Fatherless Homes and Delinquency: A Study of
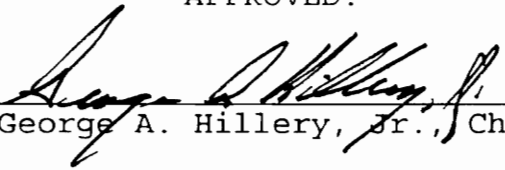Institutionalized African American Male Youth

by

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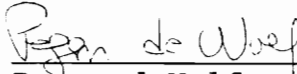
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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between fatherless homes and juvenile delinquency, especially as it is perceived by African American adolescent males (N=23) who have been detained in a juvenile detention facility. This study is ethnographic, exploratory, and inductive in its approach. Hypotheses are generated or discovered rather than tested. The methodology that is employed is multi-dimensional as it includes in-depth interviews, self-reports, and participant observation.

The findings suggest that adolescent African American males perceive father-absence as a partial causal factor in their own delinquency, and their peers' delinquency as well (suggesting most strongly a social control hypothesis, although other possible explanations exist). Family structure (i.e., father-absence) appears to be related to delinquent behavior through the mediating variables of parental supervision, discipline, and gender role modelling.

The results from this study suggest that the dynamics

within a family system are more important in explaining delinquent behavior than is the actual family structure. Some of the most insightful research into family structure and delinquency, especially research that aims to inform prevention and treatment programs, may come from examinations of how family structure and function are related.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation and admiration to my committee members. Dr. George A. Hillery, Jr., my committee chair, gave freely of his time, gifts, and energy. His contributions to this project, as well as to my life, are simply too numerous to list in a brief space. Drs. Donald Shoemaker and Peggy deWolf also gave much of themselves. They were critical, yet always supportive, throughout the investigation and writing of this research project.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the staff of the Roanoke Juvenile Detention Home, where this research took place. Mark Johnson, the Superintendent, not only granted me permission, but also provided me with important insights and suggestions that have improved this research. A special thank you is in order for Tom Brown, General Ross, and Curtis Jones. These three men have taught me more about what it means to be a black man in America than any textbook, graduate course, or journal article ever could.

A special thank you is also in order for all of the residents of the Home. I especially want to thank the young men who freely shared their lives with me as I gathered the data for this project. I cannot mention them by name, but they know who they are--I thank them and their families for allowing me the opportunity to get to know them and

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The miscreant behavior of young people is a social problem that has concerned societies throughout recorded history. This concern is understandable on many accounts. For one, our future depends on our youth and their preparedness for that future. Additionally, and however accurately, many people believe that today's juvenile delinquent is tomorrow's adult criminal (Shoemaker, 1990:4). Furthermore, the problem of juvenile delinquency raises many questions regarding a society's ability, or inability, to socialize, educate, and nurture its young.

While there is ample evidence to demonstrate that youthful offenders have been present in nearly every society throughout recorded history, there seems to exist in our time a heightened concern that juvenile crime is on the increase, both in terms of occurrence and severity. Politicians, as well as many in the news media, daily take up this very issue. We hear calls to "get tough" on crime and delinquency. Some call for "boot camps" for youthful offenders, and much stiffer penalties for those who commit the most serious crimes. Some politicians have even suggested that the National Guard be called into the toughest urban areas to combat crime, especially crack

cocaine dealing and its attendant violence. In addition, adults are rightly concerned for the very lives of our young people.

The leading cause of death for black males fifteen to twenty-four years of age is homicide. Black male children, youth, and young adults (ages birth to thirty-four years) suffer the highest rate of death by gun shots. The second leading cause of death for all males ages fifteen to twenty-four years is homicide. Homicide is the fourth leading cause of death for all youths ages five to fourteen years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). The age group that now commits the greatest number of murders in the United States is fifteen to nineteen year olds (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1991a). Moreover, "The fastest growing segment of the criminal population is our nation's children" (Bennett, 1993:4). Although juvenile violent crime arrest rates have fluctuated since 1965 (there was a substantial dip between 1980 and 1985), overall, violent crime arrest rates for young persons have quadrupled since 1965 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1991b). Suffice it to say, Americans are worried about juvenile delinquency and juvenile delinquents.

In addition to the heightened concern over delinquency and rising homicide rates, there is also concern over the deterioration of the nuclear family. Mainstream periodicals

such as *Newsweek* (August 30, 1993) and *The Atlantic Monthly* (April, 1993) have recently featured cover stories about the increasing problem of fatherless families in this country. Today, more than one in four (28.6%) families with children are headed by a single parent, almost always a single mother (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991a). Nearly two out of three (62%) African American children are living in single-parent homes (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991a).

Whether right or wrong, many people hold the belief that the absence of a father or father figure is related to juvenile misconduct. As Zuckerman writes in a recent editorial on the problem of crime in America (1993:100), "The average American citizen has an idea that the problem is rooted in teenage mothers and babies with absentee fathers who grow up without the balance of discipline and love in family life. Attorney General Janet Reno puts it down specifically to the absence of a system of reward and punishment that teaches responsibility to a child." The question of delinquency causation is, of course, an empirical question, and social scientists have conducted research into this issue for a long time. Despite the vast number of studies that address the issue of family structure and juvenile delinquency, there is no consensus among social science researchers regarding a causal link between these variables; the debate is very much ongoing.

The debate over family structure and delinquent behavior becomes even more difficult to sort through when the issue of race is introduced (for a brief, yet excellent account of this, see Matsueda and Heimer, 1987:826). One can rightly ask, "Why study delinquent African American male adolescents who are from fatherless homes[1]?". Why single them out for special attention? An answer to both of these questions is well summarized by African American physician, scholar, and Harvard professor, Alvin Poussaint, who writes (in Bowser, 1991:13):

> If we as a society do not rescue young Black men from
> the disaster that threatens them and nurture them
> adequately during their teenage years, there will
> surely be further deterioration of the Black family and
> enormous social cost to the country. We can no longer
> ignore what is now obvious: many of these young men are
> in deep trouble, particularly those living in extreme
> poverty in our urban ghettoes.

Dr. Poussaint goes on to write (p. 14):

The socialization of the Black boy from the time of his
birth deserves close scrutiny. What is the effect on
him, for example, of growing up in a single-parent
household headed by a woman? How is the little boy
affected by the absence of a father or another adult
male? What are the social forces that impact upon him

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[1] The terms "African American" and "black" are used interchangeably in this study. The former is more culturally sensitive and historically accurate, but the latter is found in much of the literature, so it too is used. The term "fatherless home" is generally used instead of "broken home." The latter term is value-laden and offensive to many people. However, "broken home" is found extensively in the research literature, and so it is sometimes used in the present study.

and induce him to adopt antisocial "macho" attitudes
that he thinks will enhance his male identity?

Poussaint raises several important questions, including
how do single-parent households, absent father figures, and
poverty affect the young black male's development, and what
social factors account for the antisocial or "macho"
attitudes that many black males adopt?

It is well established that many African American
children are living in homes without their fathers or father
surrogates. In fact, this is a trend that continues to
increase. For example, in 1965 female-headed households
accounted for nearly a quarter of all African American
families (Moynihan, 1965). By 1985, more than half (51%) of
all African American children (less than eighteen years of
age) lived in female-headed households (Jaynes and Williams,
1989). In a span of only twenty years, the percentage of
African American female-headed households had doubled.
Today, nearly two out of every three (62%) African American
children are born to unmarried women. Furthermore, some
projections indicate that as many as nine out of every ten
(86% according to Bumpass, 1984; 94% according to Popenoe,
1993) African American children are likely to spend some
time in a single-parent (90% fatherless) family.

Although the prevalence of fatherless homes is

generally undisputed, the possible effects or outcomes of such a living arrangement on children are debated among social science researchers and policymakers. The debate over "broken" versus "intact" family structure and how it affects children is ideologically and politically-charged. Those with conservative leanings will often argue that *only* two-parent families can provide the support and guidance that children need to develop normally. Single-parents, homosexuals, and others who live "alternative" lifestyles are blamed for all manner of social ills by ultra-conservatives. On the other hand, those who live alternative lifestyles, as well as many liberal-minded researchers and policymakers, will often argue that the traditional intact family structure is not without its own set of problems, and that blaming single-parent and other families that deviate from the traditional intact family structure is uncaring, unwanted, and, most importantly, unproductive[2]. Furthermore, many liberals argue that it is not family structure that affects the well-being of youth, but other factors such as income.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of this debate on family structure is that the question of *how* children might

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[2] For an interesting discussion on the politics and ideological battles that surround the family structure issue, the reader is referred to an article by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead in *The Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1993.

be affected is often lost in the heated rhetoric that is amply supplied by both sides. Rather than discussing the impact of various family structures on children, the debate tends instead to focus on such issues as bigotry, morality, tolerance, and individual adult freedom. Despite the polemic, there is an impressive and growing body of empirical evidence that suggests that not all family structures produce equally positive outcomes for children.

There are several important points that should be made at this juncture: 1) the body of social science evidence is, indeed, impressive and growing, but it is not without conflicting and sometimes confusing findings (see chapter 2, literature review); 2) the political climate in social science is such that certain research questions, issues, and perspectives are discouraged, and researchers who take up issues such as family structure, race, and delinquency are sometimes labelled as racists, sexists, and bigots. One needs only to think back to the reaction that Moynihan (1965) drew relative to his study of the Negro family (for an excellent account of this see Rainwater and Yancey, 1967). I am well aware that when one studies a disadvantaged group, it is all too easy to give the appearance of blaming the victim; and 3) the present study is designed to suggest ideas and hypotheses regarding the possible effects of father-absence on African American

males. It is not a study that tests any particular theory or set of hypotheses.

Thus far, it has been established that the single-parent, usually female-headed, family structure accounts for a large and growing proportion of many American families, and it is most pronounced among African American families. But what problems, if any, are associated with single-parent homes? Social science research findings suggest that the following difficulties for children (black and white, male and female) are associated with (not necessarily caused by) single-parent homes: 1) increased antisocial/deviant behavior (Bandura and Walters, 1959; Demo and Acock, 1988; Dornbusch et al., 1985; Glueck and Glueck, 1962; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987; Peterson and Zill, 1986; Wells and Rankin, 1991); 2) difficulty in forming and maintaining intimate relationships (Glenn and Kramer, 1985; McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988; Wallerstein and Corbin, 1989); 3) decreased educational attainment (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986; Keith and Finlay, 1988; Krein and Beller, 1988; McLanahan, 1985; Mueller and Cooper, 1986); 4) increased poverty (Bumpass and McLanahan, 1989; Bumpass and Rindfuss, 1979; Demo and Acock, 1988); and 5) poorer than average mental health (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986; Kalter et al., 1989).

