

**PRE-RELEASE EXPECTATIONS, POST-RELEASE EXPERIENCES,
AND RISK FOR REINCARCERATION AMONG FORMERLY
INCARCERATED U.S. FATHERS**

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Evan Cole Green
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ABSTRACT

Formerly incarcerated individuals face a plethora of hardships when they reenter society that may increase their risk for future reincarceration. Documenting the expectations and experiences individuals have for reentry may provide more context for the high reincarceration rates seen in the United States and serve as an entry point for future interventions. Towards this end, the current study investigates incarcerated fathers' expectations for reentry, their post-release experiences, and the implications of discrepancies between expectations and experiences for short-term reincarceration. Data came from the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting, and Partnering (MFS-IP). The analytic sample consisted of 346 Black and White fathers who provided data shortly before and after their release from prison. Fathers were asked about their expectations for logistical support, financial stability, and family relationships and coresidence before release. Upon release, they reported their experiences in each of these domains. Expectations and experiences were cross-tabulated to determine whether expectations were met. Descriptive analyses indicated that there is variability among incarcerated fathers in terms of whether they expect to have their logistical, financial, and relational needs met upon reentry and whether those needs are actually met. Binary logistic regressions that were stratified by race and included controls for several theoretically relevant variables provided limited support for the predictive utility of expectations on reincarceration. Additionally, among White fathers, more unmet expectations were actually associated with decreased risk for short-term reincarceration, whereas no significant relationship was detected for Black fathers. Findings highlight the

areas in which individuals can use more support and provide valuable information for policymakers as they work to support the reentry process. Furthermore, these results showcase the racialized effects of the criminal legal system and highlight the need to critically examine why such differences exist and reflect on the systemic processes that entrench them.

Key Words: Incarceration, fatherhood, expectations, experiences, reentry, discrepancies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW	3
A NOTE ON LANGUAGE	3
PREDICTORS OF REINCARCERATION	4
PERSONAL	4
FINANCIAL	5
STRUCTURAL	5
RELATIONAL	6
SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL	6
EXPECTATIONS.....	7
CURRENT STUDY.....	9
CHAPTER THREE METHODS	11
PARTICIPANTS	11
DATA SOURCE.....	11
SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	11
MEASURES	12
REINCARCERATION.....	12
EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES	12
REENTRY PATTERNS (DISCREPANCIES)	14
CONTROLS	15
ANALYSIS PLAN	16
CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS	17
DESCRIPTIVES.....	17
IMPACT OF EXPECTATIONS ON REINCARCERATION	19
IMPACT OF REENTRY PATTERNS ON REINCARCERATION	20
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	22
REFERENCES	30
APPENDIX.....	35
VITA.....	46

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Frequencies of pre-release expectations	35
Table 2. Frequencies of post-release experiences	36
Table 3. Frequencies of reentry patterns, all fathers (N=346)	37
Table 4. Frequencies of reentry patterns, White fathers (n=154)	38
Table 5. Frequencies of reentry patterns, Black fathers (n=192).....	39
Table 6. Binary logistic regression models of the association between expectations and reincarceration, White fathers (n = 154)	40
Table 7. Binary logistic regression models of the association between expectations and reincarceration, Black fathers (n = 192)	42
Table 8. Binary logistic regression models of the association between discrepancy groups and reincarceration, White fathers (n = 154)	44
Table 9. Binary logistic regression models of the association between discrepancy groups and reincarceration, Black fathers (n = 192).....	45

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Gramlich, 2021). In 2016, the most recent year with published national data regarding incarcerated parents, the United States incarcerated an estimated 626,800 fathers of minor children (Maruschak et al., 2021). In addition to leading the world in incarceration rates, the United States also has high reincarceration rates, with 48.6% of individuals being reincarcerated within three years of prison release and 60.7% within ten years (Antenangeli & Durose, 2021). Recidivism, conceptualized in this paper as reentering the criminal legal system, is costly for individuals, families, and communities, making it a critically important topic for social scientists to examine.

The high rates of reincarceration seen in the United States reflect the numerous challenges individuals face during reentry, including institutionalization, finding employment, relationship instability, and personal distress (Crane & Pascoe, 2021; Griffith et al., 2019; Katsiyannis et al., 2018; McKay et al., 2018a; Turney & Halpern-Meekin, 2021). A growing body of research has focused on uncovering various risk and protective factors to better understand the reentry process and to help alleviate the burden of reentry and reduce reincarceration rates (Martín et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2013). One important factor that may affect the risk for reincarceration is the expectations people have for reentry. Hopeful expectations for post-release life have been described as necessary in the reentry process because they can help individuals persist through challenges (Lebel et al., 2008). An additional layer to this potential predictive factor is

whether these expectations are violated, which has been shown to be harmful in other research (e.g., Culatta & Clay-Warner, 2021; Geeraert et al., 2022; Harwood et al., 2007). Despite this, research on how expectations and subsequent experiences may contribute to the risk for reincarceration has been limited, particularly for a prominent group in the United States, reentering fathers. The current study investigates reentering fathers' expectations, examines whether they are met, and considers the implications of discrepancies between expectations and experiences for short-term reincarceration outcomes.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Note on Language

Before beginning a literature review, it is important to define some prominent language used throughout. Recidivism is a broad term that has been used to refer a number of different outcomes such as breaking a law, being arrested, and/or being incarcerated. Often, it is operationalized in terms of whether individuals commit crimes after they are released. Although a wide net was cast for the purposes of this literature review, the current study examines reincarceration as the outcome of interest, and whether reentering individuals commit crimes is irrelevant. As such, language may alternate between recidivism broadly and more specific terms such as rearrest or reincarceration. Additionally, reentry is conceptualized as the afterlife of mass incarceration in recognition of Miller's (2021) framing of the reentry process as being laden with numerous structural hardships meant to continue punishing those who 'served their time.' Much of the work in this field has failed to grapple with the complex macro-level forces at play that should discourage analysis on an individual level. Many attempts to address this phenomenon on the aggregate level inevitably fall victim to approaching the individual "as the exclusive terrain of intervention." (Byrd, 2016, p. 6). Past research has largely been individually focused and although the current study replicates some of those tendencies, attempts have been made to highlight the structural factors at play. Still, more work is needed to unpack these nuances further.

