Introduction

A Framework for Understanding Parental Incarceration

Do not weep; do not wax indignant. Understand.

Spinoza (1632–1677)

[People] may be said to resemble not the bricks of which a house is built, but the pieces of a picture puzzle, each differing in shape, but matching the rest, and thus bringing out the picture.

Felix Adler

The visiting area of the jail had a mix of smells: urine, sweat, and desperation. I was instantly reminded of the homes I had visited during my tenure as a social worker, many years prior. The air was close and the room noisy as it was packed with visitors on this early Saturday morning. Children were fidgeting on their mothers' laps, rolling around on the dirty floor, trying to make paper airplanes out of the religious pamphlets they had found in display racks on the wall. There were mostly women and children here today. I tried to push away the thoughts of an earlier visit to this facility, during which I had entered through a different door with the sheriff to tour the holding cells and "pods" where the prisoners spent their days, months, and sometimes years. No fresh air, no sunlight, no privacy, but instead noise, bars, day after day, hour after hour. A human zoo—a place invisible to most except the incarcerated and their captors. So much pain in that place—it overwhelmed me.

There is a reason that prisons are tucked away far from the hustle and bustle of daily life—built in remote towns that need jobs and "industry." Human suffering, whether caused by one's own actions or the actions of others, is a hard thing to confront. No one wants to feel it around them. No one wants to see it. Even this jail went unnoticed in the heart of town, probably because of the lack of windows. The sheriff told me that "he likes it that way." The many jails and

prisons I had visited were surrounded by fences, wires, and walls: all of it to keep some locked away and the rest of us out.[1]

It is a risk to start a book on parental incarceration with a personal reflection from field notes compiled during a study of the impact of parental incarceration on families. The notes reflect the visceral experience of *being there* and the transformative potential of fieldwork in corrections settings (Arditti, Joest, Lambert-Shute, & Walker, 2010). In doing so I acknowledge the proverbial elephant in the room: human suffering. Prisons and jail are not happy places. Criminologists James Austin and John Irwin (2001) provide a succinct description of the prison experience today:

> Convicted primarily of property and drug crimes, 1.3 million prisoners and another 600,000 jailed inmates are being crowded into human (or inhuman) warehouses where they are increasingly deprived, restricted, isolated, and consequently embittered and alienated from conventional worlds. (p. 90)

Jails and prisons contain a great deal of collective suffering not only on the part of prisoners but also for family members connected with the offender (Arditti, 2003; Arditti & Few, 2008; Sack & Seidler, 1978). Human suffering of this nature, defined as *social suffering*, constitutes

> a collective form of bad luck, that attaches itself like a fate, to all those that have been put together in those sites of social relegation, where the personal suffering of each is augmented by all the suffering that comes from coexisting and living with so many suffering people together…and more importantly, of the destiny effect from belonging to a stigmatized group. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 64)

Social suffering impacts family, community, and society in both economic and moral terms (Bourdieu, 1999). Spinoza's dictum—*Do not weep; do not wax indignant. Understand*—provides inspiration for this book on parental incarceration. French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1999) contends that we must take Spinoza's precept to heart if we are to come up with a comprehensive picture of human difficulty and its systemic causes. In that vein, this book represents a scholarly effort to understand.

Of course, like uniquely shaped puzzle pieces, not all offenders are the same, and not all jails and prisons are the same. Some jails and prisons have

better conditions than the one described in my field notes, some institutions employ progressive practices, and some provide rehabilitation and opportunities for the imprisoned. Prison may result in unexpected changes for those within its walls. Prison may be a place where a person receives treatment for drug addiction or mental illness for the first time. Prison may stop a violent predator in his or her tracks. Prison may protect those who have been victimized and who breathe a sigh of relief now that the offender is removed from the streets. Yet there is a whole picture here, one that comes into focus when the puzzle pieces are linked—including the piece that constitutes social suffering. The picture is this: prisoners are human beings, many of whom are parents. Children lose parents to prisons and jails, and families change when someone goes to prison. Sometimes these changes help, but very often it seems they hurt not only the offender parent but also the children and others closest to the offender.

This book is meant to achieve two goals. First and most important, it tells the story of parental incarceration by focusing on the imprisoned, their children, and their family members. We know a lot about incarceration rates, crime rates, and so on, but what of the mass of humanity behind bars, as well as those affected on the outside? In this book I put a human face on the numbers and trends in interpreting what science has to say about mass imprisonment; I utilize exemplars, anecdotes, and my own reflections to flesh out interpretation. As much as one might try, it is difficult to be purely objective in the telling of this story because so much is at stake, so many lives are affected, and family adversity of the magnitude that is connected to the incarceration of a parent is very disturbing to witness and document. The research findings are generally not positive, and happy stories are hard to come by. Parental incarceration research is not neutral ground because suffering inspires emotion not only among the researched but also among those who study families in trouble. Qualitative researchers know this only too well. This book is grounded in scientific "fact" per the published research, but in reality these facts are continuously being written and constructed and rewritten (Wonders, 1996). It represents a version of reality in that like other feminist scholars, I acknowledge the "subjective and transitory nature of all truth." The story here is my take on things, a version you can trust, a version aimed at understanding, but it is only one version.