Obviously, father-absence is not the only problem facing the youth of our nation, especially African American

youth. There are, unfortunately, a great variety of
problems and obstacles in the lives of many of our nation's
black children. African Americans, especially youngsters,
are at great risk of many negative outcomes.

Marian Wright Edelman (1985), President of the
Children's Defense Fund, lists the following as the biggest
problems facing black children in America: poverty, female-
headed families, and inadequate access to health care,
mental health, and educational resources.

Washington and LaPoint (1988) offer their own list of
problems facing black children. They include an increasing
rate of out-of-wedlock births among black adolescents. They
point out that nearly two of every three black families are
headed by a single mother (one in five for whites). They
mention that black children are two and one-half times more
likely than white children to live in substandard housing.
They report that black families have median incomes that are
less than 60% of that of white families. Additionally, they
report that black children are four times as likely as white
children to be incarcerated between the ages fifteen to
nineteen years.

One of the most noted problems facing many African
American male youths is the violence that is a routine part
of their daily lives. Black-on-black violence, according to
African American leaders like Jesse Jackson, threatens to

destroy the African American community. Amos Wilson

(1992:8-9) cites the following statistics: homicide is the

primary cause of death for African American males between

the ages of fifteen and thirty-four. In 1986, African

Americans accounted for 44% of all murder victims. Moreover,

during the period 1978 to 1987, the average annual murder

rates for young African American males were five to eight

times that of young white males. In 1987, homicide

accounted for 42% of all deaths of African American males

between fifteen and twenty-four years of age.

Some observers have suggested that what is currently

going on with our nation's young African American males is

akin to combat. Citing an article from *The New York Times*,

Wilson (1992:9) notes:

> In some areas of the country it is now more likely for
> a black male between his 15th and 25th birthday to die
> from homicide than it was for a United States soldier
> to be killed on a tour of duty in Vietnam.

Mauer (1990) reports that one in four African American

males in their 20s are incarcerated or on probation (as

compared to one in sixteen for white males, and one in ten

for Hispanic males). The number of black males who are

incarcerated or on probation is greater than the number of

black males enrolled in college.

What all of these statistics point to is an alarming

situation. The United States is not a caring and safe place for blacks, especially young black men. As Washington and LaPoint bluntly put it (1988:13), "Black boys in particular are at risk simply 'being' in the United States of America."

The present study attempts to understand some of the problems facing fatherless African American adolescent males, especially from their own points of view. I have attempted to generate hypotheses based on the perceptions and observations of actual delinquent black male youths from fatherless homes. Much of what is written in the following pages comes directly from these young men.

This study allows victims to speak for themselves. The young men in my sample *are* victims of American racism. Their families are also victims. This study does not blame the victim. Rather, it forthrightly tries to understand the fatherless black adolescent male delinquent and his often criminogenic world. Blame, for blame's sake, is not something that will contribute to the amelioration of juvenile crime. What is important, though, is to increase our understanding of the problems faced by young black males so that real solutions to their plight might be found. The continued breakdown of the African American family is not *the* problem (although it is problematic, of course). Rather, this breakdown is symptomatic of larger social problems.

In summary, the problems facing many African American male youths are difficult to overstate. All Americans must face this crisis squarely if there is to be any real chance of successfully dealing with these problems and saving young lives. Parents, educators, policymakers, voters, social science researchers, and all others who are concerned about our youth and our nation's future, must continue to ask the sensitive and difficult questions. A search for increased understanding and answers, not politics and personal ideologies, should motivate inquiry. Furthermore, we must formulate treatment programs and delinquency prevention strategies that address in a meaningful way the important issue of how family life affects delinquent behavior if we want the carnage of our young people to stop.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The topics of broken homes, delinquency, and their
relationship are addressed in the research literature of
four major academic disciplines: sociology/criminology,
psychology/child development, psychiatric medicine, and
marriage/family studies (Wells and Rankin, 1991).
Additionally, there is a large body of literature on African
American family life. The review of the literature guiding
this study will focus primarily, though not exclusively, on
the family and delinquency literature (section 2.2), and the
literature on African American families (section 2.3). A
summary of the research literature is offered at the end of
this chapter (section 2.4).

Before delving into the literature, I want to discuss
the controversy that surrounds the topic of family structure
and its possible link to children's well-being. Among
social researchers, there is disagreement concerning the
relationship between family structure and outcomes for
children and youth. The notion of "family decline" (i.e.,
the argument that changes in family structure over the past
three decades have been detrimental, especially to children)
is controversial among family sociologists (for a review of
this controversy, some of the empirical evidence, and the

debate that surrounds it, see Popenoe, 1993; Glenn, 1993; Stacey, 1993). Possibly the only area of consensus among family researchers is that the family has undergone and continues to undergo tremendous change (Berardo, 1990; Popenoe, 1993).

While a plethora of social science research has not unequivocally demonstrated that various family structures differentially affect children, many social scientists, policymakers, and lay persons alike are increasingly coming to believe that the increase in single-parent families is related to an increase in the delinquent behavior of young persons (Yablonsky, 1990). Emerging and increasing "alternative" family structures of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s (especially single-parent and stepparent families) were considered by some to be liberating for adults, only mildly and temporarily troublesome for children, and something not to be too worried about (for example, see Cashion, 1984). However, this view is giving way to a growing body of empirical evidence that suggests that not all family structures produce equal outcomes for children (for example, see Dornbusch, et al., 1985; Krein and Beller, 1988; McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988; Popenoe, 1993; Steinberg, 1987; Thomson, et al., 1992).

It also must be pointed out that while many of the negative outcomes associated with single-parent families are

directly attributable to socioeconomic status (SES) (McLanahan, 1985), children from single-parent and step-family families still do less well on many measures of well-being than children from two-parent families, even when SES is controlled (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Thomson, et al., 1992). And, some argue, the continued trend toward more single-parent homes does not bode well for the future of American society (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986; Levitan, et al., 1988).

2.2 Family and Delinquency Literature

The empirical research literature that is reviewed in this section encompasses several types of studies, to include: broken homes and delinquency; family dynamics or relationships and delinquency; divorce and its impact on children; and family composition and child development. The research that is reviewed can be broadly placed into three academic disciplines: sociological/criminological research, family studies, and child development research. Although each of these discipline handles family and delinquency issues somewhat differently, taken as a whole they offer a more complete picture than do any of them separately. Before reviewing this research literature, however, I want to consider several theories that are relevant to the problem under consideration.

2.2.1 Theories of Delinquency

Although the present study is inductive, and, thus, not based on any one particular theoretical approach, it is important to establish that there is strong and varied theoretical support for examining the family-delinquency link. Indeed, the fact that family structure and familial dynamics are found as key variables in so many and varied explanations of delinquency can be interpreted as strong evidence that these variables are important and central links in the causal chain of delinquency and other childhood difficulties. Bynum and Thompson (1992:246) write:

> In short, the family's impact upon juveniles cannot be overestimated, and consequently, should remain a major research focus for sociological inquiry into the social problem of juvenile delinquency.

There are many theories that attempt to explain juvenile delinquency. The following discussion of theories of delinquency that consider family structure and familial relations as important variables is drawn from Shoemaker's (1990) review and examination of theories of delinquent behavior. The procedure that I will utilize is to identify first the school of thought or approach that Shoemaker is examining, then present the passage that supports or stresses the importance of familial factors. This review of delinquency theories is meant to be brief, not exhaustive.

From the social disorganization and anomie approach,
Shoemaker writes (p.89):

> The extent to which children in a delinquency area may
> choose to identify with a conventional or criminal
> life-style depends on the particular strength of the
> legitimate social control forces in their lives,
> particularly those within their *family* settings
> [emphasis in the original].

The above passage is quite clear and straight-forward.
I want to point out to the reader, however, that "social
control forces" is an issue that will appear again.

From lower-class-based theory, specifically the work of
Walter Miller (1958), Shoemaker writes (p.137):

> The focal concerns of a lower-class culture relate to
> delinquency in two ways. First, the values of lower-
> class life often result in the absence of the father,
> or any other significant male role model, in the home.
> Thus, many adolescent boys leave the home in search of
> male identities in street gangs, called by Miller "one-
> sex peer units." Second, within the gang, needs and
> behaviors develop that are *consistent with* the focal
> concerns of the lower class. According to Miller,
> lower-class gang members are not psychologically
> disturbed. Instead, gang members typically represent
> the most "able" male youngsters in a neighborhood, in
> terms of both physical abilities and "personal
> competence" [emphasis in the original].

Shoemaker, in evaluating Miller's assumptions, goes on
to write (p.139):

> It is with regard to the second assumption of Miller's
> thesis that any direct attention has been applied.
> This assumption, again, is that a common facet of
> lower-class culture and life-styles is the matriarchal
> home, and the presence of female-oriented households

contributes directly to lower-class male delinquency. Attempts to test this proposition, however, have largely focused on the issue of race rather than social class.

Shoemaker then goes on to discuss how Moynihan's controversial report (1965) was particularly responsible for shifting attention away from social class and, instead, onto race. In essence, Moynihan took a class problem, made it a race problem, and never acknowledged that he had done so.

From interpersonal and situational explanations of delinquency, specifically *drift* theory as proposed by Matza, Shoemaker writes that (p.164), "The later work of Matza (1964) implicates the lack of family supervision in the development of neutralization techniques. . ." Neutralization techniques, according to this theory, are essentially excuses or justifications that youth use to explain away their delinquent behavior. Matza points to the importance of family supervision; it will become quite evident that supervision is a crucial variable.

From the control perspective, Shoemaker offers the following summation (p.173):

> To control theories, the explanation of delinquency is based not on the question of "*Why* did he do it?" but, instead, "Why did he *not* do it?" In other words, control theories assume that the tendency to commit delinquent acts is well-nigh universal. Since delinquent behavior is to be expected, the crucial explanation of it is to be found in searching for *missing* factors in delinquents that separate them from

nondelinquents [all emphases in the original].

Shoemaker goes on to say that, "Perhaps one of the most persistent explanations of delinquent behavior is the breakdown of the family" (p.189). In his review of the broken home and delinquency literature, Shoemaker concludes that there is some question concerning the causal link between broken homes and delinquent behavior. He writes (p.190):

> The relationship between delinquency and a home broken by divorce, desertion, or death has been extensively investigated. For the most part, these studies have found that delinquents come from broken homes significantly more often than nondelinquents.

Later, Shoemaker adds (p.193):

> The importance of family relationships, such as supervision and affection patterns, does not necessarily preclude a contribution of the broken home to delinquency. However, the importance of the broken home may be in its effect on family relationships, which, in turn, have a more forceful impact on delinquency. It is the nature of what goes on in the family, therefore, that influences delinquency more than whether or not one parent is absent from the home.