Predictors of Reincarceration

Recidivism rates in the United States reflect the cycle of release and reincarceration experienced by many individuals (Muentner, 2022) and are consistent with Miller's (2021) framing of reentry as a mass phenomenon and the sequential advancement of mass incarceration. Released individuals are subject to numerous risk and protective factors that can help or hinder their reentry process. These can be categorized as personal, financial, structural, relational, and socio-psychological factors.

Personal

Personal factors account for the identities and histories of individuals. Incarceration can have a major impact on the identities of individuals through lasting social, biological, and psychological changes, collectively referred to as institutionalization, which leaves them "disabled by the stress, social displacement, lack of autonomy, and dehumanization imposed by the carceral system" (Crane & Pascoe, 2021, p. 318). Institutionalization can reverberate into the reentry period, leading to challenges in family relationships between romantic partners and between parents and children (Turney, 2015; Turney & Goodsell, 2018).

There are a few other prominent personal factors that are predictive of the risk for reincarceration. One of the most well-known personal predictors of reincarceration is age. Sampson and Laub's (2003) life-course approach to criminology has shown that as individuals age, their involvement in crime diminishes; as such, ignoring more systemic factors, reincarceration rates decline. Other risk factors for reincarceration include more prior incarcerations, including as a juvenile (La Vigne et al., 2009). Additionally,

Katsiyannis et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis on predictors of recidivism (broadly defined) found gender and substance use to be significant predictors.

Financial

The impact of incarceration extends into the reentry period, which is marked by numerous difficulties, many of which are attributable to the stigmatization of incarcerated individuals (Feingold, 2021; Griffith et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2020). Pew Charitable Trusts (2010) note that the individuals disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration tend to be impoverished and that various laws aimed at individuals with criminal records further deplete their economic mobility and restrict their access to housing, government benefits, and high-wage jobs. Griffith et al. (2019) found that while many individuals eventually find employment, it is typically marked by low wages, insufficient hours, or is temporary in nature. Despite the unsatisfactory nature of this employment, being employed during the six months before and after incarceration is associated with lower reincarceration rates, as is securing long-term housing following incarceration (La Vigne et al., 2009; Visser & Courtney, 2007).

Structural

One of the most glaring structural predictors is parole supervision, which increases the likelihood of reincarceration due to technical violations (Visser et al., 2010). One study found that these violations accounted for 70% of reincarcerations (Yahner et al., 2008). In-prison factors can also impact reincarceration, with men who received visitors experiencing lower reincarceration rates (Mitchell et al., 2016). Although the prior point could be conceptualized as a relational factor, it is structural in

that institutional factors can significantly reduce contact between incarcerated loved ones and their families (Comfort et al., 2018; McKay et al., 2018a; McKay et al., 2018b). Finally, the receipt of programming, including employment-, educational-, or substance use-related, both during and after incarceration, all reduced reincarceration rates (La Vigne et al., 2007; La Vigne et al., 2009).

Relational

These hardships can spill over into family life, leading to lower relationship quality and supportiveness, less frequent family interaction, and decreases in coresidence between fathers and their children (McKay et al., 2018a; Turney, 2015). These findings support the notion that the reentry period, particularly regarding family, is affected by the experience of incarceration (Muentner & Charles, 2022). Both in spite of and in light of these spillover effects, family can serve as both a protective and risk factor during reentry. Whereas marriage and coresidential relationships decrease the likelihood of recidivism, divorce increases the likelihood (Barr & Simons, 2015; Bersani & Doherty, 2013). Additionally, family members who engage in illegal activities and who use problematic rearing tactics, such as physical abuse, can increase risk for recidivism (Katsiyannis et al., 2018). Despite these potential risks, formerly incarcerated men tend to view families as pivotal to their reentry experience and one of their most important sources of both tangible and emotional support (Visser & Courtney, 2007).

Socio-Psychological

Shifting the focus back toward the individual, it is clear that internal factors also play a critical role in predicting recidivism. Katsiyannis et al. (2018) identified several

socio-psychological factors that increased recidivism rates, including a history of antisocial behavior, holding antisocial attitudes, exhibiting an antisocial personality, and experiencing personal distress. One factor that decreases recidivism rates is post-release expectations, which Visser and Courtney (2007) found to be associated with lower levels of reincarceration when hope was expressed.

Expectations

Expectations are important to consider as they may shape how people persist through the stressors they encounter, and they are molded by prior experiences (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1989). The latter notion is important to consider in incarcerated individuals. As elaborated above, many members of this population already experienced poverty and other hardships before their incarceration. Furthermore, due to the heavily racialized nature of the U.S. criminal legal system (Alexander, 2010), expectations may be further impacted in the specific context of incarceration and reentry. Despite these circumstances, other factors, such as the positive impact of relationships, have also been highlighted, suggesting protective factors that likely predate reentry. As such, one would expect a diverse set of expectations from incarcerated individuals, both positive and negative.

From a social cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1989), positive expectations can motivate individuals to persist in the face of adversity and instill a sense of control in achieving their desires. Positive expectations regarding one's reentry have been shown to be a necessary component of the reentry process (Howerton et al., 2009; LeBel et al., 2008). Burnett and Maruna's (2004) study on reincarceration found that, within 10 years

of release, 70% of participants who expressed skepticism about their reentry experience were reincarcerated, compared to only 40% who expressed confidence. Many incarcerated men have clear expectations regarding their reentry, and while some remain ambivalent, most form a positive or negative outlook, citing either positive influences to help them (e.g., their children) or structural barriers that will hinder them (e.g., homelessness; Doekhie et al., 2017; Fowler et al., 2017; Howerton et al., 2008). In the few available U.S. samples examining positive expectations (e.g., La Vigne & Kachnowski, 2005; Visser et al., 2003; Visser et al., 2006), even prisoners with prior incarcerations reported being optimistic about their return, and a majority believed it would be easy to adjust to life on the outside and stay out of prison.

