

OPENING UP THE BLACK BOX OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND SHOWING THE
EFFECTS FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING HAS ON PRISONERS'
RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR FAMILIES

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Criminal Justice—Master of Science

2019

ABSTRACT

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Adult offenders entangled in the criminal justice system in the United States have gained the attention of researchers over the years following the spike in mass incarceration, new rehabilitative programs, and criminal justice reform. Following the 1980s and 1990s restorative justice movement, the criminal justice system implemented an approach to unite victims, offenders, and communities as a way of bringing healing and reparation to those that are affected by crime. However, the vast majority of research on restorative justice focuses on juveniles who commit non-serious crimes and do not reside in the United States. Current literature examining the outcomes of restorative justice ignores the process of how these outcomes are achieved. Using Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory and Maruna's (2001) theory of desistance, the current study explores the family dynamics within family group conferencing of a sample of 17 adult offenders intertwined in the criminal justice system. Specifically, the study uses qualitative interviews from offenders who were a part of a conference and those who were not to examine the impacts conferencing has on familial relations and family dynamics. Findings suggest that self-narratives from offenders support positive familial relations, produce indicators of desistance, and shed light on various family dynamics.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude and thanks to my thesis chair, Dr. Jennifer Cobbina, for reviewing my manuscript, offering resources, and providing support and encouragement throughout the process. I would also like to express my thanks to my thesis committee members Dr. Merry Morash and Derrick Franke for serving on my committee. I would also like to thank my friend Ashleigh LaCourse for sharing her knowledge of the writing process, reviewing my manuscript, and offering positive feedback throughout the process.

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CHAPTER 1: The Need for Research

Traditionally, the administration of justice has focused on achieving fairness and equity that are often punitive in nature. During the 1980s and 1990s, the restorative justice (RJ) movement emphasized a perspective on justice that focused more on the interrelationship between the offender, victim, and the community in cases involving delinquency and criminal activity (Dorne, 2008). This approach helps the offender make reparations to his or her community usually through mediation, counseling, or conferencing. RJ is considered a preventive approach based on the assumption that the crime's origins are a result of social conditions, and therefore, the response to the crime must take into account the social context (Maiese, 2003).

However, important gaps remain in our understanding of the nature of RJ. First, studies focus almost exclusively on juveniles despite the fact that a much larger proportion of adults is entangled in the criminal justice system. This focus stems in part from the juvenile justice system putting more emphasis on rehabilitation and programming for young offenders than the adult system puts on adults who have contact with the criminal justice system, a system that emphasizes retribution and deterrence (Farrington, Loeber, & Howell, 2012). Additionally, the realization that juveniles are more amenable to change and even age out of crime has led to youths serving as a central focus in RJ studies (Farrington, Loeber, & Howell, 2012; Mears & Butts, 2001). In general, when RJ conferences are conducted with adult offenders, they are typically for non-serious crimes and most of these studies have taken place outside of the United States (U.S.) (Chan, 2012; McCold, 2003; McGarrell & Hipple, 2007; Sieppert, Hudson, & Unrau, 2000; Stewart, Hayes, Livingston, & Palk, 2008; Wormer & Walker, 2013). Less focus has been on adults who have committed a wide array of crimes who reside in the United States.

Second, much of the empirically tested work on RJ includes numerous outcomes, such as the improvement of child welfare, perceptions of fairness and satisfaction, recidivism and the cost-effectiveness of conferencing (Boriboonthana & Sangbuangamlum, 2013; Connolly, 2006; Davis, 2009; Jeong, McGarrell & Hipple, 2012; Sherman et al., 2015). Unfortunately much of the analysis of conferencing outcomes is quantitative in nature (Sherman & Strang, 2007; Sherman et al., 2015) and fails to take into account the social context of conferencing.

Third, research on Family Group Conferencing (FGC) shows positive results. Previous literature indicates that during these conferences family members often report feeling respected, perceive that their voices are heard, and appreciate being a part of the decision making process; the result is improved communication and unity (Barnsdale & Walker, 2007; Jackson, 1998). Although the current literature on the outcomes of RJ demonstrates that conferencing can work to be beneficial in a number of ways, it remains unclear *what* makes FGC work.

This thesis will provide additional information on the context of conferences to provide better insight into the dynamics of FGC. Using a comparative sample of prisoners in a FGC and prisoners who were in the control group, the current study uses qualitative analysis to examine what aspect of prisoners' family relationships improved throughout the conference and why. Analyzing the data between the conferenced and non-conferenced group will highlight desistance signals that are found within FGC, emphasizing the importance of conferencing during offenders' reentry process. As the literature has already shown that FGC has the potential to work, this study seeks to add to that literature by showing why it works. This study adds to the RJ literature by providing context to conferences with a focus on family relationships as an indicator of desistance from crime.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Variations of Restorative Justice

The overarching theme of RJ remains the same across the board, but there is variation in how restorative processes can be carried out. First, there is circle sentencing, which is also known as peacemaking circles. Deriving from Native American customs, more members of the community are involved in the process, particularly formal personnel within the criminal justice system— police officers and/or attorneys (Davis, 2009). Second, there is victim-offender mediation. The victim and offender do not necessarily have to meet face-to-face and participate in a conference, although it is encouraged. An individual acts as the mediator between the victim and offender in order to work out an agreement between the parties, with a large focus on compensating the victim (Sherman, Strang, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, Ariel, 2015). The stakeholders do not necessarily have to be classified as a victim or an offender; there just has to be an issue present that can be resolved through a mediator (Wormer, 2009).

Third, there is face-to-face conferencing, also known as FGC. FGC initially began in New Zealand in the late 1980s and it was predominately used to ensure that children are safe and that families have the necessary resources to care for their children, also known as child welfare (Waites, Macgowan, Pennell, Carlton-LaNey, & Weil, 2004). Used as an alternative to being formally processed in court, the family comes up with an agreement about what needs to happen to the child in order to correct his or her behavior. Unlike sentencing circles and mediation, FGC distinguishes the roles of an offender and a victim and invites immediate family members to participate in the process. FGC rarely extends to formal actors in the criminal justice system and members of the community. The conferences that are being used for the current study closely

resemble family-offender mediation rather than FGC, which is typically used for ensuring the well-being and safety of children.

Empirical Studies of Restorative Justice Conferencing on Adults and Juveniles

Although RJ conferences are typically used in cases that involve non-serious crimes committed by youths (Wormer, 2009), they have recently been used in serious felony cases. Davis (2009) conducted a study of 465 adult felony cases in which the victim and offender had a prior relationship and their case was mediated or prosecuted in court. Of the 465 cases, 81 percent (N=167) were formally prosecuted in court and 56 percent (N=145) actually received mediation in which a mediator worked with both the victim and offender to come up with a unanimously agreed upon outcome. Victims and offenders of the mediated cases identified the entire process as more positive than those who were prosecuted (94 percent compared to 65 percent, respectively). Of those victims and offenders who had their cases mediated, 88 percent reported that their case was handled fairly compared to 76 percent of those whose cases were prosecuted. Approximately 73 percent of mediated victims and offenders were satisfied with the agreement that was reached in the final stage, whereas only 54 percent of court-processed victims and offenders were satisfied with the outcome of their case. This study shows that the practice of mediation has a greater effect than traditional prosecution on offenders that have a previously established relationship with their victims.

Studies also show positive results related to burglary cases involving adults as victims and youths as offenders. Umbreit (1989) examined 50 burglary cases for which 62 percent (N=31) of cases were mediated and 38 percent (N=19) opted out of mediation in favor of being formally processed in court. Of the 31 mediated cases, 93 percent classified the restitution agreement as fair, 97 percent claimed to be treated fairly throughout the process, and 86 percent

noted that the mediation process was helpful for various reasons, such as receiving answers about the crime from the offender and reducing the victim's fear of re-victimization. It was noted that 80 percent of victims in mediated cases reported that they felt included in the process and that mediation was fair, which was in contrast to the non-mediated victims' feelings of inclusion and fairness (38 percent).

Contrary to these positive findings, mediation practices with juvenile offenders and adult victims have been found to under-prepare the victims, pressure the victims to act in a certain way, and intimidate adult victims (Choi, Gilbert, & Green, 2013). Power imbalances are often apparent in cases where the victim is an adult and the offender is a juvenile. The assertion of power during any stage of an FGC or mediation process may cause low levels of participation, reduce the likelihood of a positive outcome, and be damaging to the goal of reconciliation (Gerkin, 2008). The flaws of implementing a mediation process must be overcome in order to diminish the power imbalance and achieve positive results. Nonetheless, there is evidence that using a mediation process in cases that involve juveniles and adults is more satisfying and fair than enduring the traditional court process (Boriboonthana & Sangbuangamlum, 2013; McGarrell, Olivares, Crawford, & Kroovand 2000).

Desistance

Desistance from crime occurs when an individual actively works to shift his or her criminal involvement towards continuously refraining from deviant behavior, even in the midst of life's adversities (Maruna, 2001). Indicators, or signals, of desistance are factors that aid in an offender's progression towards law-abiding behavior. One indication of desistance is redeeming oneself internally via empowerment from an outside source (Maruna, 2012). When loved ones have faith that offenders can refrain from criminal behavior and begin a path of honorable

behavior, they act as a moral support system by acknowledging offenders' good merit. For example, Maruna (2001) provides a personal narrative from a desisting ex-offender that details how a significant other prompted him to end involvement in criminal activity by acknowledging his potential.¹ This heightened sense of self-worth and empowerment from an external source is internalized by the offender and indicates that he is on the route towards desistance.

Another example that signals a path of desistance is when offenders take on a generative role in society. The focus of generativity is the success of future generations, which is carried out by older generations in terms of support, mentoring, and teaching youths (Slater, 2003). An example from Maruna's (2001) study gives insight into offenders using their experiences to prevent others from engaging in criminality: "...if you can learn off what I'm telling you and stop one person going through the life I've gone through, that's an achievement" (male, age 33). If this offender enters a career path of a counselor or social worker that directly engages with youths, his past experiences can be used in a preventative manner by dissuading youths from following the same path that he did. Moreover, helping others can be one signal of desistance.