This book joins many other voices to question a criminal justice approach that relies so heavily on imprisonment. While we might all agree that incarceration may be a necessary response to certain public safety threats and injustices, its widespread use creates further safety threats and injustices not

only for the public but also for family members of the imprisoned and for the incarcerated parents themselves. A second goal of the book, therefore, is to highlight the reasons for widespread incarceration of parents and the intended and unintended consequences of the imprisonment of offenders, particularly nonviolent offenders, for families. In doing so, I hope the book's contents will inspire critical thinking among its readers and serve as a catalyst to question our nation's current emphasis on punishment in response to an increasingly broad array of activities defined as criminal. A hammer is a good tool, but it can only achieve certain things. We might use it to put a nail in the wall, but it would be of little service in unscrewing a pipe (better to use a wrench). The research presented here demonstrates that the United States relies too much on its hammer and needs to start using other tools. These tools encompass social policy reform aimed at social justice, harm reduction, and the promotion of human development. Imprisonment is an incomplete and often bureaucratic response to human problems that stem from contexts of extreme disadvantage and family adaptations to adversity. As we shall see, "institutional actions can (and often do) deepen and make more intractable the problems they seek to ameliorate" (Das & Kleinman, 2001, p. 2). This book offers a basis not only to ask questions but also to come up with different answers when it comes to dealing with parent offenders and their families—answers that visibly address the underlying conditions associated with criminal justice involvement and embrace core principles of developmental science.

Background

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, having surpassed Russia in 2000 (Mauer, 2006). At the end of 2008, federal and state corrections facilities held 1,610,446 prisoners, reaching all-time year-end highs (West, Sabol, & Cooper, 2009). Additionally, at midyear 2009, another 767,992 offenders were confined to local jails (Minton, 2010).[2] Substantial portions of the nation's prisoners are parents—52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates. Bureau of Justice estimates for 2007 indicate that the nation's prisoners report having an estimated 1,706,600 minor children, accounting for 2.3% of the U.S. population under age 18 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). One-third of these children will reach the age of 18 while their parent is still incarcerated (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Parents of minor children held in the nation's prisons increased by 79% between 1991 and midyear 2007 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008), and the trend, while slowing (West et al., 2009),

reflects the continued and widespread use of incarceration as a crime control strategy in the United States (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Dressel, 1994; Mauer, 2006).

What are we to make of these trends in terms of both crime control and the impact of incarceration on families? With regard to crime control, the relationship between incarceration and crime is a complex one (King, Mauer, & Young, 2005). Historically, the use of incarceration was proportionate to population growth; however, in the last 30 years or so the increased number of people in prisons and jails across the country has far outpaced population growth. Specifically, between 1970 and 2000 the general population rose by less than 40%, yet the number of imprisoned individuals rose by more than 500% (King et al., 2005). Opponents of incarceration interpret this outpacing as one indication of an "overreliance" on incarceration that is excessive, expensive, and damaging to society (Austin, Bruce, Carroll, McCall, & Richards, 2000; King et al., 2005; Mauer, 2006). Yet steady declines in violent and nonviolent crime since 1992–2010 provide evidence for proponents of the increased use of incarceration as a necessary and effective response to crime (FBI 2009, 2010). Recent testimony at a Federal Sentencing Commission hearing by the Department of Justice (DOJ) continues to reflect a belief in the necessity of a "get tough on crime approach" to ensure public safety, although there is an emerging recognition that adjustments may be needed for disparate or extremely severe sentencing guidelines (Testimony of the United States Department of Justice, 2010). In sum, experts disagree regarding the role of imprisonment in reducing crime, although there is some consensus that increased numbers of police and waning crack use are additional factors contributing to lower crime rates.[3] At the very least, a simple causal relationship between incarceration and crime reduction is suspect, with increased prison populations accounting for a portion of crime prevention, but not all of it.

Views about the necessity of incarceration or its purported damage are subject to a wide range of interpretation depending on one's criterion of analysis.[4] As we shall see, a family focus necessitates considerations beyond public safety and crime reduction to include criteria such as child development and health, family functioning, and parental competence. This book takes a "family perspective" that focuses on incarcerated individuals who are parents, and on the impact incarceration has on their ability to parent, as well as the consequences of incarceration on their nonincarcerated family members. Parents who are incarcerated are deeply and often negatively affected by the experience of imprisonment relative to their ability to contribute to the lives

of their children, their children's caregivers, and other kin (Hagan & Dino-vitzer, 1999). An understanding of family influences has been deemed critical in understanding "a prisoner's life" and an individual's transition back from prison to community (Visher & Travis, 2003).

The core goal of this book is to help meet the growing need of schol-ars, students, policy makers, and practitioners trying to make sense of the research and to devise evidence-based responses to the results of mass incar-ceration and its consequences: deteriorating family ties, high recidivism, intergenerational patterns of criminality, and communities where large numbers of parents, particularly fathers, are absent due to incarceration (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008; Huebner & Gustafson, 2007; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Western & McLanahan, 2000). Informed by ecological theory and developmental contextualism, this book bring pieces of the empirical literature together in a new way with the hope of more clearly providing an evidence-based foundation for clinical intervention and policy responses. Indeed, psychologists are in the business of intervening with respect to process as many contextual factors are rigid and unchangeable. A focus on process, and in particular parenting processes, provides a fertile avenue for intervention and change.