Various factors have been shown to influence positive expectations. For example, Visser and O'Connell (2012) found that lengthier prison sentences, more severe pre-prison drug use, and high levels of family dysfunction all lowered post-release optimism scores for incarcerated individuals. Conversely, they found that family support during incarceration, having more children, high levels of self-esteem, safe neighborhoods, and partaking in a drug treatment program increased post-release optimism. Additional in-prison influences include negative perceptions of prison environments and disciplinary sanctions, both of which decrease positive expectations (Cid et al., 2020).

Expectations and post-release outcomes have been shown to align in some cases, particularly regarding drug and alcohol use (Doekhie et al., 2017). However, in other cases, they stand in stark contrast, such as in Souza et al.'s (2015) study on incarcerated men in the UK, in which of the 93% of men who expected to find a job post-release, only

30% were employed six months after release. Studies such as these highlight the potential mismatch between expectations and experiences, and while the literature on unmet expectations in incarcerated individuals is sparse, research from other fields can offer insight. Research on the impact of unmet expectations in the context of life transitions (e.g., transitioning to parenthood or adulthood or returning home from long periods abroad) shows that when post-transition experiences do not live up to pre-transition expectations, individuals may experience increased psychological distress, increased difficulty in adjusting to post-transition life, and decreased life satisfaction (Culatta & Clay-Warner, 2021; Geeraert et al., 2022; Harwood et al., 2007).

Current Study

To summarize, past research has indicated that returning individuals face numerous obstacles during their reentry and multiple factors have been found to be influential for their risk for reincarceration. Researchers have theorized that expectations can influence post-release experiences and outcomes, but important empirical questions remain. The current study aims to advance our understanding of U.S. reincarceration by examining the predictive nature of pre-release expectations, with particular attention paid to formerly incarcerated U.S. fathers. Using data from the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting and Partnering (MFS-IP; Bir & Lindquist, 2017), a multi-wave study on incarcerated men and their romantic partners, the current study addresses three research questions. First, what expectations do incarcerated U.S. fathers have about their reentry experiences? Second, are these expectations being met? Finally, how do pre-release expectations influence short-term reincarceration rates in formerly incarcerated

U.S. fathers in general, and when they are being met or undermet? It was first hypothesized that incarcerated U.S. fathers would report generally positive expectations as seen in other U.S. samples, such as the Urban Institute's Returning Home Study. Regarding the second research question, it is hypothesized that these expectations will be largely undermet. Finally, it is hypothesized that positive expectations will predict lower reincarceration rates, as will met expectations, while undermet expectations will predict reincarceration.

Due to the heavily racialized nature of the U.S. criminal legal system in which Black individuals face harsher experiences on the streets, in the courts and prisons, and during reentry (Alexander, 2010; Alper et al., 2018; Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022), analyses will be stratified by race. This decision is further informed by calls from other researchers (e.g., Garcia et al., 2017) to acknowledge that numbers are not neutral, and that race is socially constructed. Therefore, particular interest is paid to within-group rather than between-group differences.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Participants

Data Source

This study utilized longitudinal data from the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting, and Partnering (MFS-IP; Bir & Lindquist, 2017), a federally funded evaluation project made publicly available to researchers through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. The MFS-IP was designed to assess the efficacy of relationship programming on relationship outcomes between incarcerated men and their intimate or co-parenting partners across several domains. In-depth surveys that covered many aspects of couples' lives were administered as part of the evaluation process and serve as the basis of the research reported here. Nearly 2,000 couples were included in the study, which focused on prisons in five different states (Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, New Jersey, and New York). Couples were first surveyed during the male partner's incarceration, then again 9, 18, and, in Indiana and Ohio, 34 months later. The longitudinal nature of this data set allows for various reentry patterns to be examined, as many participants were released and some reincarcerated throughout the data collection process.

Sample Characteristics

Participants had to meet six eligibility criteria to be included in the current study. First, men must have identified a focal child. Second, men must have been incarcerated in one of the two largest sites, Indiana or Ohio. This is because of the availability of 34-

month follow-up data, which allowed more time to examine possible reincarceration. Before moving on, it is worth noting the program eligibility requirements for these two sites. In Indiana, participants lived in faith/character-based housing and had partners that indicated willingness to go on a couple's retreat. In Ohio, participants and their partners had to indicate a committed relationship (Bir & Lindquist, 2017). Third, men must have been released from their baseline incarceration prior to the 34-month follow-up. Fourth, men must have valid (i.e., not missing) data on the variable indicating whether they had been reincarcerated during the study period. Fifth, men must have indicated involvement in a romantic relationship at baseline, although dissolution at subsequent waves was controlled for. Finally, the sample was restricted to individuals who identified as either non-Hispanic White or non-Hispanic Black men. A sample size of 346 men remained upon the implementation of these criteria.

Measures

Reincarceration

At each wave following baseline, the researchers reported if the men had been reincarcerated since the prior wave. This variable was dichotomized and assessed at each wave to render a score (0 = *no reincarceration*, 1 = *reincarcerated*). Any instances of reincarceration placed men in the latter category.

Expectations and Experiences

During their baseline incarceration, men were asked about their *expectations* for various aspects of post-release life. During reentry, they were asked about their post-release *experiences*. These questions were grouped into three domains: logistical,

financial, and relational. The logistical domain captured the social safety net of participants, the financial domain captured their financial stability, and the relational captured their familial relationships and coresidence. An additional item asked men if they expected to be reincarcerated. Even if men had been released and reincarcerated prior to their follow-up wave, experiences were still gathered regarding their time outside of prison. Due to this and the high risk for reincarceration in the immediate months following release (Antenangeli & Durose, 2021), data on experiences were derived from men's first post-release survey.

Logistical. Men were asked if they had a family member or a friend who would 1) loan them money, 2) provide them with a place to live, and 3) provide transportation to work or other appointments (0 = no, 1 = yes). Men who answered yes to either the family or friend version of the questions received a 1, while men who answered no to both questions received a 0. Each category, therefore, represented a dichotomous marker of different aspects of a social safety net. Post-release experiences were calculated using the same process. For example, someone who indicated that they expected to have a family member or friend loan them money would receive a score of 1 for that pre-release expectation, however, if upon their release, they indicated that they did not have a family member nor friend to loan them money, their post-release experience score would be 0.