From this review of theories of delinquent behavior, it can be demonstrated that family structure, and, perhaps more importantly, familial relationships or family dynamics, are key concepts in many theories of delinquent behavior ranging across several different paradigms. It is well recognized

that familial factors (e.g., structure, relationships, and other dynamics) are key variables in understanding juvenile delinquency. Hence, the present study has strong theoretical support. Another important point should also be made at this juncture. Namely, there appears to be a move toward the development of theories of delinquent behavior that synthesize or integrate ideas and findings from various theoretical approaches (Shoemaker, 1990:303). The present study offers hypotheses that link family structure with certain family dynamics. Next, the family and delinquency research literature is reviewed.

2.2.2 Family and Delinquency Research Literature

Regarding how home structure affects youthful criminality, Yablonsky (1990:83), referring to the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, writes:

> The Commission attributed the rise in criminality of the young to the weakening of parental and especially paternal authority. In the late 1980s, a marked increase in fatherless families resulted in a further decline in the proper discipline of young people.

The above is, essentially, a social control hypothesis; it will, in various forms, emerge time and again in the research literature.

Much of the sociological research into delinquency has

focused on structural variables, such as family size, broken homes, birth order, social class, and employment status of parents (for example, Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Johnson, 1986; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987; Monahan, 1957; Shaw & McKay, 1932; Slocum & Stone, 1963). In their review of the family and delinquency literature, Geismar and Wood (1986) concluded that among sociologists interested in structural family variables, the issue of broken homes has been researched more than any other.

The interest in, and research literature on, broken homes and delinquency goes back many decades. For instance, in 1923 U.S. Census Bureau statistics showed that nearly one out of two children in state institutions came from broken homes (Geismar & Wood, 1986). Mathews (1923) and Sullenger (1930) demonstrated that nearly half of the delinquent youth in their two studies came from broken homes, and they both were of the opinion that broken homes were causally related to delinquency. On the other hand, Shaw and McKay (1931), who interviewed over 7,000 boys in nearly thirty Chicago schools, and over 1,600 boys who had appeared in Cook County Court, concluded that there was no significant relationship between broken homes and delinquency. Rather, they concluded that family discord, not broken homes per se, was the greater factor in delinquency. Their conclusion, reached over sixty years ago, is still supported by some

students of delinquency today (for example, Shoemaker, 1990:193).

Many researchers have noted that youths from broken homes are over-represented in institutional settings. An important and obvious question arises from such findings: is it the broken home that leads to delinquency, or is it the case that police, judges, and other officials are more prone to institutionalize youths from broken homes than youths from intact families? Some researchers have indicated that youths from broken homes are, indeed, more likely to be detained than their counterparts from intact homes (for example, Herzog & Sudia, 1973; Schur, 1973:121).

One of the difficulties that is encountered when trying to manage the very large body of research literature on broken homes and delinquency is that the results from the many empirical studies are inconclusive and inconsistent. That is, some researchers have concluded that there is a causal relationship between broken homes and delinquency (for example, Andrew, 1976; Chilton & Markle, 1972; Glueck and Glueck, 1950; Griffiths and Rundle, 1976; Haskell and Yablonsky, 1982; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987; Monahan, 1957; Moynihan, 1965; Rosen, 1970; Steinberg, 1987; Wadsworth, 1979; West and Farrington, 1973), while other researchers have concluded that a causal relationship does not exist, or at most is quite weak (for example, Goldstein, 1984;

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Hennessey, Richards, & Berk, 1978; Hirschi, 1971; Mednick et al., 1987; Shaw and McKay, 1931, 1932; Sterne, 1964).

The findings from the research literature in this area are, indeed, mixed. As one review team put it (Wells and Rankin, 1991:73):

> The major difficulty in drawing definite conclusions about how broken homes relate to delinquency is the variability and inconsistency of the research findings. For any given hypothesis, some group of studies can be located that support it while another group provides disconfirming results. Contradictory conclusions are possible, even common in some areas, depending upon which studies are selected for empirical reference.

Some investigators argue that the reason the empirical evidence is so mixed regarding home structure and delinquency is due more to the methodological differences between studies than substantive matters. Wells and Rankin (1991:73) write:

> [M]uch of the variability in empirical findings reflects *methodological* inconsistencies and differences regarding *what* specifically is studied, *who* is studied, and *how* it is analyzed. Prior to making inferences about substantive changes, we must estimate and partial out the several kinds of methodological variations [emphasis in the original].

> Wells and Rankin (1991:88) go on to write:
>
> *Methodologically*, we found that the procedural features of previous research efforts had a substantial influence on the patterns of findings. Indeed, the methods component of variance in effects dominated over substantively meaningful components [emphasis in the original].

Their findings suggest that small, clinical, and otherwise nonrepresentative samples consistently show a stronger association between broken homes and delinquency than do larger, more representative samples. They recommend that, "Hopefully, additional research would eschew the use of small, convenient, clinical samples in favor of more representative populations" (p.88). The present study might appear to blatantly ignore this recommendation, but it should be recalled that the goal here is to generate insights, ideas, and hypotheses as opposed to testing them (this very important distinction, and the justification for the use of a small convenience sample is discussed in chapter 3).

Free's (1991) review of the broken home and delinquency literature finds that the quality (methodologically speaking) of investigations into this area must be improved if we are to have confidence in the empirical findings. He suggests that future research should incorporate more longitudinal, less cross-sectional designs. He also suggests generalizations from much past and current research are tenuous due to nonrandom sampling. He further adds that many studies have relied too much on official measures of delinquency and not enough on self-reports. Finally, Free suggests that future inquiry into broken homes and delinquency should include such variables as parental

supervision, parental affection, and parental and familial conflict.

Demo and Acock (1988), in their review of the research literature on family structure and children's well-being, also report that methodological problems, such as simplistic operational definitions, inadequate sampling, and lack of longitudinal designs, cast suspicion on much of the empirical findings on this topic.

It is clear from the above that research design impacts dramatically on empirical findings. Both Wells and Rankin, Free, and Demo and Acock point out that nonrepresentative samples, as well as too simplistic operational definitions of family structure cast doubt on the research findings of many studies. Operationalizing family structure into the dichotomous variable *family intact* or *family broken* is misleading, and, I would argue, unproductive. Family structure is more complex than a dichotomy, and when simplistic operational definitions are utilized, important etiological distinctions are bound to get lost in the aggregation.

What findings come from large representative samples and studies that are more rigorous in their methodology? Such studies, essentially, support the findings from investigations utilizing smaller and more clinically oriented samples, although the relationship between family

structure and negative outcomes is usually weaker in the larger studies (Demo and Acock, 1988).

The often cited Dornbusch et al. (1985) study employed a large representative national sample, and found that youths from mother-only households are more likely to engage in deviant behavior (their measures of deviant behavior included measures for juvenile delinquency) than are youths from two-parent households. Furthermore, they found that this relationship holds even when parental education and income are controlled. Thus, the notion that the relationship between family structure and youthful deviance is spurious (i.e., the effect of family structure on children's deviant behavior disappears when SES is controlled for) is not supported by empirical data (in addition to Dornbusch et al., 1985, see also McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988; and Kalter et al., 1989). Dornbusch et al. argue that family structure affects adolescent deviance in two ways--through family decision making patterns, and social control (i.e., parental supervision).

With regard to decision making, mother-only households are associated with family decision making patterns that involve lower levels of parental input and control. Dornbusch et al. write (1985:334):

> The mother, faced with the problem of controlling an adolescent without a father, is less likely to make decisions without input from the youth and is more

likely to allow the youth to make his or her own decision.

Mother-only households are also associated with higher rates of adolescent deviance, Dornbusch et al. argue, because these households often lack a second adult who can provide appropriate supervision and guidance to the youth (once more, we see a social control hypothesis). With so many demands placed on a single parent it is often not possible for that parent to provide adequate supervision and guidance. As a result, youths from single-parent homes often have more unsupervised time than youths from two-parent homes. This unsupervised time is often "street time," which is problematic and all too often dangerous, especially for African American boys living in urban areas (Kunjufu, 1985).

Quite interestingly, the finding that a second adult in the home is associated with lower levels of deviant behavior does not hold for male adolescents if that second adult is a stepparent. Dornbusch et al. write (1985:333):

> If the presence of two or more adults always resulted in greater social control, we might expect two-parent families that include a step-parent to be like families with two natural parents with respect to deviance. However, a separate analysis of step-parent families gives a complex result. Males in step-parent families actually have as high mean residual deviance as males in mother-only families, and males in step-parent families have much higher mean residual deviance than males in extended mother-only families or

families with two natural parents. Females in step-parent families, on the other hand, exhibit a mean level of deviance that falls between the mean for mother-only families and the means for the two lower groups, extended mother-only families and families with two natural parents. This suggests that something about the internal processes of step-parent families has a stronger negative impact on male adolescents than on female adolescents.

With regard to the above, the obvious question arises, "What is it about stepparents and stepchildren, especially stepfathers and stepsons, that might lead to such findings?". Amato (1987:328) writes:

A consideration of stepfamilies leads to a focus on the stepfather-stepchild relationship. This relationship tends to be stressful for a number of reasons: (a) Stepfathers are often uncertain about how much discipline to exercise and how much affection to show their stepchildren. (b) Stepfathers and stepchildren may be used to different household rules, activities, and ways of doing things. (c) Children may be jealous of stepfathers and see them as rivals for the attention of their mothers. (d) Children may feel loyal to their noncustodial fathers and experience guilt and a sense of betrayal if they come to like their stepfathers. . . Considering the number of potential sources of stress, it is not surprising to find higher levels of tension in stepfamilies than in intact families.

Amato (1987:327) summarized the findings from his study by writing, "Stepfathers. . . provide less support, control, and punishment than biological fathers in intact families. . ." Again, we see that the issue of social control is raised, in this case stepfathers generally provide less social control than do natural fathers.

There are at least two important points that should be made concerning the findings from the Dornbusch et al. (1985) and Amato (1987) studies: family structure in and of itself cannot adequately predict and/or explain delinquent behavior. If structure alone were responsible for delinquent behavior, then, presumably, stepfamilies should experience less delinquency than single-parent families. Secondly, family relations and patterns of interaction are key variables in understanding the behavior of youths. Two adults in the home may *or may not* provide adequate supervision, guidance, discipline, and affection. However, it appears that family structure and patterns of family interaction are related to one another. Thus, family structure may affect delinquency through its effect on family interaction, especially with regard to supervision, discipline, and family conflict.

Goldstein (1984) reached a similar conclusion. His national probability sample of twelve to seventeen year old white and black, male and female youths was used to test the "hypothesis that youths from father-absent homes would have more conduct problems than youths from father-present homes" (p. 679). Goldstein used police contacts, arrests, and school disciplinary actions as indicators of conduct problems. Goldstein's findings suggest that parental composition (i.e., family structure) affects conduct

problems through the mediating variable of parental

supervision. He writes (p.679):

> Youths from father-absent households were more likely
> to demonstrate conduct problems than those from father-
> present ones. However, it was the youths from father-
> absent households with low parental supervision who
> showed the greatest likelihood of conduct problems. In
> households with a high degree of supervision, youths
> from father-absent families were no more likely than
> those from father-present families to demonstrate
> conduct problems.