These signals are crucial when trying to answer the question of how individuals first put effort towards initiating and maintaining this change against all odds. Researchers have largely studied the question of why an individual chooses to engage in criminal activity. In contrast, there is insufficient literature about offenders that follow the path of desistance, so the question remains: *how* do offenders reform their life by way of continually forgoing criminal behavior? Signals of desistance begin to answer that question. This is particularly important because a primary goal of the criminal justice system is to reduce crime (McNeil, Farrall, Lightowler, & Maruna, 2012).

¹ "Well, before I'd gone to college, [my girlfriend] had said that she knew I had potential, and nobody else had ever

The desistance process is subjective and unique for each ex-offender. LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, and Bushway (2008) identified the most common signals of desistance found in the literature as hope and self-efficacy, shame and remorse, and alternative identities. Individual factors that initiate these signals can be found in employment, resisting peer influence in order to increase moral engagement, being in a committed and high-quality romantic relationship, and social bonds to family (Barr & Simons, 2015; King, 2004; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Walters, 2018). These factors act as catalyst for desistance in that social bonds and informal ties between offenders and their family including children, parents, romantic relationships, and employment, help explain shifts in the offenders criminal trajectory (Maruna, 2001).

To have hope does not simply mean that an individual has a strong desire for something. To have hope is to have both the will and the way; that is being motivated to actually achieve the desired goal (the will) and having the appropriate resources necessary to pull off this goal (the way) (Burnett & Maruna, 2004). The willingness to want be involved in prosocial activities that will further one's non-deviant behavior implies that an individual has hope for his or her future. Volunteering to be a part of an FGC, as opposed to being court-ordered to participate, indicates an offender's desire and willingness to change and thus starts his or her process of desistance. The signal of volunteering indicates that offenders actively want to maintain a life of conformity, and voluntarily participating in an FGC might generate other signals that represent desistance from crime.

Social Bond Theory

Social bond theory assumes that humans are deviant by nature and therefore are motivated to commit crimes (Hirschi, 1977). Thus, social bond theory does not seek out answers as to the motivations that lead one to commit deviant acts, but rather asks why one abstains from criminal

behavior. The interconnectedness of an individual and society is wide ranging and begins when he or she has a bond to prosocial values, people, and institutions, which informally controls his or her propensity for criminal behavior (Koeppel & Chism, 2018; Pratt, Gau, & Franklin, 2011). This connectivity can be exemplified through four elements that comprise an individual's bond to society: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Hirschi, 2002). Berg and Huebner (2011) contend that these bonds act as the forces that encourage an offender to suppress his or her criminal behavior.

These bonds act as informal social controls that shields offenders from some of the triggers that cause them to act on potential criminal impulses (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Wooditch, Tang, & Taxman, 2014). When any or all of these bonds are weakened, individuals will be more likely to engage in criminal activities. For example, the separation between an offender and his or her intimate partner and/or the loss of a job consists of personal events that may initiate criminal behavior as a result of weakened social bonds. Conversely, when these bonds are strong, individuals are less likely to engage in deviant behavior. It is the variations within these bonds, not the motivational factors that push offenders towards criminality, that answer the question of why offenders refrain from committing illegal acts. Below is a brief description of the four elements that comprise individuals bonds to society – attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief.

Attachment

Attachment refers to the bond one has with others and includes affection, admiration, and identification (Akers & Sellers, 2004). Individuals can be attached to educational institutions, peers, and significant others. The attachment an individual has with a significant other has more influence on his or her decision making process than impersonal relationships (Hipple &

McGarrell, 2008; King et al., 2007). The emotional aspect of this bond is important to understanding why one's attachment to others in society would prevent him or her from committing crimes. Affection, admiration, and identification are the emotional components that prompt an individual to be conscious of the fact that his or her family members or significant others may have a different set of expectations for them upon their return home from prison. This allows for an individual to be conscious of the opinion others hold in his or her regard. These opinions originate from societal norms that are shared by the majority of members in society (Akers & Sellers, 2004). If individuals are conscious of what others think and take it into consideration before engaging in behavior that opposes social norms, they will be more apt to suppress their deviant tendencies in order to avoid disappointing those to whom they are attached.

Hirschi's social bond theory indicates that bonds act as a mechanism that control his or her behavior and that an important bond for an offender to have is with family (Vaughan, Bouffard, & Piquero, 2017). Moreover, prior research has shown that offenders who have strong prosocial ties with their family show a decrease in future offending (Cobbina, Huebner, & Berg, 2012). FGC's bring offenders and their family members together in an effort to restructure their relationship, which further attaches them to one another. Attachment can be further expressed when offenders work to repair their relationships with their families, which might include amending relationships, apologizing, and forgiving. Prior research indicates that offenders who participate in conferences are more likely to sincerely apologize and receive forgiveness than offenders who are not given the opportunity to be part of the conference (Sherman et al., 2005; Strang & Sherman, 2003). Maxwell and Morris (1996) argued that apologies are important, as "it appears that the expression of remorse and a genuine desire for reconciliation on the part of the

offender is a significant predictor of offenders' desistance from future offending" (as cited in Strang & Sherman, 2003, p. 28). The process of making amends leads offenders to change how they perceive themselves (Horan, 2015) and can facilitate their attachment to their family.

Commitment

Commitment is the rational component within social bond theory. The extent to which one has dedicated his or her time and energy into conventional activities plays a large role in determining whether an individual will choose to offend or not (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). Given the time and energy that is put into conventional activities, individuals conduct a cost benefit analysis to determine if deviancy is worthwhile. Investing significant time and energy into conventionality produces a stronger commitment to conformity, and the risks of losing this stake in conformity leads one to refrain from criminality (Akers & Sellers, 2004). Activities such as receiving academic degrees or obtaining a dream job are commitments that require a significant amount of time and effort. Such commitments are found to turn offenders away from criminality and put them on a path of desistance from crime following a long stint of criminal behavior (McNeil et al., 2012; Ryan, Testa, & Zhai, 2008; Young & Zhang, 2007). Additionally, offenders can make commitments to participate in programs that strengthen their familial relations.

When offenders and their family members participate in FGC's, they are committing themselves to a positive activity that promotes familial empowerment and reparation. Moreover, those who participate in FGC explore additional ways to engage in law-abiding activities. The self-narratives of the desisting offenders in the Liverpool Desistance Study included the language of agency, and they did so at a rate five times more than active offenders (Maruna, 2001). Where one has an increased sense of agency, he or she has an increased sense of hope for exerting a significant amount of control over his or her life, which ultimately leads to desistance

from crime. This level of commitment is what is expected to be found in FGC as the dialogue that transpires evokes a moral commitment within the offender that motivates him or her to abide by the law so as to avoid damaging his/her newfound attachments and restructured relationships with their family.

Involvement

Individuals have less time to spend engaging in criminal behavior when they are involved in conventional and law-abiding activities in society, such as maintaining a career, participating in local sports leagues, being an active community member, and/or maintaining a family. Individuals begin to fixate on these activities, which require a tremendous amount of their attention. Opportunities to commit crimes are reduced when an individual becomes too busy, too preoccupied, or too consumed in a prosocial event (Cullen & Agnew, 2003). When individuals put in an effort to engage in prosocial activities, such as physical exercise or community volunteering events, they can also benefit both directly and indirectly from such activities. For example, engaging in an educational opportunity or being a part of a family related activity has a tendency to strengthen bonds and decrease involvement in criminal activity (Unal & Cukur, 2011; Wong, 2005).

In the final stage of conferencing, the agreement stage, offenders and their families come to unanimous decisions on how to move on from the crime and prevent further harm in the future. This leads families to discuss how their interactions, activities, and day-to-day experiences will shift. Consequently, an offender must completely change his or her habits and lifestyle. Under those circumstances, offenders not only engage in more prosocial activities but they become more involved with their families, which results in growth within their

relationships. FGC can prompt offenders to become positively engaged and involved with their familial networks and community (Layland, Hill, & Nelson, 2018).

Belief

Belief refers to the extent to which one values conventional norms within society.

Conventional norms are the rules and patterns that most individuals within society follow. Law-abiding citizens believe that the laws imposed on a society are morally justifiable and should be respected; therefore, they are less likely to deviate from these laws and more likely to conform to them (Akers & Sellers, 2004). Conformity and deviation are what separate law-abiding and law-breaking individuals. When a person does not hold the belief that laws and rules have a moral basis, his or her likelihood of criminal involvement is increased (Cullen & Agnew, 2003).

However, if value is placed on societal norms, an individual does not see him or herself as being outside or above the law. Consequently, an individual sees him or herself as a member of society that is expected to follow conventional norms and does so respectively.

One reason offender's family members choose to participate in FGC is because it is in line with their own morals. In general, family members of offenders do not want their communities to alienate their loved one. However, they may desire further understanding of what happened, its effect, and to repair the harm that came from caused by the crime. When an offender is listening and engaging in conversations with his or her families during an FGC it is possible that he or she can experience a shift on their own views of morality as a direct result of his or her families beliefs in societal norms. Maruna (2001) indicates that having a desire to give back, or exhibiting generative behaviors, directly facilitate one's desistance from crime. For example, becoming a substance abuse counselor or talking to local high schools about the dangers and results of drugs use are some ways in which offenders can choose to give back to

their community. Many offenders experience generativity during their process of desistance, which confirms their belief in societal rules. Conferences may increase the chances that an offender will start believing in conventional norms, which will result in him or her engaging in law-abiding behavior.