Most research about prisoners and their families is largely the result of scholars working from either a macrolevel (i.e., societal) perspective within criminology, demography, or sociology, or conversely, from a microlevel perspective focused on individual deviance (Day, Acock, Bahr, & Arditti, 2005). In bringing a *family perspective* to the current literature on parental incarceration, we will consider the nature and quality of parenting as cen-tral to the debate, rather than simply a consequence of mass imprisonment policies. It has been said that "the family generally, and parenting specifi-cally, are today in a greater state of flux, question, and redefinition than… ever before" (Bornstein, 2002, xi). Arguably, in the last 25 years, incarcera-tion has emerged as a primary force in the redefinition of parenthood. Par-enthood is a life-altering status and experience that naturally involves a focus on children and their development. Parents are charged with protecting their children from harm, preventing adversity, and promoting their children's well-being (Hoghughi, 2004). Children's well-being is inextricably linked to their parents—to their mothers' and fathers' capacity to protect, prevent, and promote. But as journalist Nell Bernstein (2005) points out, parenthood also has consequences for parents in that it involves "giving and responsibility… pleasures, privileges, and profits as well as frustrations, fears, and failures" (p. x). While parenthood may alter lives, so too does imprisonment. Prison

confinement is perhaps one of the most radical means of altering experience, changing families, and clearly limiting an individual's ability to "protect, prevent, and promote" his or her children. In this book we will consider the intersection of parenthood and prison. This book is one response to the question: *What happens when the two paths, parenthood and prison, cross*?

What Is a Family Perspective?

> The happiness of any society begins with the well-being of the families that live in it.   Kofi Annan

As reflected by these well-known words from Nobel Peace Prize winner and former United Nations head Kofi Annan, family well-being can be seen as a critical foundation of societal health. However, within the realm of policy-making many policies fall outside the explicit definition of "family policy" and are not formulated with family well-being in mind. A *family perspective* acknowledges the "important role that family considerations can play in a broad range of policy issues" (Bogenschneider, 2002, p. 25). A family perspective involves analyzing a policy or program, in this case, the incarceration of individuals who have offspring, regardless of whether the policy/program in question is explicitly aimed at families. The criterion for such an analysis is family well-being (Bogenschneider, 2002). Criminal justice policy is generally not formulated with family well-being as an explicit outcome. Rather, incarceration-related policy and intervention are more typically aimed at reducing crime and criminality in its myriad manifestations, as well as eradicating certain social ills such as drug use or handgun violence (Donzinger, 1996). A family perspective necessitates examining how parental incarceration affects the imprisoned parent, as well as family stability, the quality of family relationships, and the family's ability to carry out its responsibilities and functions. Central to a family perspective is the issue of parenting: an issue that is not adequately addressed in the literature on parental incarceration, which tends to more often focus on the effects of a parent's incarceration on child adjustment, without due consideration of mediating family processes and offenders' parenting capacity.

In thinking about incarceration, a family perspective centered on parents has great utility. Incarceration involves not only the removal of a parent from a family system and a dramatic lessening or cessation of his or her parenting contributions (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Hairston, 1998; Swisher & Waller, 2008) but also the incapacitation of

offenders whereby they are psychologically and socially altered as a result of imprisonment (Austin & Irwin, 2001; Haney, 2002; Irwin, 2005). Such alteration can result in reduced parenting capacity during and beyond a period of incarceration for parents who wish to be a meaningful part of their children's lives.

There are several books and reviews that deal broadly with issues pertaining to families and incarceration. Existing reviews tend to either focus in depth on one type of scenario such as the children of imprisoned parents (see, e.g., Hairston, 2007; Murray, 2005; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Reed & Reed, 1997), child antisocial behavior and mental health (Murray, Farrington, Sekol, & Olsen, 2009), children with incarcerated mothers (Dallaire, 2007a), or the effects of paternal incarceration on children (Herman-Stahl et al., 2008; Hairston, 1998), or contain overviews of many issues that pertain to parental incarceration but lack an integrative lens, making it difficult, in psychologist Alfred Adler's words, to "bring out the picture."[5] One of the more influential works relevant to thinking about families and incarceration was authored by noted sociologist John Hagan and his colleague Ronit Dinovitzer (1999). The article, entitled "Collateral Consequences of Imprisonment for Children, Communities, and Prisoners," draws from classic theoretical perspectives in criminology and sociology. The authors argue that family is best understood within the larger context of the use of imprisonment "as a criminal sanction," and that growth of imprisonment has tremendous costs in terms of human and social capital. These costs involve repercussions involving the employability of offenders, and the children who must bear the diminished economic and social capital of their families and communities. Most notable here are the deprivations associated with the economic and socialization contributions of the parent as a result of imprisonment.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) was to draw attention to the profound connection between criminal sanction policy and children within the macro disciplines of criminology and sociology. At the time of their writing, an emerging literature was beginning to document the harms children and family experienced as a result of parental incarceration (e.g., Brodsky, 1975; Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Johnston & Gabel, 1995; Sack & Seidler, 1978). In this book we will "dig deeper" in terms of unpacking human and social capital costs by more specifically examining the alteration in parenting functions that incarceration brings via contextual influences and intraindividual (psychological) and relational (interpersonal) processes. These alterations have profound implications for incarcerated parents, their children and intimate partners, and the communities in which

they lived and to which they will likely return after their incarceration. Indeed, the effects of poverty and parenting inadequacies on children's development have been well established (e.g., Bornstein & Bradley, 2003; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; McLoyd & Wilson, 1991). It is crucial to consider the influential role of incarceration in shaping parenting given its implications for the offender and his or her family.