Steinberg (1987) examined the relationship between

family structure, the susceptibility of adolescents to

antisocial peer pressure, and involvement in deviant

behavior. Utilizing a representative sample of 865 youth in

grades 5, 6, 8, and 9 from a school district in Madison,

Wisconsin, he looked at three different family structures--

both natural parents, mother alone, and one natural parent

and a stepparent. Of his findings, he writes (p.269):

> Youngsters living with both natural parents were less
> susceptible to pressure from their friends to engage in
> deviant behavior than youngsters living in other family
> structures. More important, youngsters growing up in
> stepfamilies--in the presence of an additional adult--
> were equally at risk for involvement in deviant
> behavior as were their peers growing up in single-
> parent households.

Steinberg (1987:275) goes on to say:

The results of the present study, consistent with
results reported, but not emphasized, by Dornbusch et
al., generally support the view that youngsters living
in stepfamilies are equally at risk for involvement in

deviant behavior as are their peers living in single-parent households. Although an additional adult is present in the adolescent's stepfamily, this may be a case in which two parents are not enough.

It appears to be the case that, overall, stepparents do not provide as much supervision, guidance, and affection as do birth parents. This assumption is supported by the research of Thomson, McLanahan, and Curtin (1992). They utilized a large national representative sample to examine possible differences in parental socialization, comparing intact (two original parents), single-parent, and stepparent (one original parent and one stepparent) families. Of their findings they write (p.375):

> We found that single parents exerted less supervision and control in some domains than did married parents, and that stepparents engaged in child-related activities and/or expressed positive feelings toward children less frequently than did original parents.

They summarized their study by reporting (p.368), "that two adults are more effective than one, and that stepparents are relative strangers to children."

Matsueda and Heimer (1987) examined the relationship between race, family structure, and delinquent behavior. Their study found that broken homes have a greater impact on delinquent behavior for black youths than for nonblack youths. They argue (p. 836) that:

. . . broken homes *directly* foster an excess of
definitions favorable to delinquency, which then
increases delinquent behavior. This effect, being much
larger among blacks, accounts for the greater total
effect of broken homes on delinquency among blacks
[emphasis in the original].

In effect, then, they are arguing that the structure of

a broken home decreases parental supervision, which leads to

an increase in delinquent behavior, or as they put it:

[N]onintact homes influence delinquency through a
similar process--by attenuating parental supervision,
which in turn increases delinquent companions,
prodelinquent definitions, and, ultimately, delinquent
behavior" (pp.835-36).

This effect is greatest for black youths who live in

trouble-ridden neighborhoods where exposure to definitions

favorable to delinquent behavior abound (Matsueda and

Heimer, 1987:836).

I wish to draw out and emphasize two points form the

Matsueda and Heimer study: 1) they found a difference, as

indicated above, between blacks and nonblacks regarding the

effects of broken homes on delinquency, and suggest that

neighborhood conditions may help account for this; and 2)

they report that family structure affects delinquency

through the mediating variable of parental supervision.

Parental supervision appears to be a key variable.

Bynum and Thompson (1992:242) write, "Much of the

controversy over the relationship between broken homes and delinquency causation may be mediated by looking at the variable of extent of parental supervision." Larzelere and Patterson (1990) report that adequate and direct parental supervision, more than anything else, provides the best protection against youths engaging in delinquent behavior.

So far, this review of the research literature has focused on those studies that have found a link between family structure and delinquent behavior. It should be fairly clear from this review that this link is indirect. That is to say, family structure affects family interaction which, in turn, affects delinquency. While the empirical findings are mixed with regard to the relationship between family structure and delinquency, a pattern does emerge when large scale literature reviews are done. Three of the better reviews are ones that have already been discussed: Wells and Rankin's meta-analysis (1991) of the broken home literature, Free's (1991) review of the broken home and delinquency literature, and Demo and Acock's (1988) review of the literature dealing with family structure and outcomes for children.

Summarizing their findings, Wells and Rankin (1991:87) write:

> The effect of intact versus 'broken' families is a
> consistent and real pattern of association, showing a
> bivariate correlation with delinquency of .10 to .15.

In the case of *phi* coefficients, this means that the prevalence of delinquency in broken homes is 10-15 percent higher than in intact homes.

Demo and Acock (1988:619) conclude that:

Although not entirely consistent, the pattern of empirical findings suggests that children's emotional adjustment, gender-role orientation, and antisocial behavior are affected by family structure.

Demo and Acock further state that:

Many studies over the years have linked juvenile delinquency, deviancy, and antisocial behavior to children living in broken homes . . . Unfortunately, these studies either relied on clinical samples or failed to control for social class and other factors related to delinquency. However. . . a number of studies involving large representative samples and controlling for social class provide similar findings (p.636).

Although the evidence regarding family structure and delinquency is in many ways compelling, there is, as repeatedly mentioned, a lack of consensus concerning a causal link between family structure and delinquency. However, the family remains a central concern for sociologists interested in delinquency. Shoemaker (1990:192) captures the view of many researchers when he writes that, "While some doubt exists concerning the connection between broken homes and delinquency, there is considerable evidence that points to a correlation between

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family relationships and delinquency." I would go a step further than Shoemaker by adding that the separate conceptualizations of family structure and family relationships have resulted in much of the conflicting findings. While structure and function appear to be closely related, structure, even when defined in appropriate ways that capture various subtleties, does not strictly imply function. The same basic family structure can differentially affect youths depending on the family dynamics present in the home. For example, single-parent families may provide various amounts and quality of parental supervision and discipline.

As Mednick et al. (1987:43) report on attempting to understand the link between family structure and youthful male criminality, "[I]f identification of the active etiological agents is the objective, then future inquiry must focus on the more dynamic and qualitative aspects of the home environment."

Research efforts that have focused on how fathers influence child development have come closest to tying together structure and function. It should also be noted that this body of child development literature is quite extensive (for example, Biller, 1971; Cath, Gurwitt, and Ross, 1982; Dornbusch et al., 1985; Hamilton, 1977; Herzog and Sudia, 1973; Lamb, 1981, 1987; Osherson, 1986; Parke,

1981 to mention only a few). Researchers in this area have rightly noted the enormous complexity of the issue, and have generally not treated it in a simplistic fashion as have many investigators looking into broken homes and delinquency.

Child development researcher Hamilton (1977:51) points out some of the difficulties associated with studying the effects of father-absence on children. He writes:

> Father-absence is, unfortunately, one of those gross variables that sounds simpler than it is. It involves a varied set of possible effects within and upon the family that is far more complicated than the simple absence of one person from the family. The effects vary, depending on the kind of relationship the father had with the children and the mother before his absence began, the cause and duration of his absence, and the availability of other adult males to the children. Father-absence effects vary also with the age of the child when the absence began, presence of other developmental problems, sex and ordinal position of any siblings, behavior of the mother during the absence, and socioeconomic status of the family, as well as other factors.

Biller (1981:490) provides the following discussion relative to understanding the complexity of the father-absence issue as it relates to child development:

> It is important to emphasize that father absence *per se* does not necessarily lead to developmental deficits and/or render the father-absent child inferior in psychological functioning relative to the father-present child. Fatherless children are far from a homogeneous group. An almost infinite variety of patterns of father absence can be specified. Many

factors need to be considered in evaluating the father-
absence situation: length of separation from the
father; type of separation (constant, intermittent,
temporary, etc.); cause of separation (divorce, death
of father, etc.); the child's age, sex, and
constitutional characteristics; the mother's reaction
to husband absence; the quality of mother-child
interactions; the family's socioeconomic status; and
the availability of surrogate models. Father-absent
children may not be paternally deprived if they have
adequate father surrogates, or they may be less
paternally deprived than are many father-present
children [emphasis in the original].

Despite the complexity of the issue, Biller (1981:490-
91) summarizes the findings of child development research
efforts regarding father-absence by stating:

The child who has an involved and competent mother *and*
father is more likely to have generally adequate
psychological functioning and is less likely to suffer
from developmental deficits and psychopathology than
the child who is reared in a one-parent family
[emphasis in the original].

Lamb (1987) provides a thorough review of the father-
absence literature, especially as it relates father-absence
to negative outcomes for male children. He writes (p. 14):

[S]uffice it to say that boys growing up without
fathers seem to have 'problems' in the areas of sex-
role and gender-identity development, school
performance, psychosocial adjustment, and perhaps in
the control of aggression.

Much like Hamilton, Lamb adds the following important
caveat:

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In sum, the evidence suggests that father absence may be harmful not necessarily because a sex-role model is absent, but because many aspects of the father's role--economic, social, emotional--go unfilled or inappropriately filled. It is essential to recognize the father's multiple roles as breadwinner, parent, and emotional support for partner in order to understand how fathers influence children's development (1987:15).

The above excerpts stress that the crucial point is the type of parenting that actually goes on within the family, be it from one parent or two. However, there are clear advantages to two-parent families for most children, including greater parental supervision, increased economic security, and greater parental involvement in decision making matters. Furthermore, a positive and caring relationship between a male youngster and a father or father figure is associated with decreased involvement in delinquent behavior (Bynum and Thompson, 1992; Hirschi, 1969; Yablonsky, 1982; Yablonsky and Haskell, 1988).

Some researchers (for example, Kunjufu, 1985; Majors and Mancini Billson, 1992; Parsons, 1947; Silverman and Dinitz, 1974; Toby, 1966; Wilson, 1991) have found that the absence of a positive father figure results in the development of compulsive masculinity among some male youths. This condition of compulsive masculinity is often characterized by overly aggressive or "macho" behavior. Such aggressive behavior, in turn, may lead to behaviors

that violates the law, such as various types of assault and other violent offenses.

The concept or notion of socialization is central to nearly all sociological approaches to understanding human behavior. It figures prominently into the sociological studies of the family (Nock, 1987; Rice, 1993), and delinquency (Bynum and Thompson, 1992; Shoemaker, 1990). A basic assumption of social control theories of delinquent behavior (such as Hirschi's (1969) *social bond* theory, and Reckless' (1961) *containment* theory) is that delinquent behavior often results when the socialization process is somehow inadequate (Bynum and Thompson, 1992:401). Family disruption, both structurally and dynamically, often results in unsuccessful socialization. The key point here is that the family generally, and father or father figures more specifically, are critical influences in the formation of delinquent behavior.

Different adult males can exert a positive influence on a male youth in a variety of ways. In the absence of a biological father, positive male role models may be found in grandfathers, uncles, other extended family members, coaches, and stepfathers, to name a few examples. Such adults can provide important adult supervision, model prosocial attitudes and behaviors, and help to "insulate" youth from destructive influences, especially delinquent

peers.