Informal Social Control

Law enforcement exerts formal social control whereas citizens exert informal social control. The stigma surrounding offenders in society is enforced through criminal sanctions and isolation. Law enforcement officers attach a label to an offender and are less likely to form a relationship with him or her. This label then causes an offender to associate his or her conviction status with his or her identity (Harris, 2006). In contrast, informal social control entails various measures that citizens can choose to act on in order to bring attention to the offender's negative behavior (Groff, 2015). These informal social controls are exemplified throughout all four elements of social bond theory. These elements influence the way in which family members or significant others exert control over the offender's criminal behavior (Groff, 2015). Relational ties among offenders and their family begin with the family members overlooking the stigma surrounding the offender and investing time and effort into forming a tightly bonded relationship (Ekland-Olson, Supancic, Campbell, & Lenihan, 1983).

Sampson and Laub (1993) proposed that informal social control occurs when offenders establish connections with traditional roles in society, which ultimately strengthens their bonds within society and makes them more inclined to refrain from criminal behavior (Morizot & Le Blanc, 2007). One bond that is particularly important is the bond with family. When an offender has bonds with one or more family members, he or she is more likely to experience informal social controls (Flavin, 2001). The strong relational ties offenders have with their family

members are a key factor in the reduction of their criminal behavior (Cid & Marti, 2007; Johnson, Giordana, Manning, & Longmore, 2007; Wright, Cullen, & Miller, 2001). Significant people in offenders' lives—family members, friends, church members—have the power to effectively enforce social norms and law-abiding behavior. The opportunity for offenders to bond with significant others evokes moral change within offenders, which influences them to mirror the non-deviant behavior those significant others surrounding them exhibit (Lehman et al., 2002). The relationship an offender has with people that he or she deems as important and the institutions that he or she is a part of are always present but may evolve over time. It is the nature and quality of these relationships that reinforce offenders' emotional attachment to relationships and goals, the ability they have to achieve societal goals legitimately, the worth they attribute to the bond, and their ability to pursue their goals (McNeil et al., 2012; Maruna, 2012).

The emotional support in FGC typically comes from the people that have the closest ties and strongest emotional relationships with the victim and offender. People that engage in these intimate and well-fortified relationships with offenders are considered informal social controls. These informal social controls play a significant role in desistance, as the cessation of crime is an important process for offenders (McNeil et al., 2012). Prisoners who receive support from their family while imprisoned often feel more inclined to change their criminal behavior as a way to repay them. Families can provide financial support and a place to live for offenders, and they offer guidance, advice, and motivation to accept responsibility for the offender's actions (Bachman, Kerrison, Paternoster, O'connell, & Smith, 2015; Cid & Marti, 2012; Mills, 2005). Forming a solidified bond between an offender and his or her family members is particularly rewarding. Experiencing a strong bond results in offenders being motivated to take their family members' opinions into account and actively avoid behavior that would lead to sanctions and

their families' disapproval (Mills & Codd, 2008). Both the nature and the quality of these relationships pave the way for desistance.

Family Dynamics

The way in which a family members interact with one another make up the family's dynamics (Jesuit Social Services, 2009). These dynamics start in the earliest years of an individual's life and continue to evolve over time. Papero, Frost, Havstad, and Noone (2018) stated "the human family system, a network of relationships, linking each family member to every other, responds dynamically to its environment and the conditions to which all members must adapt" (p. 1). Individuals and their patterns of interactions make up the larger family unit, and together the unit is able to regulate, or control, their dynamics as a whole. Factors such as familial conflicts, new marriages or divorce, employment, diseases/disorders requiring familial care, and an absent parent all have an impact on family dynamics (Jesuit Social Services, 2009; Smalley, Dallos, & McKenzie, 2016; Smokowski, Rose, Bacallao, Cotter, & Evens, 2017). Additionally, prior research on FGC's indicates that FGC's give strength to family values and practices, which can determine the quality of their relationships and interactions (Thornbald, Strandbu, Holtan, & Jennsen, 2015). With various factors influencing family dynamics coupled with the interconnected relationships of families, FGC's have the potential to positively shift family dynamics. Moreover, it becomes relevant to examine FGC's through the lens of family dynamics for those who did not have a conference against those who participated in a conference, in order to better understand the potential impact FGC's could have on families. Examining the potential effects FGC may have on families not only adds to the insufficient research regarding conferencing, but also acknowledges that family members are victims of crime as well.

Family Members as Unrecognized Victims

Mass Incarceration

As of 2016, there were 1,505,400 prisoners incarcerated in federal and state correctional facilities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018). The Federal Bureau of Prisons (2019) noted that of those that are imprisoned, 93 percent are males and 7 percent are females. The United States incarcerates more of its citizen compared to any other country. This is a direct result of criminal justice and social policies. The ‘war on drugs’ campaign launched by the Republican party in the 1970s, mandatory minimum sentencing, and three strikes laws sparked mass incarceration and significantly transformed correctional facilities (Western, 2006). As the rate of incarceration in the United States began to rapidly increase, researchers began to search for answers that could explain the sudden spark in mass incarceration. Due to punitive sentencing laws and policies directly impacting offenders, the family members of those who are incarcerated have recently become recognized as innocent victims of offenders’ criminal behavior and the criminal justice system.

Collateral Costs

The criminal justice system has historically been responsible for controlling crime and aiding prisoners in their rehabilitation and reintegration back to the community. The role that families play in an offender’s successful reentry is often viewed as supplementary as to what the criminal justice system offers. However, even if they have never been incarcerated, family members also experience the systems failures (Light & Campbell, 2007).

Visitations

Most prisoners are able to receive visits while incarcerated. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain family relationships after an individual is incarcerated. This is

especially true when visiting a prisoner is coupled with a number of difficulties that hinder the maintenance of these relationships. Visiting an offender in prison is one way that the bond between an offender and his or her family can be retained. Comfort et al. (2016) noted that the cost of visiting a prisoner extends to transportation issues, childcare, and the long distances separating a prisoner from their original community. These factors make it difficult for a loved one to receive visits. For example, Niven and Stewart's 2005 study (as cited in Light & Campbell, 2007) reported that 41 percent of sampled prisoners did not receive visits because of the financial cost of a visit and the distance it takes to get to the facility that houses their family member.

Prisoners are also expected to pay for their own goods such as extra toiletries, phone calls, and snacks while incarcerated. More often than not prisoners depend on their family members to send them money in order to purchase these items. Although prisoners are able to have jobs while in prison, they often make a few cents per hour, as their hourly wage is not comparable to an hourly wage outside of a correctional facility. Comfort et al. (2016) found that many family members had to reduce the amount of time they accepted calls and visited their loved ones due to the financial burden it imposed. The authors reported that the financial burden of calling and visiting prisoners compromised household bills being paid or groceries being purchased. Incarcerated individuals may have been the greatest or sole source of income that a family had. The legal costs of incarceration coupled with the loss of total income, wages, or benefits families received following an offender's incarceration can be detrimental for a family that was already struggling financially (Light & Campbell, 2007). Aside from financial hardships, family members social status can also be tarnished.

Social Effects

The social stigma surrounding offenders also reaches their kinship. The wedge placed between family members and offenders is solidified with long distance, the jealousy offenders experience as it relates to their romantic partner, and the stress of financially and emotionally supporting offenders. Comfort et al. (2016) noted that the demand placed on women to meet the financial and emotional needs of incarcerated men are often more than they can handle. As a result, some people in prison often seek help from multiple women outside of their primary relationship. This can lead to a lack of trust between offenders and their partners, which may result in a strained relationship. Consequently, negative emotions become more prevalent from both sides of the relationship. The label that is attached to individuals when they are incarcerated not only affects them but their family as well. Communities often ostracize those convicted of murder, rape, and other serious crimes. If an adult commits an act that is depicted as heinous by the media, more often than not their name is released. Those who know the offender and their kin may unintentionally develop negative feelings towards the family members of the offender, especially if they are still supporting the incarcerated offender. The combined negative effects can also result in adverse health effects on an offender's family members.

Health Complications

There are ramifications for the family members' physical health following an individual's incarceration. With the majority of prison inmates being male, the women who are either a romantic partner or a direct kin of an incarcerated male often experience heavy burdens as it relates to their physical health. Families must function in a way that is different from before one of their family members was incarcerated, as the support they had from the individual is no longer present or is significantly decreased. Moreover, feelings of stress can become exacerbated

by the burden of maintaining a relationship with an inmate (Lee & Wildeman, 2013). The physical health of women close to or related to incarcerated men may potentially become very high risk. The chances of women experiencing poor health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and having a heart attack have been found to be greater than the likelihood of men experiencing such conditions (Lee, Wildeman, Wang, Matusko, & Jackson, 2014). The negative effect incarceration has on women that are bonded to incarcerated men extends to the health and emotional state of their children as well.

Children

As of 2010, 2.7 million (3.6 percent) of children under the age of 18 in the United States had at least one parent incarcerated (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). The growth and learning of this next generation is inhibited when they experience the loss of a parent to imprisonment. Incarceration teaches prisoners how to behave within confined walls and socializes them in a way that conforms to criminality, not how to be the best parent or family member they can be (Browning, Miller, & Spruance, 2001). Miller (2006) notes that children do not always know that their parent is incarcerated, as family members sometimes lie about where their parent is for the child's own protection. If the bond between a child and a parent was strong before incarceration, then the unexpected separation between the two may cause confusion, curiosity, and sadness. These factors may lead a child to imagine where their parent could be, when they will be coming home, and what it will be like upon their return. The process of socialization in prison should focus attention on prisoners acquiring the skills necessary to change their behavior. The end result would be positive for offenders and their relationships with their children.

The high expectations children have upon reunification with parents can be shattered if parents do not amount to what they were imagining. Feelings of shame and rejection are viable

emotions for children to feel regarding their parents' incarceration. Children may feel shame for what their parents did in addition to rejection from other necessary social relationships. This happens solely because they are the children of incarcerated parents who committed a criminal act. Psychological strain, anti-social behavior, criminal involvement, and school behavioral issues are some of the negative consequences children may face upon a parent's incarceration (Martin, 2017). Children under the care of one person due to their parent being incarcerated also experience more childhood trauma symptoms, such as having a quick temper, experiencing nightmares, and getting in trouble at school or home, compared to children that do not have an incarcerated parent (Arditti & Savla, 2015).