Theoretical Influences: Ecological Theory and Developmental Contexts

In considering the growing literature on parental incarceration, it is important to employ a "theory" to help identify what is important, why incarceration changes individuals and families, and the resultant outcomes associated with a parent's imprisonment. Theory is an analytic structure that in lay terms helps us to explain something—to put the pieces of a puzzle together and bring out the "big picture." We can apply elements of ecological theory and developmental contextualism as a framework for understanding parental incarceration and its impact on families and children. Both of these theoretical traditions imply interdependence among developmental contexts as well as the stake individuals have in their own development. An ecological framework suggests the importance of environmental contexts and proximal processes in understanding behavior and patterns of adaptation (Cicchetti, 2006). Developmental contextualism focuses our attention on the *relational* nature of human development and suggests that parenting is best understood by examining the changing and reciprocal interactions between individuals and the multiple contexts within which they live (Lerner, Brennan, Noh, & Wilson, 1998).

Ecological Theory

Developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) articulation of nested levels in the ecology of human development is perhaps the most well-known theory that conceptualizes contexts. Bronfenbrenner delimited the macro-, exo-, meso-, and microsystems to draw our attention to the multilevel influences shaping individual and family development. The microsystem is defined as the complex of relations between the developing person (in this case, the incarcerated parent or parent's family member) and his or her immediate settings and interaction over time. Within the microsystem, proximal family relationships are seen as a primary force driving develop-

ment; thus parental functioning is a critical variable of interest. The immediate question is: How do contexts of imprisonment impinge on, delimit, and define proximal microsystem processes within the confines of the prison environment as well as in the home (Bronfenbrenner, 1995)? Bronfenbrenner is clear that the lives of all family members are interdependent. How a family member reacts to an event or role transition "affects the developmental course of the other family members, both within and across generations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 642).

Mesosystems involve interrelations among contexts containing the incarcerated parent—in short a "system of microsystems." Links between prison and home contexts, such as visiting areas, are particularly salient. An exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem in that it embodies other contexts and community factors that influence development; however, these settings do not contain the developing person. This systemic level is particularly important in understanding parental incarceration. For the incarcerated parent, a primary exosystem is the home that he or she left prior to imprisonment and may try to stay connected to during confinement. For the family, a primary exosystem encompasses the specific context of imprisonment for the family member who is incarcerated and the institutional practices associated with the prison setting during incarceration and subsequent reentry of the parent upon release (Arditti, 2005).

Finally, the macrosystem refers to the overarching institutional patterns and cultural prototypes influencing development made manifest through economic, social, educational, legal, and political systemic levels. Macrosystemic influence is of profound importance for the incarcerated parent who is under "state control," and for his or her family given their embeddedness in a broad sociocultural network that stigmatizes imprisonment (Davies, 1980). Stigma intensifies the possibility of risk and has unique disruptive effects for the parents themselves as well as for their family members because of the demoralization and social isolation that come with the prison experience (Golden, 2005; Lowenstein, 1986; Western & McLanahan, 2000).

In sum, from an ecological standpoint, parental incarceration is inherently complex in terms of how it changes the incarcerated parent as well as its systemic effects on families.

Developmental Contextualism

Developmental contextualism is best known as a model of adolescence proposed by developmental psychologist Richard Lerner (1998), which parallels

modern life-span approaches to understanding human development. One can see a clear connection to Bronfenbrenner's work given the theory's focus on dynamic interactions between individuals and the "multiple contexts within which they live" (Susman, Dorn, & Schiefelbein, 2003, p. 296). Key concepts of developmental contextualism relevant to understanding parental incarceration are *embeddedness*, *dynamic interactionism*, and *plasticity* (Susman et al., 2003).

Like Bronfenbrenner, Lerner draws our attention to the multiple influences shaping development, be they biological, psychological, or social aspects of change, and these influences can only be understood *in context*, a state defined as "embeddedness" in the language of developmental contextualism. Contexts of development include "family, peers, and the multiple social institutions that surround the developing individual" (Susman et al., 2003, p. 296).

According to the theory of developmental contextualism, dynamic interactionism is a concept that embodies the notion that processes can be reciprocal and simultaneous. The concept appropriately muddies the causal waters in that biological or genetic influences are no longer considered deterministic; it is particularly applicable in terms of integrating the individual and social aspects of development (Susman et al., 2003). Thus dynamic interactionism implies *agency* and *resilience*, concepts integral to ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in that individuals and collectively families are producers of their own development and can influence, shape, and even *transcend* toxic contexts of development (Brandstaedter & Lerner, 1999; Garbarino, 1995). With respect to parental incarceration, dynamic interactionism suggests the possibility that individuals and family members are not simply "victims" of the criminal justice system but may have diverse responses to imprisonment and adapt to the imprisonment in multiple ways, although admittedly for the prisoner, agency may exist only by degree as the limits of prisoners' agency "are quickly contained and often fiercely policed" (McCulloch & Scraton, 2008, p 17).