Financial. Men were asked how easy or hard it would be to make enough money to support themselves. Scores ranged from 1 = very easy, 2 = pretty easy, 3 = pretty hard, and 4 = very hard. This item was then reverse-coded and dichotomized such that a

response expecting a hard time would be coded as a 0, and one expecting an easy time would be coded as a 1. Post-release experiences were calculated using the same process.

Relational.

Family Relationships. Men were asked how easy or hard it would be to 1) have a good relationship with their partner after they got out and 2) have a good relationship with their children after they got out. Scores ranged from 1 = very easy, 2 = pretty easy, 3 = pretty hard, and 4 = very hard. The same reverse coding and dichotomization used for the prior variable was used for both family relationship variables, with a 0 indicating expectations of difficulty and a 1 indicating expectations of ease. Post-release experiences were calculated using the same process.

Coresidence. Men were asked if they expected to live with 1) their partner and 2) their focal child post-release (0 = no, 1 = yes). These scores were unmodified both in their original expectation form and follow-up experience form.

Reincarceration. Men were asked if they expected to ever return to prison (0 = no, 1 = yes). Unlike the subsequent variables, the post-release experience for this was assessed using the outcome variable of reincarceration rather than a survey item.

Reentry Patterns (Discrepancies)

To determine whether expectations were met, expectations and experiences were cross-tabulated, and four different patterns emerged: negative expectations/negative experiences (negatively met), negative expectations/positive experiences (exceeded), positive expectations/negative experiences (undermet), and positive expectations/positive experiences (positively met). For example, if a participant indicated that they expected to

coreside with their partner when they were released but ended up not coresiding with their partner, they would be placed in the undermet pattern for that particular variable. If, however, they did coreside, they would be placed in the positively met pattern. These patterns allowed discrepancies to be easily understood for each predictor variable. For all variables, except for expectations for reincarceration, a 0 signified a negative expectation/experience, while a 1 signified a positive expectation and/or experience. For the reincarceration variable a 1 signified a negative expectation/experience, while a 0 signified a positive expectation/experience.

Each pattern (excluding reincarceration) was summed to yield a total score for each participant with a possible range from 0 to 8. For example, an individual who undermet both of their coresidence expectations but positively met the rest would have a total undermet score of 2, and a total positively met score of 6.

Controls

Fathers' age, marital status, prior employment, and whether or not their relationship dissolved in follow-up waves were controlled for due to the strong influence these factors have been shown to have on recidivism (Barr & Simons, 2015; La Vigne et al., 2009; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Additionally, prison-specific circumstances were controlled for, including the prison site, intervention group status, the total number of received services, the total number of identified barriers to contact, and the length of their baseline incarceration.

Analysis Plan

Patterns of missingness were assessed prior to running analyses. Rates of missingness were low across both predictor and control variables, with the highest rate of missingness (~7.5%) occurring on the expectation for reincarceration variable followed by the expectation for partner coresidence (~5.8%). In general, most variables had no missingness. After this initial assessment, multiple imputation was carried out with five imputations using IBM SPSS 27 (Version 27). Only five imputations were used, given the low total number of missing values (Acock, 2005). All predictor, control, and outcome variables were used to inform the imputation process.

To address the first research question, descriptive statistics were run on each expectation variable. By assessing the frequencies of these variables, it revealed, in general, how incarcerated U.S. fathers felt about their post-release prospects. To assess the second research question, reentry patterns were analyzed for each variable to help illustrate whether expectations were being met across the different domains. The final research question was explored via binary logistic regressions. The first set of models regressed the reincarceration variable onto men's expectations. In addition to the controls listed above, this model also controlled for the post-release experience variables to isolate the impact of expectations as distinct from experiences. The second set of models regressed the reincarceration variable onto the total score for each reentry pattern.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Descriptives

As seen in Table 1, which can be found in the appendix with all subsequent tables, most fathers expressed positive expectations for their post-release life. Over 90% of fathers reported that they expected to have someone to loan them money, provide them housing, and provide them transit. Regarding their romantic partnership, 87.6% of fathers expected it to be easy to maintain a good relationship with their romantic partners, and 83.5% expected to coreside with them. Regarding their focal child, 91.3% of fathers expected it to be easy to maintain a good relationship with them, and 79.5% expected to coreside with them. Fewer fathers expressed positive expectations concerning their financial situation, with only 64.2% expecting to easily be able to support themselves financially. Finally, 97.5% of fathers did not expect to be reincarcerated.

Table 2 shows the post-release experiences of the participants. Over 95% of fathers reported having someone provide them with money, housing, and transit. Regarding their romantic partner, 58.8% of fathers reported ease in maintaining their relationship, and 53.8% cohabitated with their partners after release. Regarding their focal child, 65.7% of fathers reported ease in maintaining their relationship, and 51.9% cohabitated with their focal child after release. Regarding their financial stability, 37.3% of fathers reported ease in supporting themselves financially. Finally, 37.3% of fathers were reincarcerated.

The frequencies of the four reentry patterns for each predictor can be seen in Table 3. Tables 4 and 5 show these patterns specific to White and Black fathers. Regarding negatively met expectations, around one-fourth of fathers both expected and experienced difficulty financially supporting themselves. The average number of negatively met expectations was 0.71 across fathers. Regarding undermet expectations, around one-third of fathers did not meet their positive expectations for the following variables: not returning to prison, easily supporting themselves financially, easily maintaining good relationships with their partner and child, and coresiding with their partner and child. The average number of undermet expectations was 1.6 across fathers. In other words, a considerable portion of fathers had expectations from multiple domains violated during reentry. Exceeded expectations were uncommon across all variables, with an average number of 0.38 across fathers. Finally, many fathers met their positive expectations. Most fathers expected to not return to prison and had not experienced reincarceration by the final wave of data collection. Over 90% of fathers reported having positive expectations and experiences for all their logistical needs. Around one-quarter of fathers expected and experienced ease in supporting themselves financially. Around half of all fathers easily maintained their relationship with their partner and coresided with their partner and child as expected. Finally, a majority of fathers expected to and were able to easily maintain their relationship with their child. On average, fathers had 5.11 total positively met expectations, making this the most common reentry pattern.