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Study Design and Sampling

Data for this study come from a broader study examining how RJ impacts reentry outcomes for inmates nearing their release from prison. These data include survey and in-depth interviews with 17 incarcerated men in Indianapolis, Indiana. All participants were originally located at the Plainfield Re-Entry Educational Facility (PREF). However, halfway through the study, every prisoner was relocated to the Indianapolis Re-Entry Educational Facility (IREF) due to an initiative that was implemented to enhance prison capacity, increase overall efficiencies, and maximize assets (Garrison & Cotton, 2009).

Offenders in the current sample ranged in age from 24 to 46 years, with a mean age of 36. Of the 17 offenders, 11 identified themselves as White, 5 as Black, and 1 as Hispanic. Criminal histories varied, as the offender's most recent offense included drug (N=7), property (N=4), and violent convictions (N=3), as well as other minor crimes (N=3). Data collection began in March 2009 and ended in May 2010. Voluntary respondents were not offered any monetary compensation, but were promised strict confidentiality.

Expanding over the course of several months in 2008 and 2009, a trained facilitator conducted weekly orientations for inmates as they arrived at the correctional facility. During the orientation, the facilitator explained the purpose of RJ, explained the nature of the randomized study, and invited inmates to participate in the study. Respondents were recruited to participate if they met two conditions: their crime caused recognizable harm to a victim and they accepted full responsibility for the offense they committed. However, if an offender's victim did not agree to participate, the case would not reach random assignment and the process would then start over

for the next eligible offender. Offenders who did not meet all of the requirements were screened out. The facilitator then met with the remaining eligible volunteers one-on-one.

All eligible inmates signed consent forms, agreeing to be randomly assigned to either the treatment (FGC) or control group (no FGC). Next, the facilitator contacted the families of the offender inviting them to participate in the conference. This study considered the offender's own family as the victim of the offender's behavior. If at least one of the offender's family members agreed to participate, an informed consent was mailed to him or her, which detailed the nature of the study. Once the research team received signed consent forms from both the inmate and victim, the facilitator sent a confidential case identification number to an independent research team member at Indiana University for random assignment. It took two days for the facilitator to be notified as to whether the respondent was in the treatment or control group. The facilitator then informed participants that they would either be in the conferenced or non-conferenced group. In total, ten participants were in the experimental group and seven were in the control group.

Preparation of the study began with pre-surveys administered to all of the participants in the study.² Following this, the research team administered a post-survey to the control group, which concluded their involvement in the study. Next, the participants in the treatment group began their conferences. The research team then consecutively administered post-surveys and conducted interviews with the offenders in the treatment group. All post-surveys and interviews were administered one week prior to each participants release date.

² Missing data occurred because the participants were released from prison before their earliest possible release date was scheduled and/or because participants were relocated to another facility before the research team was able to conduct the interviews or surveys.

Detailing Surveys and Interviews

As it relates to the pre-survey, respondents were asked about their feelings involving the offense they committed (which is the basis for the conference), their court experience and process, as well as their prison experience thus far.³ They were also questioned about the feelings they have towards their family, themselves, and the criminal justice system. A Likert scale was used for all the questions ranging from 1—strongly agree to 5—strongly disagree, 1—very important to 5—not important at all, 1—terrible to 7—delighted, and 1—not at all confident to 10—very confident. All seventeen participants in the study received the same pre-survey and therefore were all asked the same questions. Appendix A provides examples of questions asked on the pre-survey.

After randomization was conducted, post-surveys were distributed to the control group—those who did not participate in the RJ conference.⁴ Being that the control group did not receive the conference, the questions asked in their post-survey were different than the questions asked of the conferenced group. Moreover, the non-conferenced, or control group was asked to participate in the survey in order to gather data on immediate perceptions of RJ, their family, and their preparation for reentry back into society. The control group was asked about their attitudes toward RJ conferencing, their family, their incarceration experience, and their feelings about their reentry into society. Information was also gathered on the offender's opinion of their family, quality of family relations, and their perceptions of self. Examples of questions that the respondents were asked can be found in Appendix B.

³ Data from the pre-survey were missing for one respondent in the treatment group.

⁴ Data from the post-survey were missing for two respondents in the control group.

After the treatment group participated in the RJ conference and had a short visit with their family, a post-survey was conducted within one week of their reentry into society.⁵ Unique questions specific to the conferenced group include asking about the conference process itself, as well as the most satisfying and challenging aspects of the conference. Respondents were also asked about the duration of their incarceration, their feelings about their reentry process, and their general attitudes towards the criminal justice system and the law. Sample questions can be found in appendix C.

In addition to the post-survey, respondents in the treatment group were then asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview that typically was completed on the same day.⁶ The larger study utilized three instruments—the pre survey, post survey, and the interviews. A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized to allow room for follow-up questions from the survey. These open-ended questions that formed the qualitative survey were specific to the conferenced group and allowed them to provide rationales for the answers they provided during the surveys. For this thesis, I will focus specifically on the qualitative survey and interview data with a direct focus on the conference process itself. However, interview questions were not uniform for all participants but instead were generated from survey questions that were open-ended and allowed for considerable probing. Participants were first asked about their reason for wanting to participate in a conference and were then asked to explain their feelings leading up to the conference. Then they were asked a series of questions about their family, the visit with their family, how the conference would impact their reentry process, and how life has been post-release. A sample of the questions can be found in Appendix D.

⁵ Data from the post-survey were missing for three respondents in the treatment group.

⁶ Data from the post-interview were missing for two respondents in the treatment group.

Analysis and Qualitative Data

Once the data were transcribed using Express Scribe, I created a dataset regarding how the conference impacted respondents' family relationships and the dynamics of family relationships for the non-conferenced group. Using thematic analysis, I identified, analyzed, and reported common themes (Braun and Clarke's, 2006). Following Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) qualitative analytical approach, the data were analyzed at three different stages by utilizing inductive analysis. First, the transcripts for both the treatment and control groups were carefully read and the text that was relevant to family or familial relationships was extracted from the text. Similar words or phrases, noted by two or more participants, were grouped together to create a master list of repeating ideas for the treatment and control group separately. A total of thirty-three repeating ideas were developed, nineteen for the treatment group and fourteen for the control group.

Second, themes were derived from grouping the repeating ideas into larger groups that represented a similar topic. Beginning with the first repeating idea in the treatment groups master list, which formed the starter idea for the first theme, I read through the entire list of repeating ideas and each time I came across an idea that was similar to the starter theme, I copy and pasted them into a document that was titled "themes." In order to highlight the conceptual similarities between all ideas, which formed the basis for the themes, I wrote down how the two ideas related to one another in one or two sentences. This was done until all of the relevant text was grouped together in a similar manner, thus forming the themes. The same process was followed for the control group. The treatment groups five major themes included: the nature of communication, a sense of empathy and accountability, the importance of family, RJ as an avenue to repair relationships, and conforming to prosocial behavior. As for the control group, communication,

aspects of relationship building, resuming the father role, the importance of making lifestyle changes, and becoming a productive member of society made up the five major themes. The themes that were developed were guided by the content of the research participants interview data.

Lastly, the themes that were derived from repeating ideas were then organized into more abstract ideas, which represent theoretical constructs. As Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) indicate, a theoretical construct is “an abstract concept that organizes a group of themes by fitting them into a theoretical framework” (p. 67). The constructs were first developed and then tied to the existing theories of social bonds and desistance. The concepts that were developed illustrate the most common patterns in respondents’ accounts. An inductive approach was used to identify meaningful patterns within this current dataset. Although the study is not generalizable beyond the sample, it does provide us with better understanding as to how FGC impacts family relationships.

CHAPTER 4: Research Findings

The resources prison provides—visitations, phone calls, emails—allow for offenders to remain in contact with their family and maintain relationships. Research has shown that the effects of incarceration can be different for each prisoner, but a common effect amongst each is that imprisonment impacts his or her familial relationships. Visitations are made difficult when prisoners are assigned to a facility far away from their home, phone calls and emails begin to decrease overtime due to high costs, and the young children of incarcerated individuals experience animosity or hostility towards their parents for being absent during crucial years of their development (Comfort & Colleagues, 2006). Prisoners often turn to their family members for housing, financial, and emotional support upon their return home (Harding, Morenoff, & Wyse, 2019; Naser & LaVigne, 2006; Naser & Visher, 2006).

Similarly, many adults interviewed in this study experienced some type of strain in their family relationships. As a result, when offenders in the study were faced with the option to participate in a conference with their families they chose to do so. Voluntary participation in FGC suggests that offenders are going through the process of desistance. Volunteering signals that an offender is choosing to engage in prosocial activities, which is in contrast to engaging in criminal behavior. Moreover, it indicates other signals of desistance, such as the desire to repair relationship, which exemplifies the connection between FGC and the continuous process of desistance. The goal of the study is to examine the dynamics of FGC and its impact on offenders' relationships with their family members. Moreover, the treatment group's survey and interview responses are compared to the responses from the control group in order to assess similarities and differences between the two groups.

Treatment Group

Exploring The Nature Of Communication

The conferences were held in closed off rooms where the mediator, the offender, and his family members gathered in a private setting to discuss the offender's most recent crime and the effects it had on the offender's family members. The conference brought the offenders and their family members together in a private and personal setting. This allowed for the offenders and their families to focus their full attention on one another with little distractions, thereby enhancing the way in which they were able to communicate. When the participants were engaging in discussion, more often than not the conversation alluded to aspects of their relationship with one another.

The set-up of an FGC conference entails that the offender, family member, and the mediator sit in a circular setting face-to-face. Such a setting prompted the participants to interact on a personal level. As a result, three participants highlighted the ability to personally engage with other conference participants. After the conference, Martin was asked if there was anything he would have said if he was not being recorded, to which he replied "...the [conference] itself was a personal gathering of loved ones." His post-interview also indicated what surprised him during the conference was that the conference "allowed things to be said face to face and I was able to see the pain and emotions behind the conversation." Similarly, Mark noted, "My sister gave me a real hug. She agreed that it [the future] could be better." Participants exemplified the ways in which they personally interacted during the conference, which included being together with their loved ones, experiencing emotions, and hugging one another. As a result, the conference provided an opportunity for some participants to release their undisclosed thoughts and feelings without fear of repercussions.