Finally, *plasticity* evolves from a focus on context and process in that there is potential for change across the life span via multiple levels of development (Lerner, 1998). The idea of plasticity is particularly important in developing sound prevention and intervention programs aimed at families interfacing with the criminal justice system, many of whom can be characterized as *fragile families* in that they are at greater risk for instability and poverty ("Parental Incarceration," 2008). Plasticity can be the praxis guiding such efforts, and it embodies the idea that "one size does not fit all," and that even well-

meaning programs and policies may have unanticipated effects. Thus plasticity suggests that care must be taken in responding to the needs of imprisoned individuals and their families.

Integration

Both developmental contextualism and ecological theory ground a focus on context and process to understand the changes and outcomes associated with parental incarceration. Both theories conceptualize human development in relation to context and the interdependent nature of multiple levels or systems of organization. Bronfenbrenner (1977) described the ecological approach to understanding development as the scientific study of dynamic interrelationships between the changing person and the changing environmental contexts within which a person lives. Similarly, developmental contextualism specifies that biological, psychological, and social contextual levels are fused and constitute the process of developmental change (Lerner, Sparks, & McCubbin, 1999). This fusion or interdependence is of great significance with respect to parental incarceration as it points to multiple connections between contextual levels and the interrelatedness of social problems such as crime and poverty. For example, incarceration can be conceptualized as both an outcome of poverty and a contributor to financial adversity (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Rose & Clear, 1998; Watts & Nightengale, 1996).

The conceptual influences of both ecological theory and developmental contextualism lead us to pay a great deal of attention to context and process. Moreover, given the notion of "fusion," outcomes are not easily disentangled from the settings and interactions with which they may be associated. That is, context and processes often persist and permeate outcomes, such as adaptation, and cannot always be discretely defined as causal antecedents (Mancini & Roberto, 2009). And while developmental change typically implies a gradual unfolding, there are times of "swift transformation" wherein relational changes occur much more rapidly than normal and are thus associated with unexpected, unpredicted, and ambiguous consequences (Mancini & Roberto, 2009, p. 419). The incarceration of a parent is arguably one of those "swift transformations" for both parent and family. With regard to context, we need to pay particular attention to demographic factors and the disenfranchisement connected to a parent's incarceration as well as to the sociopolitical and physical environment of prison. With regard to "process," we must focus on "intraindividual" or psychological processes, as well as the

interpersonal experience of the incarcerated parent. We also need to specify the alterations in parenting identities, roles, functions, and interactions that families make when a parent is imprisoned. Thus family process has an internal (i.e., psychological) *and* relational (i.e., interpersonal) component, and these are best understood relative to the contextual influences associated with parental incarceration. In thinking about outcomes or consequences of parental incarceration, we will examine what the changes brought about by incarceration mean in terms of any adaptations the parent and family make as a result of imprisonment, as well as the implications of primary and secondary losses incurred likely due to the incarceration. It is important to note that the "fallout" associated with parental incarceration, however necessary one might deem imprisonment to be given a certain set of circumstances, does not end when a parent is released and returned home. Thus we must consider the offender's reentry and the family's response to the parent's reentry as important aspect of the consequences of parental incarceration.

Elements of a Context-Process-Outcome Framework

The blending of the compatible theories of ecological theory, per Bronfenbrenner, and developmental contextualism, per Lerner, supports an integrative and systemic interpretation of the empirical research. Comprehensive theory integration in this manner provides a framework for the synthesis of discrete theories and their empirical components into a holistic approach, adapted to account for unique contextual, process, and outcome variables involved in the study of parental incarceration. The application of an integrative framework is amenable to all kinds of research—including studies that utilize a different theoretical approach or are atheoretical.[6] It is possible to consider the research collectively and to identify a multiplicity of variables that can be framed as contextual or processual post hoc, with the goal of better understanding their interdependence and cumulative influence on parents and their families. For example, a research study may lack contextual variables or considerations but highlight key processes that when viewed as part of a whole (i.e., the sum of the research) provide a new insight with respect to person-environment interaction. The theoretical approach of this book does not impose itself on the empirical research; rather, the approach allows one to sift through the research on incarceration and bring together an array of ideas and empirical findings into a coherent *whole*. A holistic strategy is advantageous in that it permits the examination of a wide range of research studies, each potentially utilizing varied methodologies and

theoretical approaches, within a common framework. A family perspective implies that the whole will tell us something more about parental incarceration than we could glean from examining its parts (in this case, each study; Broderick & Smith, 1979).

Context

There is a growing awareness that development cannot be understood apart from the contexts in which it occurs. Development implies an unfolding, pathway, or change of some sort, and contextual factors play an important role in defining experience—particularly in terms of what constitutes psychopathology or maladaptation (Cicchetti, 2006). Contextual influences may directly or indirectly affect parenting processes and outcomes for incarcerated offenders and their families (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, & Hanneman, 2008). An array of factors have been considered contextual influences. These may be proximal, as in the case of situational or interpersonal influences operating at the microsystem level, or distal, as in the case of meso-, exo-, or macrosystem forces. Context has been understudied, partly because of the difficulty in pinpointing the effects of more distal contextual factors on human development. Such documentation requires cross-fertilization with disciplines that study macro-level phenomena (e.g., demography, economics, sociology; Cicchetti, 2006). And while scholars might specify contextual effects, "rarely do discussions of contexts actually describe what it is about contexts that have a place in human development" (Mancini & Roberto, 2009, p. 8).