Kunjufu (1985:31) makes this important observation:

A single parent is different from single parenting.
Single parenting assumes the entire burden;
conscientious single parents enroll their child in
martial arts, little league, carpentry, band, etc.
Concerned parents realize their children want to
interact with their peer group, but *what* they do should
receive your input. My extended family, grandparents,
aunts, uncles, neighbors and friends exposed me very
early to the dangers of the streets with functional
field trips to drug abuse centers, jails, and
neighborhood hospitals on Friday evenings [emphasis in
the original].

This review of the literature on the father's role in

child development serves two important functions: 1) it

demonstrates the complexity of the father's role in the

family; and 2) it shows that the father is, indeed,

important in the development of children, but the most

crucial issue in child development still boils down to the

quality of the parenting--especially supervision and

discipline--that is provided to a child.

Interest in family relationships has generated a

considerable body of research literature itself. Research

in this area has been referred to as "family functioning

research" (Geismar & Wood, 1986). The variables that are

most often researched are: 1) parental affection (Andry,

1962; Glueck & Glueck, 1950, 1962; Hirschi, 1971; Matsueda

and Heimer, 1987; Nye, 1958); 2) family interactional

patterns, including such variables as spousal conflict, child abuse and neglect, and intimacy of communication (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Hirschi, 1971; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987; Nye, 1958); and 3) parental supervision and discipline (Craig & Glick, 1963; Dornbusch et al., 1985; McCord, 1979; Sterne, 1964).

Some investigators have found that certain types of parental discipline are associated with delinquent behavior. For example, Glueck and Glueck's landmark study (1950) found inconsistent parental discipline to be more closely related to delinquent behavior than any other characteristic of the family. Nye (1958) found that the disciplinary techniques of nagging, scolding, and love-withdrawal were significantly related to delinquent behavior. Nye (1958:90) further found that, "The disciplinary role of the father is more closely related to delinquent behavior than is that of the mother. . . ."

Bavolek (1985, 1991) has found in his research into parenting effectiveness that low parental empathy and harsh disciplinary techniques such as yelling and spanking are associated with low self-esteem and weakened impulse control in children. In turn, low self-esteem and poor impulse control may lead to antisocial behavior.

Although the study of broken homes and delinquency has a long and prolific research history, there are few

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qualitative studies. Geismar and Wood (1986:14) noted this gap in the literature when they wrote: "Becker's (1963) assessment of 16 years ago, valid now as it was then, points to an additional problem:

> There simply are not enough studies that provide us
> with facts about the lives of delinquents. Many studies
> correlate the incidence of delinquency with such
> factors as kind of neighborhood, kind of family life,
> or kind of personality. Very few tell us in detail what
> a juvenile delinquent does in his daily round of
> activity and what he thinks about himself, society, and
> his activities. (p.166)."

My review of the literature reveals that there still are very few studies of the kind that Becker (1963) called for. Those few accounts that have revealed in some detail what the delinquent youth does, feels, and thinks have tended to be journalistic (for example, Bing, 1991) or anthropological (for example, Anderson, 1990), rather than sociological. While such journalistic and anthropological contributions can be helpful in increasing our understanding of the problem of juvenile delinquency, they are generally devoid of the theoretical content that is found in sociological research. What is needed, then, is social science research that is grounded to "real life" actors and situations, and is at the same time theoretically well-

informed[3]. Having reviewed and considered the theoretical
and empirical research literature on family and juvenile
delinquency, I turn next to the body of literature that
examines African American family life.

2.3 African American Family Literature

In this section, research efforts that have focused on
the following areas of African American family life are
reviewed and discussed: the African American family in
historical context; possible explanations of the breakdown
of the African American nuclear family; problems faced by
African American families; Moynihan's controversial report
and reactions to it; ethnographic accounts of African
American father-child relationships; so-called conspiracy
theories; and research that has examined race and youthful
criminality.

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[3] Merton's notion of *theories of the middle range* provides, in
my opinion, the best framework for conducting social research.
Merton (1968:39) writes, "Middle-range theory is principally used
in sociology to guide empirical inquiry. It is intermediate to
general theories of social systems which are too remote from
particular classes of social behavior, organization and change to
account for what is observed and to those detailed orderly
descriptions of particulars that are not generalized at all.
Middle-range theory involves abstractions, of course, but they are
close enough to observed data to be incorporated in propositions
that permit empirical testing."

Much of the literature on African American family life[4] would have us believe that the fatherless home in the African American community (the so-called matriarchal tradition) is an historical fact dating back to the slave period (for example, Frazier, 1939; Hauser, 1965; Moynihan, 1965). Gutman (1975, 1976) disputes this position with his excellent and very detailed studies of slavery and post-slavery family composition. He carefully examined state, federal, and Freedmen's Bureau census documentation. Of his findings, he writes:

> The findings in this study dispute vigorously the general view of the black family and household composition between 1850 and 1880 because most antebellum free blacks, North and South, lived in double-headed households, and so did most poor rural and urban freedmen and women (1975:466).

Gutman has hypothesized that the breakdown of the two-parent black family is likely related to blocked employment opportunities for black men. Many black men were simply unable to obtain decent employment in the North or in the South; this seems to have started near the end of the

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[4] It is misleading to speak of the literature on African American family life as if it referred to *one* homogenous African American family. In fact, there are as many varieties of African American family life as there are African American families. However, it is the very nature of social science (especially sociology) to place groups of people into general categories. The point I want to make here is that the discussion of the African American family is not meant to be demeaning or stereotypical in any way.

nineteenth century.

To the above discussion, Gutman adds:

Slavery and quasifreedom imposed countless burdens upon
American blacks, but the high proportion of two-parent
households found among them between 1850 and 1880 tells
how little is yet known about the slave family, its
relationship to the dominant white family structure,
and the ways in which freedmen and freedwomen adapted,
transformed, retained, or rejected older forms of
family life. Finally, if the family transmits
culture from generation to generation, then black
subculture itself needs to be reexamined (1975:479).

There are two points from Gutman's study that relate to
the present study: 1) there are many beliefs, "persistent
myths" as Gutman calls them, surrounding the black family
that need to be reexamined and corrected where necessary;
and 2) the beginning of the breakdown of the black nuclear
family apparently occurred some time around the turn-of-the-
century, and economic factors are likely central to this.
In other words, the current state of affairs has not "always
been this way."[5] Indeed, many scholars interested in the
African American family are now arguing that the

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[5] Exploring the history of black family life in America,
especially the question of how and when the adult male was driven
out of the family, is an area that needs considerably more
attention than it has received to date. There is good reason to
believe that economic conditions at the turn-of-the-century, and
various events including the depression "squeezed" black men out of
the labor market (for example, see Gutman, 1975; and Staples and
Boulin, 1993). Economic factors likely account for a good portion
of the continued increase in father-absent families. This area of
investigation, as interesting and important as it is, is well
beyond the scope of this study.

deteriorating African American family structure is directly related to adverse economic conditions (Staples and Johnson, 1993).

The breakdown of two-parent African American families has accelerated in the latter half of this century. For example, Gutman (1976) found that in 1865, according to Virginia census data, 75% of slave families contained two parents. Upon examining 1925 census data for the Harlem section of New York City, Gutman (1976) found that 85% of black households were headed by both parents. Even at the time of Moynihan's report (1965), 75% of black families had two parents. Less than thirty years later, 66% of all black children live in a one-parent family (Rice, 1993:37).

Another important finding from studies of African American family life is that African Americans report belief in the family as an important institution (Rice, 1993). Staples (1985) argues that unfavorable structural conditions account for the increase in black single-parent families, not ideology or a lack of values relating to family. In other words, African Americans, by and large, desire to form and maintain two-parent families, but find it extremely difficult to do so under the current social and economic conditions.

Rolison (1992) tested "competing political paradigmatic explanations" of black, single female-headed family

formation. One of the paradigms, which Rolison termed the "structural perspective," suggests that economic and demographic factors are responsible for large scale black male unemployment and morbidity. This situation leads directly to the creation of black female-headed families. The other paradigm, which Rolison termed the "neoconservative perspective," suggests that government programs, especially AFDC or "welfare," are largely responsible for the increase in black female-headed families. The neoconservative argument goes something like this: the government's welfare program discourages women from marrying because their income and standard of living from welfare is often better than what they might experience in marriage. According to this argument, the "government has supplanted the matriarchal structure as the source of black family ills" (1992:473).

Rolison's (1992) findings support the structural perspective over the neoconservative perspective. Black male unemployment and the sex-ratio (the number of black males per every 100 black females ages 20-45) are the most significant contributors to female-headed family formation. In other words, there would likely be more two-parent African American families if African American men had access to employment opportunities.

This structural or economic perspective on African

American family formation is well summarized by Staples and

Johnson (1993). They make the following argument (p.56):

> There is no convincing evidence that length of time on
> welfare, changes in welfare benefits, or number of
> programs from which benefits are received have any
> significant effects on the likelihood of marital
> formation or divorce(Washington, 1989; Furstenberg,
> Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan, 1987; Rank, 1987; Darity and
> Myers, 1984). The culprit is not welfare, but the
> economic difficulty of Black urban life--high male
> unemployment and the declining pool of eligible males
> to head families.

It is important not only to understand what possible

effects result from female-headed families, but to know how

these families have come to be the dominant family form

among African Americans. Black female-headed families are

not, on the aggregate level anyway, a preferred or freely

chosen family structure. Instead, it appears that black

women simply do not have much of a pool of marriageable

black men from which to draw.

In discussing black female-headed families, Hare and

Hare (1984:21-22) write:

> [T]here is nothing wrong with being a black female
> single-parent--and one rightfully makes the most of any
> situation in which she/he finds herself. But there is
> something wrong with why a black woman is so much more
> likely to experience the single parent situation, why
> one race can freely imprison, send off to military
> duty, unemploy, underemploy, and otherwise destroy the
> oppressed black woman's eligible male supply. Also
> there is something wrong with glorifying this problem
> instead of rising up to change it. People will speak
> here of 'options,' but forced or unintended options
> must be called by some other name.

Whatever the circumstances actually were surrounding the black family historically, and whatever the true causes are of female-headed family formation, it is clear that many black families today are facing a variety of tough problems (Taylor et al., 1990). The increasing number of female-headed families carries with it important implications for black children. Many of these important implications are negative--poverty, ongoing exposure to violence, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and delinquent and criminal behavior, to name but a few. Slightly more than half (51%) of all black children were living in homes with only one parent in 1985 (Jaynes and Williams, 1989). 1992 U.S. Census Bureau figures indicate that more than six out of ten (62%) of all black families with children are headed by one parent. That represents a 10% increase in only seven years; the black nuclear family continues to disintegrate. Today, nearly two out of every three (62%) black children are born out of wedlock (Bennett, 1993; Joe and Yu, 1991).