Seven participants were pleased with the unrestricted conversation that transpired throughout the duration of the conference. The offender and his family each had the opportunity to talk about anything they felt was necessary, which allowed the dialogue to be more personal. Unrestricted conversation took the form of discussing feelings and expressing concerns. For example, following the conference, Omar described the open platform of the conference as a positive attribute stating “it helped get everything out in the open ... [and] speaking one on one with family, face to face, that was a big thing.” Similarly, Martin noted that the conference was helpful because “there was more opportunity to speak openly about the things that could have, should have, and were done.” Samuel claimed the conference would prevent him from breaking the law in the future because the conference “gave me a whole different perspective. Having everyone [family members] talk about it and get it out of the way was a way for me to let go [of the shame].” These personal conversations resulted in amplified communication between family members at the conference.

Following the conference, Jacob and five others described the ways in which the conference increased their families’ overall communication with one another. Jacob described his feelings as positive and that he “was able to listen to both of them [his wife and son] and hear their points of view.” Likewise, Omar described the meeting as having went well and that “[he] got to hear perspective from [his] girls [daughters], that helped [him] a lot.” Similarly, Mark claimed that without the RJ program, he would not be able to “sit down with [his] divorced parents and pour [his] heart out.” Over half of the offenders in this study exemplified ways in which their verbal and nonverbal communication grew stronger. Examples from this sample included the offenders and their families actively listening, processing information, and replying

to what was said to them. As a result of this, the offenders were able to cognitively process the messages their families were conveying by actually listening to what was being said.

Various aspects of communication led to the expression of a myriad of emotions throughout the conference. The offenders expressed an ability to sympathize with the emotions their families were communicating to them. In particular, seven offenders mentioned various emotions that were present throughout the conference. For example, Stephen acknowledged that a surprising factor during the conference was “listening to everyone and how they [family] felt, even the tears.” Likewise, Kevin asserted, “I have never seen my mother cry until the meeting here... to hear the hurt I caused her--that is something anyone with a soul would never do again.” Moved by his mother’s tears, Kevin came to understand the impact his criminal act had on his family. Others noted that the sharing of emotions was not something that was openly done in the past. Jacob said when he learned he would have a conference he was delighted since “just hearing those feelings--that is something [he] never did at home.” The families acquired the skills necessary to form strong relationships as a result of the conference. Personally interacting with one another and engaging in personal discussions, which led to various emotions being expressed, resulted in increased level of communication among participants who were a part of the conference.

Restorative Justice Leading To A Sense of Accountability

Another theme that aided in the formation of strong relationships was that the conferences led to a sense of accountability among the offenders. This was often discussed in terms of the offender’s empathy towards their families. By empathizing with their families’ feelings, which were a result of the offender’s crime, offenders began to take accountability for their actions. This sense of accountability was first achieved when six offenders recognized that

their actions damaged their familial relationships. Kevin indicated one of his demons was how he destroyed his relationship with his sister: “the hurt I caused people that I supposedly love. I never realized the effect it had on my sister.” Wesley alluded to his relationships being damaged when he said that the hardest part of the conference was “seeing the pain and suffering I put my family through.” Prior to the conference Jacob stated that, “If I am going to come home and do that [commit a crime] it is going to damage the relationship[s] even more.” Following the conference Jacob was asked what the hardest part of the conference was, to which he replied: “listening to Timothy [his son explain he needs his father]. That was the only hard thing... it actually made me and my old lady stronger.” The extent to which he had damaged his familial relationships was unknown to Jacob until after he was able to hear it directly from his family. By reiterating the consequences of the offenders’ actions throughout the conferences, the offender’s family members implied that damage had been done to their relationships. However, it was not permanent.

After recognizing the consequences that their behavior has for others, six offenders held themselves accountable for the offense they committed. After the conference Wesley stated that “[he] is truly sorry for what [he] did and [he] takes responsibility for his actions.” Similarly, Martin said, “[he] had to take responsibility for [his] actions.” Additionally, the meeting was helpful for Jacob because “when [he] got locked up they [family] did not know anything about it. He [sold] dope in front of [his] boys and it just wasn’t right... it was helpful to talk about it.” Samuel also alluded to accountability, as his post-interview indicated that the hardest part of the conference was “admitting things to [his family] that they never knew I did.” Offenders who were part of the conference did not fully comprehend the severity of their crimes and how it affected their families. However, after discussing the crime with their families and listening to

the pain that was inflicted on them, the participants were able to better understand the harm resulting from their criminal actions. The offenders began to empathize with their families' feelings, which prompted them to hold themselves accountable for the crime that they committed and understand the harm that it inflicted on their family.

By holding themselves accountable, six offenders came to various realizations throughout the conference, which indicated strength in their familial relationships. When asked what empowered him during the conference, Omar explained that, "it makes [him] realize how important [he] was to [his] family unit... and that they were to [him]." Similarly, during Kevin's post-interview he indicated that he was surprised by some of the things said during the meeting because "[he] never realized the emotional hurt and embarrassment and everything that went with it until the [conference]." Mark claimed, "There were some things said that I did not realize how I affected peoples lives." He went on to discuss him not being there for holidays, not being present for prom pictures, and being absent when his nieces were born. This suggests that in the past when the offenders chose to engage in criminal acts they were not fully aware of the effects it would have on their family. The offenders gained a sense of accountability by recognizing their behavior adversely affected their familial relationships, resulting in some taking responsibility for the crime they committed and coming to various realizations throughout the conference.

Restorative Justice Revealing The Importance Of Family

As participants described and explained the crime and heard feedback from their family members during the conference, some of the conversation stressed offenders' attachment to their families. A common theme among three offenders was that the conference itself shed light on the importance of family. For example, after the conference, Mark was asked why others should

believe he will not reoffend, to which he responded that, “[he has] a family that believes in [him]. That means more than anything to [him] right now.” Likewise, when Omar was asked how things have been since the meeting, he noted the importance of family, claiming, “now it is back to feeling like [he is] part of the family again, which is more important than anything.” Furthermore, Martin claimed family is the main reason why it would be a problem if he would be re-incarcerated: “family would be the biggest reason it would be hard for [him] to come back here.” Factors such as having a family that believes in them, feeling like they are a part of the family, and family acting as a reason to not returning to prison exemplified the ways in which the offenders stressed their families’ importance. As a result, the offenders can feel welcome upon their return home and use their families as motivation to refrain from future criminality.

The conference revealed the importance of one another, which led family members to offer support to the offenders following their release. Specifically, eight offenders alluded to their family members offering them support post-release. Samuel was asked what surprised him during the conference and he responded, “they [family] were more supportive than I thought.” Similarly, Kevin said, “this program is my foundation and what anchored everything in, I have a support group now that is nothing but family.” Likewise, Stephen said “they [family] are my support system... It’s like I have strengthened the bond between the people in my life and strengthened my bond with humanity.” Support is a positive attribute in any relationship and such support will help offenders stick to the agreements they made at the end of their conference. Supporting an offender post-release shows that he or she is cared for, that others want him or her to succeed, which ultimately strengthens relationships with his or her support system.

Moreover, the conference further revealed the offenders’ attachment to their family by expressing fear that family members would give up on them if they continue on the same path,

which five offenders specifically mentioned. Jacob claimed, “I am not just going to lose my life, but whatever family I have out there. If I am going back to the streets, I am not going to be around my kids.” Omar claimed “the effects [of the crime] on my family were devastating... they [family] would give up on me if I make another mistake.” Similarly, Samuel indicated that his children and family would give up on him as well: “the biggest problem with going away for a long time is my kids and family...that is the end of it right there [if re-arrested].” Half of the sample noted that they could potentially lose their relationships with their children and other family members if they commit another offense in the future. This revealed a certain level of attachment between the offenders and their family, which was reinforced through the support the families offered and the realization of their importance in the offender’s life.

Restorative Justice As An Avenue To Repair Relationships

RJ being used as an avenue to repair relationships further exemplified familial attachment. Four offenders alluded to the lack of trust their family members had towards them. For example, Jacob claimed, “if my [family] cannot trust me, then who else will? The [conference] would build trust up.” Moreover, Omar indicated that “[being arrested] hurt the trust and belief [his daughters] had in [him]. [He] received a letter a long time ago that [his daughter] did not think she could trust [him], which was one of the biggest reason I wanted to participate in a conference].” Just under half of the sample highlighted aspects of trust, which impact the quality of their relationships. As a result of bringing them together and discussing the crime and its effects, the offenders were able to recognize that they had broken their families trust and that they must work to reinstate their trust for one another.

Three offenders alluded to aspects of honesty as it relates to being honest with themselves and their family members. For example, Kevin explained that during the conference he “honestly

listened, did not argue, and that was tough.” Furthermore, Wesley noted, “Everyone got off their chest what they were holding in. Secrets [would] still [be] buried [if they did not have a conference].” Omar claimed, “I never wanted to be looked at as someone dishonest. I always wanted to be the honest person. Telling my children and my wife I lied to them was probably the hardest part.” Some offenders mentioned aspects of honesty, such as actually listening to what their family said, disclosing past secrets, and coming clean about prior lies. As a result, the conference served as a mechanism in which the offenders and family members were able to restore their relationship, by being honest and open to trusting each other again.

Part of repairing relationships is to apologize for wrong doings and ask for forgiveness, which four offenders were able to do. For example, Jacob explained, “it was helpful to talk about it [the crime] because [he] was never able to apologize to [his family] before.” Kevin revealed “...the forgiveness and love that was expressed, and being able to apologize” as positives of the conference. After the conference Mark was hesitant on answering ‘yes’ when asked if he apologized to his family because “sorry is just a word, it is [my] actions. I want people to *know* I am sorry.” Just under half of the offenders were motivated to apologize to their families following the conversations that occurred throughout the conference. Never talking about the crime before, as well as receiving forgiveness were common reasons for some of the offenders choosing to apologize. As a result, the offenders apologies were sincere, easily understood, and could hopefully be forgiven.