Contexts represent a cluster of distinctive characteristics that may constrain or enable, be oppressive or developmentally enhancing, malleable or fixed (Garbarino, 1995; Mancini & Roberto, 2009). For example, the environment and structure of prison visiting rooms (e.g., controlled seating and movement for the inmate; rules prohibiting any physical contact) can be characterized as constrained, oppressive, and fixed, and they powerfully shape family process (Arditti, 2003; Hairston, 1998). Contextual factors associated with cumulative disadvantage, such as a lack of educational attainment or a history of unemployment, have bearing on outcomes, such as family reintegration and the assumption of parenting roles (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). More distal contextual influences distinctive to U.S. criminal justice policy, such as political disenfranchisement, arguably add to difficulties for ex-prisoners who reenter community and family life (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). Contextual risk factors pertinent to parental incarcera-

tion refer to structural, distal, or macrosystemic factors that impact parental incarceration.

It is important to note that contextual risk factors, those factors that enhance vulnerability or maladaptation, can characterize the *inmate* (e.g., history of substance use, incarceration as an early adult, lengthy sentence, prison overcrowding), the *family* (e.g., young children at home, single parenthood, unemployment), or *both* inmate and family (e.g., deep break policy,[7] stigma). Similarly, protective contextual factors, those factors that ameliorate risk or provide opportunity, such as work-release programs, resource assistance, and mental health services, may benefit the inmate, the family, or both.

Process

A consideration of process implies paying attention to the psychological and interpersonal experience of the incarcerated parent as well as family members who are left behind. Generally process refers to "a course of action, functions, operations, and methods of working" (Mancini & Roberto, 2009, p. 573). A process-oriented approach assumes that person-environment interactions occur in multiple ecological domains over time and "reflects a concern with more than charting…risk factors. The assumption is that risk factors and…outcomes are interrelated due to the action of underlying mechanisms" (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000, p. 52). Thus a process lens seeks to understand causality by articulating how risk factors set in motion specific processes and mechanisms (Cummings et al., 2000).

Here process encompasses both the intraindividual and the familial level of effect, and these factors may be interrelated. For example, high levels of maternal distress among mothers who are, or who were, incarcerated (Arditti & Few, 2008) may contribute to estranged family relationships and vice versa.

A focus on process, then, lends insight into the complicated social actions through which the family affects the individual (in this case the incarcerated parent) as well as how the individual affects the family. The current lack of a processual understanding has been deemed a serious gap in the research on incarceration and prisoner reentry (Dallaire, 2007a; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005; Visher & Travis, 2003).

With respect to parental incarceration, process is concerned not only with the incarcerated parent's psychological adjustment and intraindividual experience but also with how a parent's imprisonment changes the *relation-*

ships between incarcerated parents and their intimate partners, children, and other family members. Process encompasses important protective mechanisms such as parents' ability to garner social support from friends, family, and institutional systems, as well as the extent to which support needs are being met, or existing support resources are deemed particularly helpful.

From a process lens, one would expect family relationships to be altered by incarceration for a number of reasons. First, *prisonized* parental identities emerge and gain prominence during incarceration. The term *prisonization* is sometimes used to refer to institutionalization in corrections settings and is "shorthand" for the negative psychological effects of imprisonment. Prisonization involves the "incorporation of the norms of prison life into one's habits of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Haney, 2002, p. 80; as derived from Clemmer, 1940). This process of adaptation to the culture of prison society generally implies a loss of agency that has profound implications for parenting (Irwin, 2005). Second, parenting roles are altered because incarceration constrains the enactment of key parenting functions, such as the provision of financial support, discipline, and basic care (Hairston, 1998). Incarceration curtails communication, the offering and receipt of affection, and caretaking. Imprisoned parents may adapt to the unique features of the prison environment in which parenting becomes largely an internal, symbolic process that may be characterized by a great deal of distress (Arditti et al., 2005; Arditti & Few, 2008).

Per ecological theory and developmental contextualism, processes do not occur in a vacuum and are best understood within their context. For example, a primary means of interaction between parents and children during incarceration is institutionalized visitation within the prison/jail facility. Environmental factors and prison policies profoundly shape the quality and nature of family interaction during this time (Arditti, 2005). With respect to prison environments, context is particularly salient and arguably overshadows process pertinent to incarcerated parents and their families given fixed institutional practices and their enforcement. The salience of context extends to probation and parole, whereby the incarcerated individual and his or her family must follow strict guidelines in terms of where and how they live (Parkman, 2009).

Outcomes

Finally, outcomes of interest broadly encompass the effects of incarceration on imprisoned parents as well as on their families and children. Outcomes

are consequences connected to the changes that come from "processes of human development and of whatever lurks earlier in a sequence of events, circumstances, or conditions" (Mancini & Roberto, 2009, p. 5). In this case development is intertwined with the contextual factors and processes associated with incarceration and involvement in the criminal justice system.