Impact of Expectations on Reincarceration

To assess the predictive utility of pre-release expectations on reincarceration, binary logistic regression models were run separately for White and Black fathers. Model 1 regressed the reincarceration variable onto the various expectation variables, Model 2 added the corresponding experience variables, and Model 3 added the control variables.

A vast majority of White fathers held positive expectations for having a family member or friend that could provide them with a place to live. Due to this low variability, this item and its corresponding experience were not included in the model. Model 1 yielded no significant predictive relationships between pre-release expectations and reincarceration. Model 2 had similar results; however, fathers who coresided with their partners post-release were 3.36 times more likely to be reincarcerated. Finally, Model 3 showed the same significant relationship between coresidence and reincarceration, but with the addition of controls, the odds of reincarceration increased to 9.18 times as likely. Of note, dissolution was also found to increase the odds of reincarceration by 9.33 times. Post-hoc analyses revealed that White fathers who experienced dissolution and coresided with their partner were twice as likely to be reincarcerated as Black fathers who experienced dissolution and coresided with their partners. Additionally, it was found that fathers who expected ease in relationship maintenance with their child were 4.95 times less likely to be reincarcerated. Some other results were significant at nontraditional levels ($p < .10$), as seen in Table 6. Model 3 was statistically significant overall $\chi^2(24) = 43.612, p = .008$. The model explained 35.9-35.7% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in reincarceration outcomes and correctly classified 74.5-76.6% of cases.

For Black fathers, neither Model 1 nor Model 2 yielded significant predictive relationships between pre-release expectations (or experiences) and reincarceration. Model 3 revealed that expecting to have someone to provide housing during reentry reduced the likelihood of reincarceration. Additionally, there was a significant relationship between the length of baseline incarceration and reincarceration; fathers with longer sentences were less likely to be reincarcerated. Some other results were significant at nontraditional levels ($p < .10$), as seen in Table 7. Model 3 was statistically significant overall $\chi^2(26) = 44.046$, $p = .015$. The model explained 22.6-27.9% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in reincarceration outcomes and correctly classified 72-75.15% of cases.

Impact of Reentry Patterns on Reincarceration

Binary logistic regression models were run independently for White and Black fathers. Each model regressed the outcome variable onto the total reentry patterns variables (e.g., the total number of undermet expectations) and the control variables. Only results from the undermet model are shown, as it was the only pattern with significant findings.

As seen in Table 8, for White fathers, a significant association was found in which White fathers were less likely to be reincarcerated when they had more undermet expectations. Post-hoc analyses revealed that adding dissolution to the model as a control led to a significant relationship between total undermet expectations and reincarceration. Attempts to test an interaction between total undermet expectations and dissolution yielded no significant results. The model was statistically significant $\chi^2(10) = 25.691$, $p = .004$ and explained 21.1-22.6% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in reincarceration

outcomes as well as correctly classified 68.4-70.1% of cases. As seen in Table 9, for Black fathers, the total number of undermet expectations did not significantly impact reincarceration rates. This model was not statistically significant $\chi^2(10) = 10.777, p = .375$.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Given the numerous difficulties individuals face during reentry, including a high reincarceration rate, it is critical to study factors that can promote either protection or risk in this marginalized group. Using data from the Multi-site Family Study on Incarceration, Parenting, and Partnering (MFS-IP; Bir & Lindquist, 2017), the current study reveals heterogeneity in both the expectations held by incarcerated U.S. fathers and in their post-release experiences, highlighting areas in which fathers encounter obstacles as well as support.

Most fathers expressed positive expectations across logistical, financial, and relational domains. In other words, they expected a relatively easy transition to life outside of prison where they would have social support for logistical needs, support themselves financially, and maintain their relationships and coreside with their partners and children. Financial stability, the item with the lowest percentage of positive expectations, still saw most fathers report expectations of ease in supporting themselves. These findings align very closely with other U.S. studies, such as those utilizing the Returning Home dataset, which reported similar rates of expectations of ease for financial outcomes (e.g., La Vigne & Kachnowski, 2005). The optimism observed here also aligns with non-U.S. samples (e.g., Souza et al., 2015; Villman, 2021).

Analyses of post-release experiences reveal a more nuanced pattern. Results suggest that fathers are returning home to support networks capable of providing them with money, housing, and transit. However, for the other domains, experiences were less

positive. Although most fathers still reported ease in maintaining family relationships and coresiding, the percentages were significantly less than initial expectations. Additionally, financial stability provided the most difficulty, with most fathers reporting that they were struggling to support themselves financially.

Cross-tabulating expectations and experiences allows for an examination of reentry patterns, which is essential to better understand the overall reentry experiences and discrepancies that may emerge. In general, the frequencies of these categories align with prior findings that incarcerated individuals often meet their pre-release expectations (Doekhie et al., 2017; Souza et al., 2015). Most fathers' expectations were met, regardless of whether they were generally positive or negative about their post-release prospects. This finding shows that despite fathers having variability in their reentry patterns, on average, they tend to predict their experiences, whether positive or negative, correctly. Despite the majority of fathers meeting their expectations, there were still many cases of expectations not being met. For instance, nearly one-third of fathers who did not expect to return to prison were reincarcerated. Similar proportions of undermet expectations were found for relationships, coresidence, and financial stability. In other words, a sizable number of fathers were having their positive expectations violated across multiple domains. These findings reflect the well-documented interpersonal and financial hardships men experience during reentry (Griffith et al., 2019; McKay et al., 2018; Turney, 2015). Exceeded expectations (i.e., fathers who had negative expectations but positive experiences) were rare.