While the African American family has been falling apart before our very eyes, the issue has, until fairly recently, been largely neglected or ignored (Hare and Hare, 1984). This neglect or avoidance of the issue is perhaps due, in large part, to Moynihan's (1965) infamous report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, and the negative reaction it drew. In it Moynihan claimed that, "At

the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family" (p.5). Moynihan's thesis was that until the black family structure was stabilized, poverty would continue to ravage the black community. At the time of his report, nearly one-quarter of all black families were headed by a female. Today, that percentage has more than doubled. Moynihan was close, I believe, to understanding the problem. However, he had matters backwards. In other words, black family stability is not likely to occur until poverty is seriously dealt with, not the other way around as Moynihan thought.

Reactions to Moynihan's report were blistering. He was accused of "blaming the victim." Ryan wrote that Moynihan's report, "seduces the reader into believing that it is not racism and discrimination but the weaknesses and defects of the Negro himself that account for the present status of inequality between Negro and white" (in Rainwater and Yancey, 1967:458). Another concern with the Moynihan report involved Moynihan's sole focus on race. Recall that Shoemaker (1990:139) made the point that Moynihan took Miller's thesis on lower-class culture, and applied it solely to race rather than social class as Miller himself had conceptualized it. Moreover, Moynihan made this shift without acknowledging what he had done. Further, the way his report was presented did appear to blame black Americans

for their plight.

Despite the negative reaction and the problems outlined above with Moynihan's report, his argument has been somewhat vindicated when one considers the recent national attention that this sensitive issue has received, and by many of the research findings that have been reviewed in this chapter. As Hare and Hare (1984:7) put it:

> At a national symposium on Homicide among Black Males, sponsored by a federal agency in Washington in 1981, the predominantly black male behavioral and social scientists spent all day peppering their deliberations on the crumbling black marital structure and the need for mass employment of black males, with angry verbal jabs at the infamous 1965 Moynihan report, apparently unaware that Moynihan had been saying exactly the same things sixteen years before.

Hare and Hare (1984:7) go on to say:

> The only difference in what Moynihan said and what his angry black critics were saying was that Moynihan was concerned with the 25 percent female-headed family rates in 1965, while the black scholars were calling attention to the almost 50 percent female headed black family rate today.

The problem of fatherless homes in the black community, especially among the poor of the inner city, has received some attention from ethnographers. Liebow (1967:78), discussing black streetcorner men, writes:

> Looking at the spectrum as a whole, the modal father-child relationship for these streetcorner men seems to be one in which the father is separated from the child, acknowledges his paternity, admits to financial

responsibility but provides financial support
irregularly, if at all, and then only on demand or
request. His contacts with the child are infrequent,
irregular, and of short (minutes or hours) duration.

Anderson (1990:133) writes descriptively of the young
black male:

> The boy has grown accustomed to home-cooked meals and
> the secure company of his family, in which his father
> was largely absent and could not tell him what to do .
> He was his own boss, essentially raising himself with
> the help of his peer group and perhaps any adult . . .
> who would listen but not interfere.

Bing's (1991) investigation of urban gang members (the

notorious Crips and Bloods of Los Angeles), many of them

African American youth, provides rich insights into the

lives of violent adolescents. She interviewed many of these

gang members, sometimes in a detention facility, and at

other times in their neighborhood or "'hood" as the

youngsters like to call it. Quoting from an interview with

an African American ex-gang member turned detention home

counselor, Bing writes:

> The very fact that a kid is in a gang means that
> something is missing. So many of them are functioning
> illiterates. So many of them come from abusing
> backgrounds. The hardest cases were probably sexually
> molested or they were routinely beaten--probably both.
> Depends on what kind of father influence was around
> the house. If any. You find a gang member who comes
> from a complete nuclear family, a kid who has never
> been exposed to any kind of abuse, I'd like to meet
> him. Not a wannabe who's a Crip or Blood because
> that's the thing to be in 1990, I mean a real

gangbanger who comes from a happy, balanced home, who's got a good opinion of himself. I don't think that kid exists.

This detention home counselor raises many important issues, including child abuse, illiteracy, family breakup, and self-esteem. Father-absence once again is raised as a central issue.

One of the most positive aspects of Bing's (1991) efforts is that she allows the gang members to speak for themselves in her book. A recurring theme among many of the gang members is their anger toward their absent fathers. One young African American gangbanger reported the following (pp. 29-30):

> If I could, I'd go see him. 'Cause he's my real father. I wouldn't go now, not right now, 'cause I got hostility towards him. He just left, he left my mama for nothin'. I don't know why. Just fuckin' left her. She went to the store and when she come back, he gone. Just like that. I remember that day, I was with my mama and she like to die, cryin'. All us kids, except for my little baby sister, is his kids. If I could change things, I'd make him not leave. But if I see him now, boy I'd probably try to kill him or something. I probably would. My brother be always sayin', "If I ever see him again, he gonna die."

African American scholars themselves are not in full agreement about the impact of fatherless homes on black children (Hare and Hare, 1984). Some (for example, Billingsley, 1968) have taken the position that single-

parent, matrifocal homes can really be seen as strengths in the sense that they are often times associated with strong extended black family units (see also Hill, 1971; Martin and Martin, 1978). Hare and Hare (1984) are critical of black scholars who have taken this approach. They write (p.12), "Black intellectuals joined white feminists, or collaborated with them in suppressing all studies and writings finding pathology in the black family. And this would be true at least until the 80's." While the extended family has been and continues to be an enormously important support system for African Americans (Heiss, 1975; Martin and Martin, 1978), the accelerated breakup of the nuclear family is a problem for the African American community.

There exists in the literature on black family life genocide or conspiracy theories (for example, see Bowser, 1991; Hare and Hare, 1984; Kunjufu, 1985; Wilson, 1992). Even if there is no conspiracy against African Americans, especially males, the bleak situation that faces African American males in the U.S. is beyond debate. Jawanza Kunjufu, an African American education consultant and researcher, uses the term "conspiracy" to describe what is happening to black males, especially young boys. He writes (1985:1):

> To use the word *conspiracy*, which is an act of plotting together to harm someone, to describe certain aspects of our society is a strong indictment of the social

fabric of this country. The conspiracy to destroy
Black boys is very complex and interwoven. There are
many contributors to the conspiracy, ranging from the
very visible who are more obvious, to the less visible
and silent partners who are more difficult to
recognize. Those people who adhere to the doctrine of
white racism, imperialism, and white male supremacy are
easier to recognize. Those people who actively promote
drugs and gang violence are active conspirators, and
easier to identify. What makes the conspiracy more
complex are those people who do not plot together
to destroy Black boys, but, through their indifference,
perpetuate it. This passive group of conspirators
consists of parents, educators, and white liberals who
deny being racists, but through their silence allow
institutional racism to continue [emphasis in the
original].

Thus far, this review of the black family literature

has made the following important points: 1) the so-called

matriarchal tradition is more myth than fact, at least

historically; 2) black female-headed family formation is

likely a result of institutional racism (i.e., economic

discrimination); 3) research into single-parent families or

other areas of black family "pathology" was largely

abandoned during the 70s and early 80s, possibly due to the

reaction generated by the Moynihan report; and 4)

researchers, especially many African American researchers,

are rethinking the issue of fatherless homes, and are

discussing it with great candor. Next, research that has

examined race and delinquency will be reviewed.

One of the most consistent findings regarding race and

delinquency is that there is a great disparity between

official measures of delinquency and self-reported measures of delinquency (Henggeler, 1989; Hindelang, 1978; Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis, 1979, 1981). Official measures indicate that black youths are disproportionately arrested for unlawful acts, especially index and violent crimes (Fagan, Forst, and Vivona, 1987; Krisberg et al., 1987). For example, while only 15% of all U.S. youths are black, 30% of juvenile arrests for index crimes and 50% of juvenile arrests for violent crimes involve black youths (Henggeler, 1989). Furthermore, black males are ten times more likely than white males to be arrested for homicide (Hawkins, 1983). Tillman (1986) reports that nearly 7 out of 10 African American male youths in California are arrested at least one time before reaching adulthood, as compared to 3 out of 10 white males.

Self-reported measures of delinquent behavior, on the other hand, do not show much difference between white and black youth (Henggeler, 1989). Such findings are often interpreted in one of two ways--there exists a racial bias in the juvenile justice system (Fagan, Slaughter, and Hartstone, 1987; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987); or, economic differences between blacks and whites account for the disparity as wealthier whites have greater influence that may help keep their youths out of the juvenile justice system (Joe, 1987).

A closely related economic explanation for this racial disparity is that African Americans have a much higher rate of unemployment which, in turn, is related to criminal conduct (Duster, 1987). Hawkins (1983) argues that economic deprivation is, in large part, responsible for the youthful criminality of African Americans.

2.4 Summary

To summarize, the vast body of research literature that focuses specifically on broken homes and delinquency, it can safely be argued, is inconsistent and inconclusive. The question of how these two variables are related is still very much an open and complicated matter. The inconsistencies, at least in part, are likely a result of the simplistic handling of a complex phenomenon. That is to say, the inconsistencies in the empirical research evidence appear to be related to methodological matters as much as or more than substantive matters.

The broader body of sociological and child development research literature that examines family structure and youthful well-being suggests that there is a link between these variables. The link is indirect and mediated through family interaction variables, especially parental supervision and discipline.

There is a growing awareness among many social science

researchers that, in general, single-parent and step-parent family structures produce less healthy outcomes for children and youth than does an intact family structure. Nevertheless, it is, ultimately, the type of parenting that goes on within a family that has the greatest effect on youngsters. Thus, single parents who provide adequate supervision, guidance, nurturance, discipline, and involvement in their children's decision making will likely experience less problems with delinquent behavior than parents who do not. Bynum and Thompson (1992:242) summarize this position when they write:

> One parent who is intimately involved in the supervision of the child's behavior may be more effective in preventing delinquency than two parents who show little or no interest in their child's behavior or who are distracted from their parental responsibilities by marital stress. While studies linking broken homes, physical and emotional abuse, and other family problems to delinquency causation create much controversy, there is almost irrefutable evidence that a stable family life characterized by love, concern, consistency in discipline, and adequate parental supervision is related to less likelihood of delinquency.

The literature on African American family life, especially much of the historical work, may perpetuate myth more than accurately inform the debate. However, it does seem to be the case that for much of this century, especially the latter half, many black fathers have been absent from their families. This situation is especially

prevalent among the urban poor. The root causes of this
social phenomenon are not to be found in defects of African
American character, culture, tradition, or values. Instead,
the causes appear to be structural. They are most apparent
in America's ongoing economic discrimination (e.g., high
male unemployment) and institutional racism. If African
Americans are given a reasonable chance to achieve
educational and financial parity with whites, and if
policies toward black males change so that education and job
training are given priority over incarceration, we should
witness an increase in two-parent African American family
formation. Concomitantly, to the extent that two-parent
families really can provide increased supervision and
discipline, there should be a reduction in delinquent
behavior.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion regarding the genesis of and rationale for this study. This is followed by a discussion of how important assumptions and biases likely affect the present study (section 3.2). Finally, the specifics of how the sample was drawn, and how the data were gathered and recorded are presented (sections 3.3 through 3.9).