It comes as no surprise, given the profound situational and experiential alterations associated with imprisonment, that parental incarceration has emotional, social, and economic effects on families and that these effects tend to be deleterious and involve significant losses to both the incarcerated parent and the family (Arditti et al., 2003; Murray, 2005; Murray & Farrington, 2008; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001). With respect to the incarcerated parent's family members, effects can be conceptualized as occurring over time and are also a result of *secondary prisonization* (Comfort, 2008). Secondary prisonization involves the transformation of the nonincarcerated family members' lives—particularly female intimate partners of male inmates—as a result of interacting with the inmate and the correctional system. Changes may result in family members' social life, routine, priorities, and appearance based on their adaptations in response to a parent's incarceration. With respect to the imprisoned parents, outcomes of interest include their psychological adjustment, the quality of their family relationships, and their ability to reenter family and community life after a period of incarceration. The prisoner reentry literature widely documents the difficulties ex-offenders face upon release—particularly in terms of finding employment and dealing with the demands and responsibilities of life on the outside (Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Travis, 2005). Family ties, support, and resource sharing seem to be a critical component of reentry success and reunification of the offender with his or her children (Visher & Travis, 2003).

Risk and Protective Factors

Utilizing a context-process-outcome lens suggests two additional theoretical elements: *risk factors* and *protective factors*. Risk factors can be either static or fixed in that they cannot be changed (e.g., gender, race, in utero conditions affecting development) or else variable (features that can change such as age, or be modified through intervention). In general risk factors are those features or characteristics that contribute to vulnerability or maladaptive psychopathological outcomes (Cicchetti, 2006). Consistent with the notion of interdependence and multiplicity, risk factors tend to co-occur rather than occur in isolation (Rutter, 1990; Sameroff, Seifer, Barocas, Zax, & Greenspan,

1987). For example, mental illness and drug use often co-occur, and these characteristics are together overrepresented among incarcerated populations, presenting a cumulative risk for maladjustment and reentry difficulties (James & Glaze, 2006). Thus attention to multiple risk factors and mechanisms of effect is important (Cicchetti, 2006; Garbarino, 1995).

However, risk factors must be considered in light of any protective factors that the developing individual might experience. Protective factors function to promote competent development and reduce or counterbalance the negative impact of risk factors (Luthar, 2003). For example, in considering parental incarceration as a risk factor for children's academic failure, a high degree of parental school involvement or after-school mentoring may "protect" the child from a lack of success in school and possibly enhance achievement. Thus risk and protective factors are contextual *and* processual. They operate dynamically in shaping human development, at each level of the ecology (i.e., micro, meso, exo, and macro), and in tandem, "transacting with the features of the individual…and the external world" (Cicchetti, 2006, p. 10). Further, resilience and positive adaptation may be manifested differently in children and adults in relationship to different social contexts whether within prison, among peers, in the school setting (for children), or in one's neighborhood (Seidman & Peterson, 2003).

Approach to Selection and Coverage of Empirical Research

In addition to the theoretical influences shaping coverage in this book, the content presented is informed by the empirical research on parental incarceration. I selected largely from empirically based peer-reviewed publications, books, and book chapters that drew directly from the population of interest: incarcerated mothers and fathers, their family members, and in some cases their children. Central to studies drawn upon for this book was a focus on parenting and/or family well-being (criterion for a "family perspective"). Studies dealing with topics related to the issue of incarceration, such as parental arrest, were excluded from consideration.[8] The search process for empirical literature entailed several steps. First, I searched for studies on parental incarceration by examining the reference lists of previous reviews, books, and prior research (including work done by myself) conducted by exemplar scholars (e.g., Austin & Irwin, 2001; Hagan & Coleman, 2001; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Hairston, 2007; Murray, 2005; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2001; Travis, 2005; Travis & Waul, 2003; Western, 2004). Second, I searched electronic databases for published references or government

reports utilizing Ebscohost, Google, and Google Scholar search engines and included the following key words or phrases: "parental incarceration," "parents and incarceration," "maternal incarceration," "paternal incarceration," "mothers in prison," "fathers in prison," "parents in prison," "incarceration and children," and "families and incarceration." Databases that were searched included ERIC, JSTOR, PsychInfo, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Ingenta, BioMed Central, and Heinonline. I refined the search process by adding additional key words pertinent to the book content (e.g., "incarceration and cumulative disadvantage" or "prison overcrowding and mental health"). I then screened titles and abstracts with research assistance from a librarian and a graduate assistant and selected empirical studies that collected information from imprisoned (or previously imprisoned) parents and that had findings relevant for understanding parenting. Given the voluminous number of hits utilizing these methods, criteria for narrowing down studies used in this review of the relevant literature included top hits per database, articles repeatedly cited in reference lists of scholarly research and reviews, and articles connected to the theoretical concepts guiding this book (context and intraindividual and relational family processes). I then constructed three matrices based on the populations assessed (incarcerated/reentry fathers, incarcerated/reentry mothers, or family members/children), which detailed the following information: study type (i.e., quantitative/qualitative, mixed method), design, sample, and study characteristics, theoretical background, contextual factors, processes, and findings/outcomes. I used this information to construct and support the arguments and findings contained in this book. Information about much of the empirical literature on parental incarceration that supported the book content is summarized in Table A1 in the Appendix.