Seven participants indicated that one of their priorities was to strengthen the relations they have with their family. Martin said that “[he] felt like [his family] was able to grow from the whole experience... grow closer and bond a little better.” Omar concurred when asked how he felt after the meeting: “[he] felt like [his family] were closer.” Samuel noted, “I have to stop just

talking and doing things. It is better to show someone than tell them.” Almost all of the offenders’ highlighted aspects of relationship building that was facilitated by the conference, including growing, bonding, and taking action. As a result, offenders became motivated to prioritize these relationships in order to reap the benefits of the relationships, which include reinforcement of their familial bonds and making amends.

Seven of the participants alluded to the fact that the conference itself was a tool that aided in offenders mending relationships with their families. For example, when Wesley was asked after the conference why he wanted to participate, he replied, “to make amends with [his] family.” Kevin concurred with “[RJ] ought to be mandatory. If they [prisons] really want to get people ready for society, they [prisoners] need to make those amends.” Mark indicated that him and his sister have plans to build a better relationship, “me and Sarah are going to start working on our relationship.” Several offenders exemplified the ways in which the conference helped amend their familial relationships. Examples include giving the offenders a platform to do so, bringing the families together, and making plans for the future. If familial relationships have become damaged enough to the point that they need professional assistance, FGCs can provide an opportunity for families to make amends with each other.

Conforming To Prosocial Behavior

Offenders acknowledged that continuing their law breaking behavior upon their release would only produce the same negative outcomes. This prompted some to make a commitment to only engage in law-abiding behavior. Six offenders mentioned aspects of their families’ expectations of them post-release to conform to prosocial behavior. For example, Kevin explained, “you heard it, you know what we expect now, you know what we want [restating what his family said to him].” Quite similarly, Martin stated, “this is what is needed and this is what is expected from [him].” Additionally, Samuel discussed “knowing how everyone [family]

feels and what they are expecting of [him]." Over half of the participants indicated that they have a newfound commitment to conform to prosocial behavior. As a result of the families disclosing their expectations to the offenders, the participants felt more inclined to commit to engage in law-abiding behavior.

Nine offenders expressed their willingness to exert control over their own lives by making behavioral changes in order to successfully commit to law-abiding behavior. For example, Samuel bluntly stated, "I have to change me," after he was asked how he felt when the conference was completed. Similarly, Martin disclosed, "it [conference] helped me evolve and learn things." Mark stated, "[the conference] brought about a change in [his] life. [He] is not going to be part of the recidivism rate [or a] statistic." Additionally, Wesley said, "because of the [conference] with [his] family [he] will think for a change and think before [he] acts." Almost all of the offenders exemplified the ways in which the conference has motivated them to make behavioral changes. Examples include being aware of the changes they must make, evolving as a person, and thinking before they act on their criminal impulses. As a result, offenders in this study mirrored the path towards desistance because they were previously not able, or willing to, control their criminal behavior.

One aspect of behavioral change that the offenders exhibited was that they now plan to give back to their communities as opposed to jeopardizing it. Notably, seven participants in this study had a strong desire to give back to their community, which exemplified their newly discovered generative behaviors. Jacob exemplified this when claiming that "[he] used to coach minor league football teams... I want to work with children [again]." Similarly, Wesley stated, "I want to give back to the youth. I want to be a youth minister and talk to the kids voluntarily, not for pay." Additionally, Kevin plans to participate in the "just say no program, and go with them

to different schools... being able to associate with them makes it believable because I have been there.” Over half of the offenders alluded to several ways in which they plan on giving back to their community: coaching youths sports leagues, becoming a minister, and attending youths school programs. This exemplifies how the offenders would take their negative life experiences and use them positively to prevent youths from entering or continuing criminal paths, highlighting their conformity to prosocial behavior.

Three offenders discussed the ways in which they will be more engaged with their family through leisurely activities. For example, when the interviewer asked Jacob if the first thing on his agreement was to go to church with his family, he replied, “yes. That is important to do.” Mark’s agreement also included helping out at his local church one weekend out of the month as he stated that “[he] volunteers... for church. That will be father and son day.” Similarly, Samuel also disclosed components of his agreement, which included “fishing with [his] dad.... [his] dad has a bunch of wood and [he] is going to cut it all up for him.” As a result of familial engagement, offenders can begin to desist from crime through their families’ encouragement to spend time with one another and actively making plans to spend time together. All in all, the offenders that participated in the conference expressed common themes related to RJ. They include the nature of communication, empathizing with family, understanding the importance of family, RJ acting as an avenue to repair relationships, and conforming to prosocial behavior.

Control Group

The control group consisted of seven offenders that volunteered to participate in the conference, but ultimately this group was not selected for it. Although no conference was conducted, these seven offenders participated in a pre-survey followed by a post-survey, which revealed similar themes among the group as it relates to their familial relationships. Common

themes among the non-conferenced group include open communicating, relationship building, resuming the fatherhood role, making lifestyle changes, and becoming a productive member in society.

Eagerness To Openly Communicate With Family

Despite not participating in the FGC, four offenders expressed a newfound commitment to only have positive familial relationships. The desire to engage in conversation with family members—listening and providing feedback—and have a neutral platform to facilitate this open communication was apparent among four of the offenders. Specifically, Ernie “was looking forward to the opportunity to discuss these issues prior to [him] getting out.” Likewise, Harry was disappointed he was not in the conference because it would have “put [his family] in a position that [his family] can tell [him] what they are afraid to tell [him] out there... everybody would have been able to say whatever they wanted on neutral grounds... that probably could not happen anywhere else.” Several of the offenders expressed their desire to explore the myriad of aspects of communication that conferencing had to offer. A few offenders noted that professional input during the meeting would have been a positive attribute. Ryan noted, “someone with a professional input on the outside could help me get through it a lot easier versus trying to do it myself.” Some offenders highlighted the importance of professional input when making attempts to form positive family relationships for reasons such as a mediator’s mere presence and their role in easing the dialogue between them and their family. If given the opportunity to have this dialogue, a few offenders felt they would have been made aware of exactly how their crime affected their family.

Though they did not have the chance to engage in conference, three offenders acknowledged that their criminal behavior had adverse impacts on their family members. For

example, Nathan said: “I really hurt some people. Like my sister and my mom.” Harry claimed that the “guilt in me is solely overwhelming because of how much I have put them through [and] how much I let them down.” The participants also expressed an inclination to experience various communication aspects with their family because it would have given the offenders an opportunity to explain their crime. Owen claimed that “I wanted to explain to my family why I did it and what was the cause of what I did.” Offenders made these comments knowing that the crime had a negative impact on their kinship, but they were not able to comprehend the level of impact of the crime without hearing it directly from them. Additionally, the offenders knew that their crime affected their family and that the damages were reversible, which prompted them to want to explain the crime and openly communicate with their family about it.

Aspects Of Relationship Building

Another aspect of making a commitment to having positive family relationships was the mechanisms that facilitate such commitment, such as characteristics of relationship building. Five offenders expressed a desire to apologize to their family and ask them for forgiveness. Ryan wanted to “try to get my [his] point across that [he is] sorry for the pain [he has] caused to people.” Similarly, Harry indicated that “[he] really wants them [family] to know how sorry [he] is.” On the other hand, Owen claimed, “[he] wanted to see if [his family] forgives [him] for what [he has] done.” The conference would have provided the offenders an opportunity to apologize and ask their family to forgive their criminal behavior prior to the offenders’ release.

In addition to apologizing and forgiving, a couple of offenders stressed the importance of providing closure to their family. For example, Nathan explained: “I was really just hoping that this would be a stepping stone to where I could help give my family some closure [and] give myself some closure.” Similarly, Harry stated that “[he] is hoping it will put them [family] in a

position that they can tell [him] what they are afraid to tell [him] out there. They need to say it for them to feel better and heal.” Others noted their desire to restore the broken familial relationships. Following the conference, Ryan claimed that he was going to “try to amend [his] broken relationships.” Overall, some expressed their commitment to form positive relations with their families and repair the damage.

Resuming The Fatherhood Role

As part of the offenders’ commitment to having positive family relationships, almost expressed a strong desire to resume the father role when they become reunited with their children. As a result, four offenders mentioned that being imprisoned has separated them from their children and severely degraded their role as a parent. For example, Owen stated, “my son. My son wants me to be there for him. I have seen my son grow up in pictures and it is kind of hard.” Asked how his family has been affected, Harry replied, “by me not being there, like for my kids. That has got to be a whole lot tougher than I imagine.” Additionally, Owen noted that if he were to be re-arrested, it would “take [him] away from his children.” Several offenders indicated their yearning to be a father to their children again. Examples from these offenders involve being present in their children’s lives, which can be achieved by refraining from their criminal impulses, and also being active in their children’s lives, by way of spending time with them and taking care of them.

Five offenders had a strong desire to take care of their children when they become reunited with their family. For example, Nathan explained: “I am nervous about being able to help out [his family]. Am I going to be able to provide for my family? ... I want to raise my daughter.” Similarly, Ryan said prison made him a better person because “it gave me time to be sober... I missed out on raising my kids... I want to try and get involved with my kids more.” Harry indicated that he wants to “still have time to be a father, not just somebody out there

working.” A few acknowledged that their imprisonment caused a strain on their relationship with their child(ren) and expressed a desire to make up for the absence in their children's lives.

Importance Of Making Lifestyle Changes

Five offenders stressed the importance of letting go of their old lifestyle by creating a new one and standing by these changes. Harry stated it would be a problem if he got caught again: “...It’s [because of] what I have done to my family, what is running through their [family] head, and how disappointed my family is.” Furthermore, Nathan claimed, “[he] does not want to fail them [his family].” Similarly, Ernie discussed: “failure. I am not going to accept the failure.” Such guilt and fear has resonated with the offenders and may act as a motivational factor for them to revamp their lifestyles in order to reduce their chances of experiencing such guilt in the future. If the families were given a chance to participate in the conference, it may have provided the pathway necessary to strengthen their relationships.