The present study has evolved out of my three and one-half years of employment at a juvenile detention facility--the Roanoke Juvenile Detention Home (hereafter referred to as the RJDH or the "Home"). During these years at the Home (I continue to be a paid, part-time employee), I have come to recognize that African American male youths are disproportionately represented in the Home's population. Specifically, the Home's population census for fiscal year 1992-1993 (July, 92 through June, 93) shows that the population has been composed of 45% black youths (40% male, 5% female) and 55% white youths (43% male, 12% female).

The Roanoke Valley's[6] population of black and white ten

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[6] The Roanoke Valley consists of Roanoke City, Salem City, the town of Vinton, and Roanoke County. According to 1991a U.S. Census figures, the Valley has 19,137 male and female youths ages ten to seventeen years inclusive. 18,805 or 98.3% of these youths are

to seventeen year old youths inclusive--this is the age range that the Home generally serves--is composed of 18% black youths (9% male, 9% female) and 82% white youths (41.8% male, 40.2% female) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). So while only 9% of the Valley's ten to seventeen year old youths are African American males, 40% of the Home's population over the past year has been composed of African American males (see chart A.1 in the Appendix).

The Superintendent of the Home has reported that the increase in African American representation continues to climb rapidly (November, 1993, personal communication). He has indicated that over the past several months (roughly from June, 1993 to November, 1993) the Home's census has been composed of 60-65% black youths, mostly older male teens.

Many of these young African American males are from single-parent homes. Indeed, 80% of the Home's African American male residents are from single-parent, usually fatherless, households[7]. This over-representation of young

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either black or white.

[7] This figure is the best estimate that I have been able to ascertain, but it must be carefully qualified. The only way to generate this statistic from existing Home documentation is to compare the home address of the youth with the home address that is listed for the youth's mother and father as reported on the admission card. Quite often, 80% of the time in the case of African American male residents, the youth's home address is different from the address listed for one of the parents, nearly

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black males from single-parent homes captured my interest, and, ultimately, has led to the present study.

Many of the Home's staff (especially the black male staff) have related that they think that the absence of a father or father-figure is connected to the delinquency of these young males. I have often heard comments such as, "These youths wouldn't be in so much trouble if they had a good man in the house to look up to." Other professionals in Roanoke's juvenile justice system have expressed this same point of view. Social workers and probation officers have often commented to me on their perception of the relationship between fatherless homes and delinquency. Many juveniles themselves have expressed similar sentiments. While the comments of juveniles and professionals in the juvenile justice system are not the kind of scientific evidence that researchers base conclusions of causality on, such comments and my own observations did plant the seeds that have resulted in the present investigation.

Many of the Home's African American male youths are

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always the father. Indeed, it is not at all uncommon to have "unknown" listed for the father's address. However, it is not possible from the youth's chart to determine if a stepparent or other adult relative is in the household. Thus, the most accurate way to report this figure is to say that 80% of the Home's black males come from households without both biological parents present. I have discussed these figures with the Home's Superintendent, Mark Johnson. He reported to me that the 80% figure has appeared consistently in reviews of the Home's population that he has conducted.

recidivists, returning time and time again to the Home.

They are often involved in the violent world of drug

trafficking--crack cocaine distribution most notably.

Putting all of these pieces together, a profile began to

emerge of a black teenage male from a single-parent home who

sold crack, carried a gun, and was "livin' large[8]."

Informal discussions with many residents of the Home

suggested to me that father-absence might just somehow be

important in all of this.

Subjective perceptions and objective empirical evidence

are often in conflict. Given this fact, plus the

inconsistent and inconclusive nature of so many empirical

studies on the topic, it was decided that an approach

different from what is typically done in social science

research (that is to say, deductive and quantitative

hypothesis testing) was in order. One possible solution was

to get "close to the data." Therefore, an ethnographic,

inductive, hypothesis discovery research design has been

employed. Hillery says of his research into communal

organizations that ". . . the contradictions were too

numerous to resolve and the solution seemed to be to return

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[8] The term "livin' large" refers to the lifestyle of a crack
dealer. This most usually includes carrying a gun, sporting flashy
and expensive clothing and shoes, sleeping with as many females as
possible (impregnating them is especially prestigious), and
otherwise showing off. Other terms that refer to the same general
phenomenon include "got it goin' on," and "bein' paid."

to the data" (1968:12). Though Hillery's subject matter is different from mine, his solution appears to be applicable in the present case.

It has been possible to conduct this qualitative study due to my access to the youths in the Home. Indeed, one of the real strengths of the present study is the access to the Home's population, a situation that many researchers interested in this topic do not enjoy. It was also decided that the focus would be solely on one segment of the Home's African American male population--youths from fatherless homes. Thus, no comparisons are justifiable between this sample and other groups, such as whites, females, nondelinquents, or youths from father-present households.

In order to get something approaching an in-depth or detailed understanding of the world of the fatherless African American male adolescents in the Home, it has been necessary for me to spend considerable time with them. Generally, this has come about through my employment at the Home. Over the course of more than three and one half years, I have spent thousands of hours in the Home as a staff member. I have many times been able to establish rapport and trust with some of the detained youths. Also, I have been able to make many observations in this capacity.

In a different role, that of a researcher, I have spent over two hundred hours gathering data through interviews

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with both residents and staff, and by combing through the Home's files. Accordingly, I believe that my insights are deep, but generally not broad. Hence, the generalizability of the findings from the present study can only be known through rigorous, empirical testing utilizing a representative sample.

The research methods used in this study include in-depth interviews, self-reports (i.e., diaries and letters), participant observation, and the collection and analysis of some of the Home's records. Each of these methods will be discussed in turn. The research goal has been to generate hypotheses that can be tested, not to test deduced and operationalized hypotheses. This is, respectively, the difference between inductive and deductive research methodology (Hillery, 1968). Borrowing from Hanson (1958:3), "[M]y concern is not with the testing of hypotheses, but with their discovery."

An additional research goal has been to gather data from the points of view of adolescents. While many studies have gathered data based on the points of view of educators, researchers, clinicians, parents, and other adults, relatively few studies have gone directly to the youth to get their "stories." I intentionally use this term because I want to do more than develop an abstract model. I want the reader to get a "feel" or understanding of the lives of

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the research participants, or what Weber referred to as *verstehen*[9].

The methodology used in the present study is primarily drawn from the works of four researchers who have successfully utilized qualitative methods--Denzin (1989a, 1989b), Goffman (1961), Hillery (1968, 1981, 1982, 1992), and Spradley (1980).

Goffman (1961) used qualitative research methodology to study a total institution. The present study does the same. However, one of Goffman's central findings regarding the internal dynamics of total institutions has not been borne out in the present undertaking. That is to say, I have found his description of the relationship between staff and inmates in total institutions to be inaccurate when applied to the Home. He writes (1961:7):

> In total institutions there is a basic split between a large managed group, conveniently called inmates, and a small supervisory staff. Inmates typically live in the institution and have restricted contact with the world outside the walls; staff often operate on an eight-hour day and are socially integrated into the outside world.

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[9] *Verstehen* has different meanings to different social thinkers. For example, Ritzer (1988:104) writes, "To him [Weber], *verstehen* involved systematic and rigorous research rather than simply getting a "feeling" for a text or social phenomenon. However, Ritzer (p.105) also writes, "But a number of people have interpreted *verstehen*, and Weber's statements about it, as a technique aimed at understanding culture." It is this latter interpretation to which I am referring. In other words, I hope that the reader can understand something of the culture of these young men through my study of their lives.

Each grouping tends to conceive of the other in terms of narrow hostile stereotypes, staff often seeing inmates as bitter, secretive, and untrustworthy, while inmates often see staff as condescending, highhanded, and mean. Staff tends to feel superior and righteous; inmates tend, in some ways at least, to feel inferior, weak, blameworthy, and guilty.

The relationships between staff and residents (what Goffman calls inmates) at the Home do not follow the pattern he describes. While it is certainly true that some residents are suspicious of the staff and vice versa, this is the exception rather than the rule. For the most part, the staff and residents have a mutual respect and fondness for one another. I believe that this is due, in large part, to three factors: 1) many of the staff are from the same neighborhoods as the Home's residents; 2) the staff often know the youth and his/her family even before the young person is detained in the Home; and 3) many of the staff report that they were juvenile delinquents themselves, and, thus, possess a genuine empathy for the youths in the Home.

Goffman's findings with regard to the staff-inmate rifts found in some total institutions do not apply to the Home[10]. Indeed, if his description of the staff-inmate rift

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[10] Readers interested in total institutions are referred to Goffman (1961). Hillery (1968, 1992) successfully refutes Goffman's claim that monasteries are total institutions. Hillery's (1992) "substitution hypothesis" holds that in the

was accurate with regard to the Home, I would not have been able to conduct the present study.

One of the strengths of this study is the access I have to the young people in the Home. In order to do ethnographic studies successfully, it often takes the researcher many months or even years to establish a relationship of trust with his/her informants (Hillery, 1992). My position at the Home has provided me with the opportunity to get to know many of the research participants quite well. This, in turn, has afforded me the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews where I have been able to gather very personal and sensitive data. Another related strength of the present study is that I have long-standing and friendly relationships with many of the Home's residents (in some cases, I have known residents for more than three years, watching them grow from skinny, pimple-faced young boys to towering, muscular, and bearded young men in the process). In sum, my history and familiarity with many residents of the Home has allowed me to conduct this qualitative research.

I have a sense that another factor that sets the Home

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absence of the family, the presence of agape love and freedom in the monastery make it a communal organization rather than a total institution. While the Home is a total institution, the quality of the staff-resident relationships leads to a different situation than what might be found in other total institutions, such as prisons or psychiatric wards.

apart from the total institutions that Goffman describes is the genuine love that is often shared between staff and residents in the Home. Many of the fatherless African American male youths in the Home form strong bonds with the African American male staff. In this regard, I have to specifically name Tom Brown, General Ross, Micky Hardy, Curtis Jones, and Melvin Morton. I am convinced that these black men become father figures for many of the Home's residents, be they black, white, male or female, but especially with the black male youths. I know of many instances in which these staff have maintained important and positive relationships with youths even after the youths have left the Home. To a lesser extent, I believe that I have also been able to form such relationships. An unfortunate trend, in my opinion, is that the Home has been hiring more and more part-timers who typically do not work at the Home for more than a few months. With this turnover and lack of consistency, plus an ever-increasing population, staff-resident interactions are becoming more formal and less friendly.