A Note on Methodology

Most studies pertaining to parental incarceration have been characterized as descriptive and based on convenience samples (Geller, Garfinkel, Cooper, & Mincy, 2008; Wilbur et al., 2007). This is largely due to the challenges of conducting research in corrections settings and accessing marginalized and residentially mobile populations (Jucovy, 2003). Indeed, in criminal justice research, sometimes nonprobability samples are "the best that can be done" (Pope, Lovell, & Brandl, 2001, p. 13). While caution is understandably warranted in drawing sweeping conclusions due to questions of generalizability, much of the research, and in particular qualitative studies, pertaining to parental incarceration can be characterized as *purposeful* rather than simply

"convenience based." This distinction is important because purposeful sampling implies planning and focused objectives—whereby the logic and power of the approach "lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The use of information-rich cases "yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

While probability samples have greater external validity than purposeful samples, researchers generally have to utilize data sets that were not specifically designed to answer incarceration-related questions. Thus critical variables of interest may be excluded, and measures may lack depth or application to issues pertaining to parental imprisonment. Data limitations are particularly noticeable relative to female incarceration and recidivism (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). For example, answers to the effects of critical variables of interest (e.g., prison programming, variations in relational and community circumstances) on women's postrelease parenting trajectories are "elusive" due to absent or incomplete Bureau of Justice data (Deschenes, Owen, & Crow, 2006). Researchers Kathryn Edin, Timothy Nelson, and Rechelle Paranal (2001) discuss the limitations of data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. The data set follows 5,000 children (of which three-fourths were born to unmarried parents) and their families from 1998 to 2000. In their study of "turning points" in the life course of fathers who have been incarcerated, the authors note that noncustodial fathers, and minority, low-income fathers in particular, are seriously underrepresented in large data sets and that the "underrepresentation problem in most large surveys is so severe that it constitutes something of a crisis" (p. 49). The utilization of these large, quantitative data sets may not provide a complete picture of parenting and often means that processes and mechanisms of effect "remain opaque" (p. 49). Consistent with Edin et al.'s contention that "qualitative data can shed light on these processes" (p. 49), qualitative data are utilized in this book to enhance understanding and inform coverage of parental incarceration.

In addition to purposeful and population-based empirical work, I have also selectively utilized critical reviews and government reports that examined literature or summarized statistical data related to parental incarceration. The coverage here is systematic in that it is characterized by the use of primary empirical sources, an explicit search strategy, a critical appraisal of the literature, and an "evidence map" or quantitative summary (as summarized in the appendix) of exemplar studies that serve as the empirical core of the book (cf. Cook, Mulrow, & Haynes, 1997).

The Use of Exemplars and Case Studies

Throughout this book exemplars and case studies are used to illustrate themes in the empirical literature on parental incarceration. Exemplars and case studies not only illustrate themes but also put a "face" on the parents and children impacted by incarceration. In some cases I draw exemplars from another scholar's qualitative work and note the original study accordingly. I also utilize cases and examples from my own research interviewing caregivers with children visiting a parent at a local jail (Arditti, 2003; Arditti et al., 2003), a qualitative investigation based on interviews with 51 incarcerated fathers in Utah and Oregon (Arditti et al., 2005), and two qualitative studies based on in-depth interviews and follow-up for mothers who were recently incarcerated and released back to their families, children, and communities (Arditti & Few, 2006, 2008). Finally, I constructed "composite" cases based on prisoners and their families who accessed the website "Prison Talk," an online inmate support community. These composite cases are also noted accordingly in the text. Pseudonyms are used for all exemplars and cases regardless of their source.

Summary

What is the experience of incarcerated parents? How does incarceration impact parenting? How far-reaching are the consequences of incarcerating so many parents?

A context-process-outcome framework helps give us the tools to unpack the research and answer these questions in a comprehensive fashion. The framework as derived here is a *theory of interdependence* that points to the connections between one's physical and social environment and one's development, between imprisonment and parenting, and between the offender's experience and family well-being. Interdependent contextual layers and family processes point to lives linked, and perhaps undone, by incarceration. Parental incarceration is the proverbial stone in the pond that, once thrown, sends ripples outward to shore. The incarceration of so many in this country has been characterized as a "massive legal intervention" or "social experiment" (Foster & Hagan, 2007). Arguably, something much larger than a stone has been thrown; the ripples, no longer soft and inconsequential, are now tall waves, which stand to overpower the pond and its environs. A context-process-outcome framework helps to articulate the mechanisms and pathways by which alterations in parenting occur, and how the changes

brought about by a parent's incarceration potentially change everything. For example, a focus on context shows us how incarceration intensifies poverty in already disadvantaged households. A focus on process can reveal alterations in how incarcerated parents see themselves that in part ultimately lead to their disengagement from family. In delineating outcomes from this perspective, we see that they do not occur in a vacuum, but that family well-being (or the lack thereof) is influenced by a larger social environment that stigmatizes incarceration, makes it difficult if not impossible to parent from prison, and discourages family members from staying connected to the imprisoned in a way that would enhance development. Indeed, consistent with the introductory quote by Felix Adler, we will identify patterns of risk, resilience, and experience in this volume that link "different but yet matching" empirical findings that, when considered collectively, ultimately portray what it is to be, and to have, a parent in prison. In doing so, a radically different social policy agenda emerges: one that moves beyond mass incarceration and focuses on offenders as *parents* connected to children and families. In line with this focus, this book calls for real reform and programmatic change that is responsive to social inequality and the collective vulnerabilities of the incarcerated and their kin.