In addition, some indicated that they were aware of their responsibilities and what is expected of them upon their return home. Harry mentioned during the pre-survey that he was nervous about reentry because he has “to be a friend... a father... a son... to be there for the financial and personal side of it [relationships].” Similarly, Owen claimed his mother made her expectations upon release clear and that “[his] mother expects [him] to not go into relapse... [his family] is expecting better of [him] because [he] promised them.” As offenders become more aware of their families’ expectations, they can begin to adapt their behavior to be in line with these expectations. As a result, these behavioral changes may spark relationship changes.

These expectations and responsibilities resulted in some offenders disclosing that they must change their behavior. Owen noted that, “[he] will have to think before [he] reacts now.” During the pre-survey Nathan claimed that, “[he] does not want that old life back, [he] wants a new life... nobody is going to believe that until they see what [he] is doing” and his post-survey

indicated that “[his] decision making has damaged others so [he has] to start thinking about those consequences before, instead of afterwards.” Factors such as refraining from acting on impulses, letting go of the past, seeking a new path, and acknowledging that in order to avoid re-incarceration behavioral changes need to be made, were factors found in the participants’ self-narratives. Overall, participants exemplified their need to desist and the logic they applied to motivate themselves to achieve this change.

Becoming A Productive Member Of Society

Many stressed that they did not want to be re-incarcerated, which prompted the offenders to discuss how they will adopt a new outlook on life, one that sparks a belief in conformity. Another common theme amongst the offenders was their desire to become a productive member of society. In particular, a couple indicated that caring for their own families and mom was one of the ways they could spend their time productively post-release. For instance, when Harry stated “[he is] nervous about being able to have enough time... to take care of [his] mom and make sure she is okay.” Offenders felt that they had a debt to pay because previously they were a part of the problem, as opposed to being a part of the solution. Others claimed that they would like to mentor others as a way of giving back to their community. Ryan disclosed that his intent was to “do whatever [he] can to repay [his] debt to society. If [he] could mentor the kids that are in a similar position that [he] was in... [he would] feel like [he has] won.” Moreover, Owen revealed that his plans for reentry included “church events, speak to ex-drug addicts, ex-offenders, and people who have problems with sex and stuff like that. Offenders have lived through various experiences such as violence, imprisonment, and negative social stigmas. Overcoming these obstacles and attaching themselves to certain groups or causes, such as mentoring others or attending church, will increase their chance of achieving desistance.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine what effects FGC have on prisoners' relationships with their family members. Using Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory and Maruna's (2001) theory of desistance, this thesis examined what aspect of prisoners' family relationships improved throughout the conference and why. Among offenders that were selected to participate in a conference, several themes were identified, including RJ revealing the importance of family, RJ as an avenue to repair relationships, RJ opening up the nature of communication, RJ leading to a sense of accountability, and the offenders' willingness to conform to prosocial behavior. The importance of family and repairing familial relationships represented the offenders' expression of attachment to their family. This reiterates that forming close bonds with family members can facilitate desistance for offenders.

The importance of family was revealed when five participants mentioned that their family would give up on them if the offenders did not change their ways; eight participants mentioned their familial support post-release, and three offenders referred to family as the most important people in their lives. These results suggest that by expressing attachment to family members, offenders can become motivated to solidify their bonds with their family and exhibit more control over their behavior, which will ensure that the bond does not get fractured. This pattern of results is consistent with prior research on social bonds, which indicates that offenders who have strong familial bonds exhibit higher self-control and are less likely to engage in criminality (Cao, Burton Jr, & Liu, 2018; Vaughan et al., 2017).

Making amends and repairing relationships are factors that are central to any variation of RJ (Chang, 2017). The family members in the present study detailed the emotional harm that offenders imposed on them following their criminal activity and were seeking emotional

restoration throughout the conference. Participants exemplified how RJ can be used to repair relationships when seven of them alluded to amending their familial relationships and taking the steps to actively work towards a better relationship. When offenders accept responsibility for their crime, apologize for it, and their family members accept this apology, they can begin to repair and build their relationships with one another (Braithwaite, 2016). Four participants mentioned apologies, forgiveness, and trust; and three offenders mentioned being honest with each other.

The participants also showed that the conference enabled them to obtain certain skills that are necessary to form strong relationships with their family members. This was exemplified through RJ reaching various aspects of communication and ultimately causing offenders to empathize with their family, which led to a sense of accountability among the offenders. Factors such as participation, recognizing harm, and communicating accountability for the crime by the offender to their victim or family exemplify the ways in which RJ promotes emotional intelligence (Tata & Jamieson, 2017). While the typical court process devalues communication between offenders, RJ places great value on communication and, more specifically, how communication can be enhanced via emotional intelligence.

Imprisonment reduces the quality and rate of communication for offenders and their family members. This occurs via physical separation and the inability to communicate with one another whenever they feel inclined to do so. Weaver (2009) explains that successful mediation between offenders and their families occurs through effective communication via family members using language in order to deliver a strong message. Maruna (2001) highlights the importance of language throughout interactions with offenders and alludes to the approach of “normal-smithing,” which delivers an important message to offenders: regardless of the labels

society has attached to the offender, he or she has components of normalcy and therefore has it within him or herself to come back to the moral mainstream of society. Several offenders experienced diverse aspects of communication, which allowed them to explore the various nature of communication, such as listening, receiving, and processing dialogue. Specifically, seven offenders mentioned various aspects of emotions, six alluded to engaging in personal dialogue, five mentioned characteristics of communication, and three offenders noted how the personal interactions really put meaning into what was said throughout the conference.

Family members and direct victims are more likely to forgive offenders if offenders effectively communicate that they understand the harm that their crime caused and hold themselves accountable for the crime (Campbell, 2017). Sincere apologies and forgiveness confirm an offender's commitment to morality, which is exemplified by acting in an honorable manner in society (Collins, 2004). Notably, offenders achieved a certain level of empathy and accountability during the conference, which can be one of the first steps taken in forming a strong relationship with their family. Offenders exemplified the ways in which RJ brought on a sense of accountability as many took responsibility for the crime they committed and noted that their familial relationships had been damaged as a result of their actions.

Making a commitment to only engage in law abiding behavior was made possible when the offenders discussed the ways in which they would conform to prosocial behavior. By nature of the FGCs, offenders and their family members are attempting to make amends with one another. The process of amending relationships helps an offender expand his or her prosocial identity, which is made possible through prosocial behaviors (Horan, 2015). Moreover, desisting offenders go through identity changes that result in new, coherent, and prosocial identities (Maruna, 2001). Examples of a newly acquired prosocial identity may include exerting control

over one's own life (agency) and gaining a sense of purpose and/or meaning for one's life. To this effect, making a commitment to only engage in law abiding behavior allows offenders to position their newly acquired identity in the context of their bonds, as it relates to compatibility and strengthening relationships. Compatibility is determined by spending time with others who have similar goals or those who help an individual carry out these goals. Relationships can be strengthened after an offender commits him or herself to law-abiding behavior. Doing so would ensure that the offender is no longer inflicting harm on others as a result of committing crimes.

Offenders can spend time with individuals who motivate and influence them to engage in law-abiding behavior by engaging in prosocial activities. Examples of the participants in this study initiating their shift toward conformity include nine offenders mentioning how they intend on changing their behavior, seven offenders mentioning generativity, six offenders noting their families' expectations of them post-release, and three participants alluding to the activities they will engage in with their family upon their release. Several offenders reiterated the desire to give back, or generativity, after participating in the conference. The experimental group findings exemplified the ways in which FGCs impact offenders' relationships with their families.

The current study also explained family dynamics for the group who did not have a conference. Major themes for this group included aspects of communication, relationship building, resuming the fatherhood role, the importance of making lifestyle changes, and becoming a productive member of society. Communication, relationship building, and resuming the fatherhood role exemplified the offenders' commitment to having positive family relationships. A belief in conformity was derived from the offenders' reports of the importance of making lifestyle changes coupled with becoming a productive member of society. This pattern of results suggests that the themes that emerged from the control group have commonalities with

the experimental group—communication, relationship building, and conformity—but also themes unique to the control group. These unique themes included the importance of making lifestyle changes and resuming the father role. To this effect, three of the five themes found in the control group were similar to the themes found in the treatment group.

This was unexpected in that the treatment group received a conference and the control group did not. Findings suggest that FGC may not be solely responsible for improving offender's relationships with their families and positively shifting their families dynamics. This does not take away from the positive findings for the group who received the conference; however, it indicates that receiving just one conference might not be enough for offenders to fully receive the benefits of FGC as it relates to their familial bonds. Perhaps FGC should be offered multiple times throughout the course of a year in order to really measure the effects it produces.

With the treatment and control group having more similarities than differences, both groups' reentry outcomes would be expected to be similar as well. All offenders in the study were housed in a facility that prides itself on reentry and offers programs that go beyond teaching the basic vocational skills that many prisons have to offer (Lloyd, 2007). The facility allowed for FGC to take place, which is uncommon throughout most correctional institutions. However, value can still be found within FGC regardless of the similarities between the conferenced and non-conferenced group. The treatment group was actually given a conference, had intense dialogue with their family members, and was able to really put their future and reentry process into perspective alongside their family.

Three of the themes—communication, relationship building, conformity—were common between the two groups. For instance, RJ highlighting the nature of communication in the treatment group and an eagerness to openly communicate within the control group was found. In

the treatment group, the various aspects of communication—personal interaction, dialogue, increased level of communication, and emotions—were discussed. Yet, the control group expressed a yearning for that type of communication with members of their family. The non-conferenced groups eagerness alone is not enough to produce significant changes amongst the offenders, as they would need the actual programming to increase their level of communication within their family. Having strong communication within families can ensure that offender's family members stay in accordance with the offender's process of desistance. Additionally, the treatment group has obtained communication skills with family, which can ensure that in the future the families would have continued conversations, even if different as a result of strengthened their bonds.