It is worth delving deeper into the differences between negatively met and positively met expectations. The only domain with a large portion of negatively met expectations was financial support, which aligns with prior research that highlights the difficulty of supporting oneself during reentry (La Vigne et al., 2009). Buffering these hardships is a robust social safety net expected and experienced by many fathers during reentry. Furthermore, despite not reaching the same frequencies as the logistical items, most fathers met romantic partner and child expectations. These findings support a common theme in the Returning Home study in which families became an integral part of the reentry process (Visser & Courtney, 2007). The average number of each pattern aligns well with these frequencies and helps paint a broader picture that, although there is variability in experiences, fathers tend to be optimistic overall and meet their expectations across most domains. Black fathers reported higher rates of optimism and “success” across all expectations and a majority of experiences than White fathers. These differences are in line with Pattillo’s (2021) Black Advantage Vision framework which argues that historically a majority of research has approached Black individuals and families from a deficit lens and research is needed which celebrates Black triumph and joy. The findings in these two areas of the study serve as an example of the strength and resilience of Black individuals and their families and should be noted as such.

Despite the commonality of expectations predicting experiences, the question of their predictive utility on reincarceration remains. The binary logistic regressions utilized in this study attempt to better elucidate this possible relationship. Across both racialized groups, there was limited support for positive expectations predicting lower

reincarceration rates. For fathers racialized as White, those who expected to be able to easily maintain a relationship with their child were less likely to be reincarcerated than those who expected difficulty. This analysis also yielded the counterintuitive finding that White fathers who coresided with their romantic partners post-release were significantly more likely to be reincarcerated than those who did not. This finding may be related to the dissolution of romantic relationships in White fathers, as seen by the increased risk for reincarceration in those who experienced dissolution, yet these associations did not exist in Black fathers. Additional support for this explanation may be found in the elevated reincarceration rate for White fathers who coresided and experienced relationship dissolution, which was nearly twice as high as Black fathers with the same experiences. Given that dissolution rates did not significantly differ between racialized groups, one possible explanation for this finding is that Black fathers may have more diverse networks of support through fictive kin (Taylor et al., 2013). In contrast, White fathers may have been more dependent on their romantic partners for reentry needs; thus, relationship dissolution with their coresiding partner left them without a safety net. All of this being stated, it is additionally possible that dissolution is a proxy for other relationship dynamics that may explain the finding and warrant attention in future research. For fathers racialized as Black, those who expected to have someone to provide them with housing and those who experienced child coresidence were less likely to be reincarcerated. These findings highlight the importance of structural and family support (Visser & Courtney, 2007). Finally, longer incarceration lengths were associated with reduced reincarceration, a finding previously associated with reduced optimism (Visser

& O'Connell, 2012). One possible explanation for this could be that individuals with longer sentences are reentering at an older age and, therefore, into an environment where contact with the criminal legal system may be less common (Sampson & Laub, 2005). Ultimately, this proposed explanation still ignores the complex systemic forces at play, and further exploration is encouraged. Overall, these findings paint a more nuanced picture than that suggested by prior research (Howerton et al., 2009; LeBel et al., 2008) and our social cognitive framework. Even the few expectations that did significantly predict reincarceration pointed more towards the importance of having networks of emotional and tangible support through children and housing. Therefore, it seems plausible that expectations on their own are not all that important, but rather the object of the expectation, that being support during reentry, is the true protective factor. However, it should be acknowledged that it is possible that these findings reflect the temporal particularity of the short time frame and that given a longer time frame, such as the ten-year frame of reference utilized in Burnett and Maruna's (2004) study, the predictive utility of expectations may have emerged more prominently.

Overall, analyses failed to support the idea that violated expectations increase risk for short-term reincarceration. Moreover, when controlling for dissolution, more total undermet expectations were found to actually decrease the risk for reincarceration for White fathers. One possible explanation for this counterintuitive finding could be that White fathers with more undermet expectations are less likely to experience coresidence with their romantic partner. Thus, they may be shielded from some of the harmful effects

of dissolution and associated dynamics, as noted earlier. More information regarding the timing of dissolution is needed to untangle these complexities.

This study has several key strengths. The longitudinal data allows for the analysis of a critical transition period for formerly incarcerated men, one in which the risk for reincarceration is at its peak (Antenangeli & Durose, 2021). This study also provides new knowledge on the expectations held by incarcerated U.S. fathers and isolates the effect of these expectations on reincarceration, something that has yet to be captured. Finally, through analyses stratified by race, this study shows that the experience of reentry is not consistent across racialized groups, highlighting the inequities built into the criminal legal system.

Despite these strengths, there were also multiple limitations to this study that future researchers should work to address. The specific group of men utilized in this study, Black and White fathers with a romantic partner at baseline, may reduce generalizability. While these racialized groups were chosen due to the historical foundation of anti-Black racism in the U.S. criminal legal system (Alexander, 2010; Najdowski, 2022), future research should aim to include other racial and ethnic groups as the influence of White supremacy is not restricted to White-Black racial lines. Additionally, program eligibility requirements at each site may limit the generalizability of findings. Despite controlling for site of incarceration and intervention group, fathers who opt-in to relationship intervention programs may be different from fathers in ways that may affect reentry expectations and experiences. While this study was not dyadic, prior research has highlighted that differences may exist between couples who have a

partner willing to participate in a study in comparison to those which do not (e.g., Barton et al., 2020). Another limitation of this study is the lack of specific dates of release, reincarceration, and dissolution. These timing issues create difficulty when drawing conclusions and reporting specific reentry patterns. Future research utilizing the MFS-IP data (Bir & Lindquist, 2017) should attempt to utilize specific dates of release to capture a more detailed look at the timing of reincarceration. Along these lines, not all fathers were released at the same time, meaning that different fathers were out for shorter periods and thus short-term reincarceration may have just not yet been captured. This study also did not utilize any data from romantic partners. As the findings revealed, family and friends are an important aspect of reentry and as such future work should start by incorporating partner perspectives on men's reentry, with the goal of eventually expanding to the greater community to which men are returning. By expanding the level of analysis, future research could better capture the broader networks of support that were revealed to be beneficial to the reentry experience. Finally, while this study was interested primarily in reincarceration, future research should expand criminal legal system contact to include rearrest and reconviction in analyses.

