paid child support for them?

### **Father Involvement: Access**

- Looking back to your time with the mother of your children before incarceration, how would you describe your relationship with her?
- Did you need permission to see your children? Did you work out an arrangement with the mother of your children for your involvement? Tell me about that arrangement.
- Did that arrangement change over time? Was there ever any tension or disagreement over this arrangement for your involvement?
- Were you involved with children who are not yours by birth? Tell me about these relationships.



### **Father Involvement: Now**

- How often do you see your children now? Can you give me some examples of how you and your children interact with each other?
- Other than when you see them, are you able to maintain contact with your children? How?
- How would you describe your current relationship with them?
- How do you show your love to your children?
- What makes someone a good father?
- How would you describe your current relationship with the mother of your children?
- Before incarceration, did you ever feel left out of your children's lives? Do you feel left out currently? If so, how do you make sense of being left out?
- Who taught you how to be a father?

### **Family Support**

- I'd like to talk a bit about your larger family now, like your parents, brothers and sisters. How would you describe your relationships with family members since incarceration? How has time away from the family changed your relationships?
- Thinking back, who did you rely on for support if you got sick and needed care? Who relied on you?
- Who did you turn to if you needed life advice? Who turned to you?
- Who did you turn to if you got into a jam and needed to make ends meet? Who turned to you if they got in a jam with money?
- When you hung out with someone, who did you hang out with?

### **Family History**

- Let's spend a bit of time talking about growing up. Where did you live during high school? Tell me about the neighborhoods where you grew up.
- Who was in your family then? Who was the most important adult to you as a teen?
- Where did you live in grade school? Tell me about these neighborhoods. Who was in your family then? Who was the most important adult to you as a young boy?
- What was your relationship with your father like when you were a young boy? What was your relationship with your mother like when you were a young boy?
- How old were you when you moved out of your parents' house for the first time?

### **Work History**

- Did you work during high school? What was your first job? Did your brothers or sisters work as well?
- Where did your parents work when you were young? Did they do things in addition to make ends meet?
- How was work for your father when he was your age? What do you think has changed in the world of work if you compared his experience to yours?
- Between high school and incarceration, where did you work? Did you receive any training or certification?
- Did you ever receive food stamps or public aid for your children? Did you get assistance from family or friends?
- Have you ever felt left out of the work world? What does having a job mean to you?
- Do you have any long term goals for a career?

### **Education History**

- Where did you go to grade school? What was your experience of grade school? Best memories, worst memories?
- Where did you go to high school? What was your experience of high school? Were you involved in activities? Were you a good student?
- Did you graduate from high school? What were your plans upon leaving/graduating?
- How have those plans played out? Do you have any long terms goals for education?

### **Incarceration History**

- Tell me about the decisions and events that led to your incarceration.

### **Finish**

- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- What is your greatest personal fear?
- What is your greatest personal hope?
- What are some areas that you need to improve or change as a father?
- What are some of your greatest accomplishments as a father?

## Appendix B: Demographics

Table 1: Sample Demographic Information

Demographic Variable	Total Sample (N=28)	Work Release (n=14)	Parenting Program (n=14)
Race:			
Black	16 (56%)	2 (14%)	14 (100%)
White	10 (36%)	10 (72%)	0 (0%)
Asian	1 (4%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)
Native American	1 (4%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)
Age:			
17-29	9 (32%)	5 (36%)	4 (29%)
30-39	13 (47%)	6 (43%)	7 (50%)
40+	6 (21%)	3 (21%)	3 (21%)
Age at Birth of First Child			
17-19	9 (32%)	4 (29%)	5 (36%)
20-25	14 (50%)	8 (57%)	6 (43%)
26+	5 (18%)	2 (14%)	3 (21%)
Number of Children:			
1-2	14 (50%)	8 (57%)	6 (43%)
3-4	11 (39%)	5 (36%)	6 (43%)
5+	3 (11%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)
Education			
High School Dropout	6 (21%)	4 (29%)	2 (14%)
GED/ High School	11 (39%)	6 (42%)	5 (36%)
College/Vocational	11 (39%)	4 (29%)	7 (50%)

## Appendix C: Reported Occurrence of Setbacks and Missteps and the Influence on Parent/Child Relationships

Table 2: Reported Occurrence of Setbacks and Missteps in the Sample (N=28)

Setbacks and Missteps	n	%
Incarceration	21	75%
Substance Abuse	23	82%
Failed Relationships	12	43%
Domestic Violence	6	21%
Fatherhood at Young Age	6	21%
Chronic Unemployment/ Default on Child Support	23	82%

Table 3: Reported Influence of Setbacks and Missteps on the Parent/Child Relationship (N=28)

Influence	n	%
Absence	25	89%
Lack of Resources	15	54%
Risk to Children	13	46%
Improvements	10	36%

## Appendix D: Coding Scheme

### Coding Scheme

- Setback/Missteps
  - Incarceration
  - Failed relationship
  - Substance abuse
  - Domestic violence
  - Chronic unemployment/default on child support
  - Having child at young age
  - Other
- Setback/Missteps influence on parenting
  - Absence
  - Risk for children
  - Lack of resources for children
  - Improvement in parent/child relationship
  - Other
- Narrative Sequence
  - Redemption
  - Circular Narrations
  - Contamination
  - Decontamination
    - Confession in interview
    - Confession to family
    - Confession to family and other
- Expression of Identity
- Communicated Identity
  - Strategy
    - Honesty
    - Moral lesson/guidance
    - Teacher
    - Example
    - Other
  - Mode
    - Act
    - Belief
    - Other
- Etcetera
- Reworking/Retelling fathering role
  - Father's parenting
  - Social norms
  - Vicious cycle/circle

## Appendix E: Analytic Memo

### Analytic Memo

**ID:** “Jon”

**Age:** 30

**Race:** White

**Relationship Status:** Divorced (was married for 4 years). Remarried

**Length of current relationship:** 6 years

**Number of children:** 3

**Age of children:** 12 (M) 11 (F; step) 6 (M; step)

**Biological/stepchildren:** 1 bio 2 step

**Number of partners for biological children:** 1

**Age at the time of first child:** 18

**Level of Education completed:** High School

**Employed:** Yes (worked cutting down trees, now works installing insulation)

**Incarceration:** Yes

**Substance Abuse:** Yes

**Contact with children:** Yes. He sees his biological child one time a month; his biological child lives with his ex-wife. His wife’s two kids live with their fathers. Of the two stepchildren, he is closest to the six-year-old boy. He refers to him as “he’s my boy” and the child calls him dad. Sees female one time a month and six-year-old two times a month.

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