The control groups alluded to what they wanted to get out of the conference, suggesting the reentry process was at the forefront of their minds. The treatment group effectively held themselves accountable and became aware of the importance of their family, which was not found within the control group. Perhaps this is because of the nature of FGC, which the control group was not able to experience. These themes, especially the two unique to the conferenced group—empathy leading to accountability and the importance of family—highlight the value of FGC in an offender's reintegration process.

It is important to note that findings may differ if participants were coerced to participate. Coercion can lead people to say things that they believe others want to hear and individuals participate because of others' expectation. Thus, any participant who is or feels coerced to take part in FGC could result in skewed research findings.

According to social bond theory and desistance, offenders should form attachments to prosocial people and activities if they want to reduce the likelihood of committing crimes in the

future. The participants that did not participate in the conference produced results that mirror making a commitment to form positive family relationships and acquiring a belief in conformity. However, the control group participants were not able to discuss such matters with their family members and follow through. Consequently, they did not produce results that highlight *actual* improvements in their familial relationships. Nevertheless, these findings show that offenders who volunteered to participate in FGCs alluded to various aspects of their relationships with family.

Limitations

Despite these findings, there are several limitations within this study. First and foremost, the sample size (N=17) is small. This, coupled with missing data for some of the narratives, weaken the overall size and findings yielded within the study. This project used a comparative sampling technique that entailed comparing prisoners in the treatment who received RJ conferencing with prisoners in the control group who did not receive conferencing. As such, the two samples are not representative of all those in prison. Although common in qualitative research, the findings for this project are not suitable for making broad generalizations about the factors that facilitate desistance.

The sample also focuses solely on adult male offenders involved in the criminal justice system. Offenders that comprise of women, juveniles, and are of Hispanic origin are excluded, which is problematic, given that together they make up a large portion of the criminal justice system. Future studies should include this demographic group.

Another limitation is that the manually coded data was not checked for coding reliability; only the author has coded this dataset. Future studies should include working with a team of researchers who can check for inter-coder reliability, which would increase the validity of the

findings. Also while transcribing the interviews, some of the language was inaudible. This is problematic in that some key information may have been discussed in the original interviews, but this author was not able to properly transcribe the text due to audio malfunctions.

There is some promise that FGC improves family bonds for some offenders. However, this study shows that this improvement was a minor intervention that was discovered amongst a minuscule number of people. In the future, programs offered to offenders should facilitate organized and continual conversations with family members who can provide prosocial support. Positive support from family members that will actually increase the chances of an offender's successful reentry, not compromise it, is imperative. Offenders must differentiate toxic family members from those that can provide them support, and programs must adopt a process that facilitates such conversations and support. Additionally, it appears that FGC can act as a starting point in an offender's desistance process. However, future studies should follow up with participants to determine if agreed upon agreements were followed.

With the participants being house together, there is potential that they were discussing their familial issues and answers that they gave on the pre and post surveys with one another. This could prompt offenders to think through the minds of others, or take others experiences and make sense of their own. The pre and post surveys/interview asked the participants different questions; the participants were not asked a uniform set of questions. Consequently, asking different questions to different offenders seemed to have produced similar answers as well as answers that varied. With the offenders not being asked the same set of questions at all stages of the research and producing slightly different results, it begs the question of if these differences have any actual meaning.

Finally, in order to fully examine participants' relationships after participating in a conference, longitudinal studies should be conducted that look at these effects over time. There is a vast amount of literature on the effects that RJs and FGCs produce, but research lacks in the area of how participants' relationships can improve following a conference.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study yielded unique findings as related to prisoners' relationships with their family members following their participation in an FGC. These results are consistent with prior research that identifies familial relationships as primary factors that suppress an offender's criminal behavior. Moreover, a large body of research has analyzed how informal social controls influence individuals to refrain from criminal activity, as well as what the desistance process looks like for various offenders. Previous studies have examined the presence and quality of familial attachments outside of RJ and how these bonds put offenders on the path of desistance. This study is unique in that all participants volunteered to be part of a conference and they were compared with those who did not receive conferencing. This study examined the effects conferencing had on prisoners' relationships with their family members. Specifically, it provides insight into how familial relationships can be strengthened or improved by bringing the families together and how the families can control offenders' criminal behavior and steer them towards desistance.

In this study, the need to repair damaged familial relationships is apparent. There are a number of programs prisoners can participate in that attempt to get them ready for their return to society, such as drug/alcohol programs, therapy, and programs that teach basic life skills. Correctional facilities in the United States are filling up at alarming rates, so individualizing treatment for every offender is difficult. Additionally, offenders are assessed and placed in

programs that fit their needs, and these programs facilitate their reintegration into society.

Drug/alcohol and therapy courses are popular reentry programs, and offenders often refer to their family members when participating in such programs. Many offenders return home to their spouses/significant other or family when they are released from prison. As a result, when prisoners inform correctional officials in the prison where they will reside, assigned parole officers check that the home is safe to ensure that the prisoner can legally reside there. Beyond that, prisons generally do not offer many programs, besides parenting classes, which deal directly with offenders and their families in order to rekindle their relationships or strengthen them before the offenders' return home. This thesis suggests that FGCs can impact family behavior and relationships in numerous ways.

The bulk of reentry programs are comprised of educational and vocational courses, which indicates that prisons are lacking in terms of the type and amount of programs they are offering to offenders upon their release (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). Moreover, these programs should integrate an offender's family as much as possible. The root cause of prisoners' criminality cannot be fully examined without taking the family into consideration. Ignoring such important personnel can undo all of the prior work programs have done if prisoners return home to broken families. This study continuously highlighted that the offenders' criminal behavior resulted in damaged family relationships. These relationships cannot be repaired while an individual is incarcerated and his or her family is in the community. However, if prisons begin to implement programs like RJ and FGC, prisoners can unite with their family before their release and work towards the goal of reparation and restoration. When prosocial bonds between prisoners and their families are established and maintained, not only can it result in improved familial relations but also it can reduce the likelihood of subsequent offending.

The similarities within the treatment and control group include: relationship repair, the nature of communication, and a belief in conformity. RJ revealing the importance of family and RJ leading to a sense of empathy, which led to accountability, were not found within the control group. Additionally, resuming the fatherhood role was not found within the treatment group. These findings suggest that FGC is valuable in that it produced effects in the treatment group that the control group was yearning for. This highlights that FGC can positively impact an offenders reentry process by revealing the importance of family, acting as a mechanism in which relationships can be repaired, and increase the level of communication.

However, only participating in a conference once puts offenders and their families at risk of not maintaining these skills to the effect that it will continue to improve their relationships. Therefore conferences should be conducted multiple times. If possible, the same facilitator should continue to work with the offenders and their families so that they do not have to keep revealing private information to different people. Keeping up with the families, motivating, and encouraging them to continually practice the skills they obtained from the conference would be beneficial. This constant reminder will aid in their relationship repair, which comes from the offender's attachment to their family, their commitment to engage in prosocial activities, their actual involvement in activities, and their newfound belief in societal norms. Having conferences periodically will ensure that offenders remain on a straight and continuous path of desistance.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Examples of Questions in the Pre-Survey

Do you think the meeting will help build back trust?

Do you think a restorative justice meeting will be helpful?

How has your family been affected by your crime?

I feel that I have adequately been held accountable for my offense

My actions were very much out of character for me

Currently, how supportive is your family?

How do you feel about the way things are between you and your close relatives, children, and partner?

I see myself as basically a criminal

After release I plan to give back and help other people such as former inmates, youth in trouble with the law, or people with drug/alcohol problems?

The criminal justice system is generally fair

Obeying the law is the best way to keep the community safe

APPENDIX B

Examples of Questions in the Post-Survey (CONTROL)

Why did you want a restorative justice conference?

How disappointed are you that you were not able to have a meeting?

What is expected of you?

Will you try to do anything similar to restorative justice on your own after you get out, or while you are still here?

During my incarceration, something has empowered me to be a better person when I get out.

How much do you think your actions/incarceration have affected the 'victim'?

I understand what it was like for the victims

After release I believe that I will succeed at most things I try

I am nervous about what life will be like after release.

How confident are you that you will have a successful reentry into society?

APPENDIX C

Example of Questions in the Post-Survey (TREATMENT)

Was there anything you would say if you were not being recorded?

The conference will help me from breaking the law in the future

How did the meeting go?

Were you surprised by anything that happened or anything that was said in the conference?

I thought the meeting was helpful

What empowered you during the conference?

Did you apologize to your victim?

Would you recommend restorative justice to other offenders who are in a similar situation?

What three things were most satisfying about the character?

What three things were hardest about the conference?

Has your experience at this facility changed any of your perceptions of the correctional system?

After release I believe that I will have close personal relationships

After my release I plan to give something back to others to make up for what I have done

In general, I have respect for the law, the police, the courts, and the correctional system

APPENDIX D

Example of Questions in the Treatment Group Interview

How did the meeting go?

Was my role as a facilitator minimal?

Why could you not do this in your own without the program?

Were you surprised by anything that was said during the conference?

Why should people believe you won't reoffend?

Tell me in your own words why you wanted to participate in restorative justice

What are your thoughts about the restorative justice program?

How did you feel leading up to the conference?

How did you feel after the meeting was over, right when you signed the contract?

Do you think having this contract with you might help keep you on track?

Why do you think it will help you not reoffend?

Do you think you have a better understanding of the harm you have caused to other people?

If you hadn't had this meeting, how do you think things would be between you and your family?

Did you learn anything extra in the meeting about how they have been affected, anything new that came up?

Do you think people said what they wanted to say?

After the formal part of the meeting I left the room and you guys had a few minutes to visit, how did that go?

Do you feel like that support is stronger now?

Do you think this meeting will help your transition?

How have things been since the meeting?

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