This study provides new insights into U.S. fathers' expectations and experiences during the afterlife of mass incarceration (Miller, 2021). This study, guided by prior literature and existing data, approached hopeful expectations on an individual level. Building on this, future research should try to capture a more communal level of hope. This suggestion echoes both that of French et al. (2019), who propose the necessity of collectivism and "radical hope" in lifelong liberation struggles of which the reentry

period certainly could qualify, as well as Miller (2021), who argues for the conceptualization of reentry as a mass phenomenon. While utilizing a broader frame of reference, three suggestions are made to researchers and policymakers. First, attempts should be made to reduce harm across the board during the reentry period for all individuals. Second, specific attention should be paid to groups with a high risk for reincarceration. These prior two points could be addressed through the utilization of supportive programming highlighted by Muentner and Charles' (2020) participants. That is to say that programs should be multimodal to address the many challenges encountered during reentry and be easily accessible and tailored to their specific participants. Finally, efforts should continue being made to radically reduce the United States' reliance on prisons to solve complex social problems. Rather than focusing on maintaining and reforming the current carceral state, efforts must be made to "affirm... the human rights to health, education, housing, and adequate living standards for all" (de Giorgi, 2017, p. 113).

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Frequencies of pre-release expectations

Expected to...	% of all men N = 346	% of White men n=154	% of Black men n=192
Not return to prison	97.5%	97.2%	97.8%
Have someone to loan them money	93.1%	90.9%	94.8%
Have someone to provide them housing	94.2%	92.1%	95.8%
Have someone to provide them transit	95.1%	94.2%	95.8%
Easily support themselves financially	64.2%	57.1%	69.8%
Easily maintain a good relationship with partner	87.6%	84.9%	89.8%
Easily maintain a good relationship with child	91.3%	89.6%	92.7%
Coreside w/ partner	83.5%	83.3%	83.6%
Coreside w/ Child	79.5%	79.3%	79.7%

Table 2. Frequencies of post-release experiences

Post-release experience	% of all men N = 346	% of White men n=154	% of Black men n=192
Reincarcerated	37.3%	38.3%	36.5%
Had someone to loan them money	97.1%	96.1%	97.9%
Had someone to provide them housing	98.8%	99.4%	98.4%
Had someone to provide them transit	95.9%	94.8%	96.8%
Easily supported themselves financially	37.3%	45.5%	30.7%
Easily maintained a good relationship w/ partner	58.8%	54.4%	62.4%
Easily maintained a good relationship w/ child	65.7%	57.1%	72.6%
Coresided w/ partner	53.8%	50.6%	56.3%
Coresided w/ Child	51.9%	46.1%	56.5%

Table 3. Frequencies of reentry patterns, all fathers (N=346)

Expected to...	Negative Expectation/ Negative Experience (Negatively Met)	Positive Expectation/ Negative Experience (Undermet)	Negative Expectation/ Positive Experience (Exceeded)	Positive Expectation/ Positive Experience (Positively Met)
Not return to prison	1.3%	34.1%	1.3%	63.4%
Have someone to loan them money	1.7%	1.2%	5.2%	91.9%
Have someone to provide them housing	0.6%	0.6%	5.2%	93.6%
Have someone to provide them transit	1.5%	2.6%	3.5%	92.4%
Easily support themselves financially	26.0%	36.7%	9.8%	27.5%
Easily maintain a good relationship with partner	8.1%	32.8%	4.4%	54.7%
Easily maintain a good relationship with child	6.4%	27.9%	2.3%	63.4%
Coreside w/ partner	12.8%	32.7%	3.7%	50.8%
Coreside w/ Child	16.0%	31.7%	4.5%	47.7%

Table 4. Frequencies of reentry patterns, White fathers (n=154)

Expected to...	Negative Expectation/ Negative Experience (Negatively Met)	Positive Expectation/ Negative Experience (Undermet)	Negative Expectation/ Positive Experience (Exceeded)	Positive Expectation/ Positive Experience (Positively Met)
Not return to prison	0.7%	35.2%	2.1%	62.0%
Have someone to loan them money	1.9%	1.9%	7.1%	89.0%
Have someone to provide them housing	0.0%	0.7%	7.9%	91.4%
Have someone to provide them transit	1.3%	3.9%	4.5%	90.3%
Easily support themselves financially	29.2%	25.3%	13.6%	31.8%
Easily maintain a good relationship with partner	11.7%	33.8%	3.4%	51.0%
Easily maintain a good relationship with child	8.4%	34.4%	1.9%	55.2%
Coreside w/ partner	12.5%	34.7%	4.2%	48.6%
Coreside w/ Child	16.6%	36.6%	4.1%	42.8%

Table 5. Frequencies of reentry patterns, Black fathers (n=192)

Expected to...	Negative Expectation/ Negative Experience (Negatively Met)	Positive Expectation/ Negative Experience (Undermet)	Negative Expectation/ Positive Experience (Exceeded)	Positive Expectation/ Positive Experience (Positively Met)
Not return to prison	1.7%	33.1%	0.6%	64.6%
Have someone to loan them money	1.6%	0.5%	3.7%	94.2%
Have someone to provide them housing	1.0%	0.5%	3.1%	95.3%
Have someone to provide them transit	1.6%	1.6%	2.6%	94.2%
Easily support themselves financially	23.4%	45.8%	6.8%	24.0%
Easily maintain a good relationship with partner	5.1%	32%	5.1%	57.7%
Easily maintain a good relationship with child	4.7%	22.6%	2.6%	70.0%
Coreside w/ partner	13.1%	31.1%	3.3%	52.5%
Coreside w/ Child	15.6%	28.0%	4.8%	51.6%

Table 6. Binary logistic regression models of the association between expectations and reincarceration, White fathers (n = 154)

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)
Expectations for...			
Not returning to prison	.459 (.044-4.842)	.528 (.050-5.527)	.439 (.035-5.582)
Having someone to provide you a loan	.803 (.206-3.138)	1.026 (.222-4.736)	.571 (.103-3.160)
Having someone to provide you transit	3.180 (.484-20.910)	4.633 (.578-37.159)	8.382† (.713-98.603)
Being able to financially support yourself	.667 (.336-1.324)	.577 (.274-1.214)	.639 (.268-1.524)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ partner	1.011 (.346-2.954)	.841 (.251-2.819)	.838 (.206-3.411)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ child	.440 (.139-1.393)	.346† (.098-1.223)	.202* (.043-.953)
Coresiding w/ partner	.674 (.204-2.224)	.562 (.152-2.080)	.746 (.158-3.514)
Coresiding w/ child	1.005 (.375-2.689)	1.247 (.375-4.145)	.786 (.186-3.329)
Experience of...			
Having someone to provide you a loan	-	.801 (.109-5.859)	.726 (.067-7.877)
Having someone to provide you transit	-	.329 (.054-1.991)	.200 (.025-1.601)
Being able to financially support yourself	-	.933 (.439-1.983)	.939 (.384-2.295)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ partner	-	.925 (.370-2.316)	1.662 (.546-5.066)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ child	-	1.898 (.808-4.458)	2.082 (.721-6.011)
Coresiding w/ partner	-	2.986† (.913-9.764)	10.637* (2.232-50.702)
Coresiding w/ child	-	.395† (.131-1.189)	.355 (.097-1.304)
Controls			

Table 6 continued

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)
Received Relationship Intervention	-	-	.940 (.378-2.339)
Incarcerated at Indiana Site	-	-	.678 (.247-1.861)
Length of Incarceration	-	-	.785† (.613-1.005)
# of Services Received During Incarceration	-	-	1.105 (.922-1.325)
# of Identified Barriers to Contact	-	-	1.027 (.916-1.151)
Age	-	-	.952 (.897-1.010)
Currently Married	-	-	1.431 (.482-4.243)
Experienced Relationship Dissolution	-	-	11.925** (3.103-45.828)
Employed 6 Months Prior to Incarceration	-	-	1.054 (.410-2.709)

Note. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .001

Table 7. Binary logistic regression models of the association between expectations and reincarceration, Black fathers (n = 192)

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)
Expectations for...			
Not returning to prison	3.282 (.199-54.038)	4.286 (.333-55.109)	5.360 (.238-120.870)
Having someone to provide you a loan	1.268 (.139-11.548)	2.153 (.120-38.593)	1.532 (.064-36.930)
Having someone to provide you with housing	.113† (.010-1.245)	.098† (.007-1.297)	.035* (.002-.738)
Having someone to provide you transit	.806 (.093-7.007)	.851 (.079-9.189)	1.709 (.129-22.668)
Being able to financially support yourself	1.554 (.763-3.166)	1.411 (.668-2.982)	1.224 (.538-2.785)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ partner	.803 (.229-2.812)	1.006 (.259-3.903)	.911 (.242-3.685)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ child	.802 (.208-3.086)	.799 (.198-3.223)	.662 (.142-3.086)
Coresiding w/ partner	1.305 (.432-3.939)	1.307 (.391-4.375)	1.828 (.503-6.641)
Coresiding w/ child	1.699 (.652-4.424)	1.949 (.704-5.391)	2.242† (.743-6.766)
Experience of...			
Having someone to provide you a loan	-	.159 (.004-6.528)	.179 (.003-10.073)
Having someone to provide you with housing		1.601* (.045-57.120)	.847 (.015-47.765)
Having someone to provide you transit	-	.596 (.070-5.090)	.585 (.057-5.970)
Being able to financially support yourself	-	.826 (.407-1.676)	.876 (.398-1.925)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ partner	-	.940 (.464-1.903)	1.192 (.537-2.645)
Being able to have a good relationship w/ child	-	1.628 (.677-3.918)	1.374 (.545-3.466)
Coresiding w/ partner	-	1.376 (.501-3.776)	1.744 (.583-5.220)

Table 7 continued

	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)
Coresiding w/ child	-	.413† (.146-1.165)	.340* (.113-1.019)
Controls			
Received Relationship Intervention	-	-	.841 (.383-1.844)
Incarcerated at Indiana Site	-	-	.934 (.432-2.020)
Length of Incarceration	-	-	.817* (.698-.957)
# of Services Received During Incarceration	-	-	1.003 (.881-1.142)
# of Identified Barriers to Contact	-	-	1.022 (.923-1.131)
Age	-	-	.949† (.897-1.003)
Currently Married	-	-	.931 (.375-2.313)
Experienced Relationship Dissolution	-	-	1.986† (.891-4.429)
Employed 6 Months Prior to Incarceration	-	-	1.192 (.577-2.462)

Note. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .001

Table 8. Binary logistic regression models of the association between discrepancy groups and reincarceration, White fathers (n = 154)

	OR (95% CI)
Total Unmet Expectations	.711* (.534-.945)
Controls	
Received Relationship Intervention	1.020 (.461-2.255)
Incarcerated at Indiana Site	.740 (.312-1.756)
Length of Incarceration	.793* (.636-.988)
# of Services Received During Incarceration	1.036 (.891-1.206)
# of Identified Barriers to Contact	1.032 (.930-1.144)-
Age	.955† (.906-1.006)
Currently Married	1.198 (.471-3.049)
Experienced Relationship Dissolution	3.943* (1.524-10.197)
Employed 6 Months Prior to Incarceration	1.358 (.604-3.056)

Note. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .001

Table 9. Binary logistic regression models of the association between discrepancy groups and reincarceration, Black fathers (n = 192)

	OR (95% CI)
Total Unmet Expectations	1.101 (.863-1.403)
Controls	
Received Relationship Intervention	.964 (.491-1.892)
Incarcerated at Indiana Site	1.155 (.588-2.271)
Length of Incarceration	.882† (.771-1.009)
# of Services Received During Incarceration	.985 (.878-1.105)
# of Identified Barriers to Contact	1.033 (.945-1.128)
Age	.960 (.914-1.009)
Currently Married	1.068 (.485-2.355)
Experienced Relationship Dissolution	1.378 (.700-2.715)
Employed 6 Months Prior to Incarceration	1.025 (.536-1.959)

Note. †p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .001

VITA

Cole Green (he/him) was born and raised in Nashville. In 2019, he received his BA in Psychology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In the Fall of 2021, he began his graduate studies in the Department of Child and Family Studies as an MS en route to PhD student. His research interests center around the impact of mass incarceration on families. During his time as a graduate student, Cole worked as a graduate research assistant in the Well-Being in Adolescents and Emerging Adults (WAE) lab, and as a teaching assistant for CFS 395 (Research Methods).