3.2 Assumptions and Biases

There are two points that I wish to make in this section. The first deals with assumptions that I hold, and how they may impact on this research. Based upon my

clinical experience[11], my research into the issue of family structure, and my personal experiences as a son and a father, I am strongly convinced that, all things being equal (e.g., income, love and affection, parental supervision, and relative lack of dysfunction or pathology), intact (i.e., two biological parents) families produce better outcomes for children than single-parent families. This is a personal bias, but it has strong empirical support as demonstrated in chapter 2. However, I am equally convinced that a single-parent home is often a healthier family situation, especially when it provides safety and respite from abusive family members, often times fathers/husbands.

Another assumption that I have is that no social science research is completely objective or value free. As Hillery (1992:xxxi) has noted, "In the first place, the very desire to be objective is a value that leads to bias." Hillery discusses how choosing a particular method of inquiry leads to excluding from consideration anything that cannot be studied through that approach. In his own work,

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[11] My clinical experience includes four years as a Behavioral Science Specialist with the U.S. Army. In this capacity, I was trained to conduct individual, couple, family, and group psychotherapy. I also have worked in the military and in civilian life as a child protective services worker investigating and treating incidents of child maltreatment. Presently, I am employed as a mental health counselor teaching parenting classes, running support groups for parents, providing therapy designed to increase parent-child bonding or attachment, and I also provide outpatient family therapy.

for example, the scientific method, or "form of truth" as he puts it, does not allow for the study of love and prayer. Hillery decided to use other methods or forms of truth (such as sensory truth and mystical truth) in addition to scientific truth. By doing so, he has been able to understand a type of communal organization, the monastery, in a deeper and fuller sense than would otherwise have been the case. Indeed, Hillery feels that without studying love and prayer, monasteries cannot be adequately understood. Hillery's approach is instructive for all engaging in social science research.

Simply by focusing one's attention on a particular research problem, or by posing certain research questions, value judgments are made. When we ask certain questions, we are not asking other questions. This involves value judgments. When we select a research design, we are obviously choosing not to utilize other available designs. The point here is simple--bias is introduced into the research act from the very start, even before the first datum is collected. How can we deal with this situation?

Hillery contends that there are two possible approaches that can be used in dealing with the problems of objectivity in research. He writes (1992:xxxii):

> In view of such problems with objectivity, two possible remedies may be used. One was proposed by Melvin Williams some years ago when he argued "for an

environment of free competition between opposite biases." The other remedy is a logical accompaniment: One should make evident one's values and thus one's potential biases.

Howard S. Becker (1969:239) in his presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems had the following to say regarding social research and values:

> When sociologists undertake to study problems that have relevance to the world we live in, they find themselves caught in a crossfire. Some urge them not to take sides, to be neutral and do research that is technically correct and value free. Others tell them their work is shallow and useless if it does not express a deep commitment to a value position. This dilemma, which seems so painful to so many, actually does not exist, for one of its horns is imaginary. For it to exist, one would have to assume, as some apparently do, that it is indeed possible to do research that is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies. I propose to argue that it is not possible and, therefore, that the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on.

I am concerned first and foremost about the youths in my sample, as well as all the youths that pass through the Home. I am on their side. I want to understand their lives as much as I want to understand delinquent behavior in an abstract or academic way. It is my belief that the present study will aid in understanding the lives of the residents of the Home, as well as help in increasing our knowledge of juvenile delinquency more generally.

The sample in this study is not representative of African Americans, juvenile delinquents, young males, or any other group for that matter. Furthermore, this study should in no way be taken to suggest that most African American youths and/or youths from single-parent families are incarcerated. Not only would that be unfair to African Americans and single-parent families, it simply cannot be empirically supported. The fact is that the majority of black male youths today are reared in single-parent homes, but the majority of black male youths are not incarcerated. However, as research has consistently shown, single-parent households are more likely than two-parent households to be associated with delinquent and antisocial behavior.

The present study is an attempt to do no more than unravel a small piece of that association for a very specific group. The findings generated from this study cannot be generalized to any larger group. Large representative samples and rigorous measurements are needed for that purpose. However, the findings from the present study may be used to study larger groups. It is, of course, important to test hypotheses, but it is equally important to generate hypotheses that are worth testing (Hillery, 1982).

I am sensitive to the precarious position I am in as a white male researcher finding yet more "problems" with the African American family. The literature on black families

is replete with studies focusing on deficits, weaknesses, and pathology. While researchers, especially white researchers, should be sensitive to this situation, they should not be dissuaded from asking important, though sensitive, research questions.

This study, like any social science study I would argue, is not value free. While I have attempted to be a scientific observer, I recognize that my personal values followed me into the role of a researcher. For example, I am convinced that fathers play a key role in the lives of their sons, whether present or absent. I have gone into this study looking for father-son issues. I do not apologize for any of these values. I do, however, point them out explicitly so that the reader may know what biases are likely to be introduced due to these personal values.

The final point that I want to make is that this study examines the problem of father-absence and its possible effects on two distinct levels of analysis--a micro level in which the lives, perceptions, and feelings of young men are examined, and a more macro level in which larger social forces are examined. When I first began this study, I planned only on examining father-absence on the micro level, but I quickly recognized that this sensitive issue was surrounded by many larger issues. Thus, to approach any type of a full understanding of this problem, it is

necessary to examine these larger issues in some detail.

3.3 Variables

As the present study is qualitative, inductive, and most importantly suggestive, the variables under examination are not operationalized as precisely as variables that are quantitatively measured, analyzed, and interpreted. However, working definitions of *fatherless home* and *delinquent behavior* are needed to guide the study. They are defined as follows:

-Fatherless home: a household that consists of a mother or mother figure, her child(ren), but no father or father figure (e.g., stepfather, male extended family member).

-Delinquent behavior: any behavior, officially measured or self-reported, that is a status offense (e.g., truancy, running away) or criminal violation.

Both of these definitions are precise enough to set criteria for sample selection, and also to inform the reader of what type of households and behaviors are under consideration. At the same time, the variables, as defined, are broad enough to encompass many types of living

arrangements and behavior. The data on delinquent behavior should be considered especially reliable and valid as it is gathered from official documents and self-reports.

3.4 Sample

The present study is based on a small (N=23) convenience and purposive sample of African American male youths who were detained in the Home during the 1992-1993 fiscal year. The study sample represents 16% of all the African American males, or 6.3% of all the residents detained during this period.

The sample is a convenience sample in the sense that I chose the research site and the sampling frame on the basis of my ongoing relationship with the detention facility and its residents (i.e, based upon my employment there).

It is also a purposive sample in the sense that I generally chose for research participants those youths who I knew best. These youths tended to be recidivists and/or detained on serious charges that resulted in extended stays in the Home. For example, several of the youths in the sample spent as much as two thirds of a year in the Home for serious and violent charges such as malicious wounding and murder. During their many months in the Home, I had the opportunity to get to know and become friendly with these young males. Many others who ended up in the sample I

already knew well from their previous stays in detention; one youth was in the Home for the tenth time in his delinquent career. In effect, I tended to approach potential research participants on the basis of how well I knew them and they me. However, several youths who I did not know so well agreed to participate in the present study.

Babbie (1989:204) says of purposive or judgmental sampling that, "Occasionally it may be appropriate . . . to select your sample on the basis of your own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of your research aims: in short, based on your judgment and the purpose of the study." The sample used in this study was drawn so as to maximize rapport. A basic assumption of this study is that the greater the trust and comfort between researcher and subject, the deeper the questioning could go, and the richer the data gathered would likely be.

As the study sample is homogeneous with regard to the variables of gender, race, delinquency status, family structure (in the broad sense that all were fatherless homes), and social class, it is not appropriate to make comparisons with other groups. While this is a limitation or weakness in one sense, it is also an advantage in the sense that the findings speak directly to the group under investigation--the Home's African American male teens from single-parent families. Many young African American males

are at risk of engaging in delinquent behavior, and, thus, this population is in need of study with an eye toward practical and effective treatment and prevention programs.

Formal selection for participation in the study was based on the following simple criteria: 1) the youths obviously had to be male, African American, and come from a fatherless home; 2) youths that I had already formed a relationship with from previous stays at the Home were generally selected over youths that I did not yet know. However, several youths who were in the Home for the first time were selected in an effort to increase the sample size; and 3) only youths who expressed an interest and willingness to participate in the study were asked to provide their formal consent. In addition to this, each youth that signed an informed consent had to have his mother or guardian also sign an informed consent.[12]

Approximately thirty youths or so met the above

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[12] On a few occasions I was able to get the youth to agree to participate and sign the informed consent form, but was then unable to get a mother or guardian to sign. In these instances, the parent's signature was unobtainable because the mother did not come to the Home to visit with the youth. I only had one mother refuse to sign for her son's participation. Many of the mothers that signed commented that they were pleased that I was going to interview their sons, and that they thought it was important to study juvenile delinquency from the point of view of the youth. One mother said to me, "My son only sells drugs 'cause there aren't any jobs for him. He's not a bad child. I want people to know this."

selection criteria and formally agreed (i.e., provide their written consent) to participate in the study. Not one youth who I formally asked to participate refused. I had a small number of youths (maybe as many as four or five) express an unwillingness to be interviewed when I initially and informally approached them. Among those who did agree to participate, I lost a few because I could not secure informed consent from their mothers. This happened because the youths' mothers did not come to the twice-weekly visitations where I would approach parents about the study and attempt to gain their written consent. Only in one case did a mother refuse to consent even though her son had.

I lost a few potential subjects who had only an incomplete in-depth interview process. That is, a few youths left the Home before I could complete three or more in-depth interviews with them, which I found were needed before I began to really know something of the history and dynamics of their family lives. While I have excluded such cases from the background information and from formal qualitative analysis (i.e., chapter 4 will not report data obtained from the initial interviews with these few young men), all of the interviews, interactions, and observations I have experienced in the Home have left impressions on me that have found their way into the findings.

3.5 Background Information

In addition to data collected from the research participants, I had access to the Home's records. From these documents, I have gathered information for the variables age, number of times in detention, and type of delinquent offense. I present these data for both the study sample and for the overall population of the Home. It will be possible to compare characteristics of the study sample with certain parameters of the Home's population. The purpose of these data is simply to help place the study sample into some context.

3.6 The Setting

This study was conducted in the Roanoke Juvenile Detention Home. This facility is reportedly the second oldest juvenile detention home in the country (the oldest being in Cook County, Illinois). The Home is a secure and professionally staffed detention center for youths less than eighteen years of age. There is a Superintendent, an assistant Superintendent, one full-time secretary, three administrators (essentially shift leaders), approximately one dozen full-time counselors, another eight to ten part-time counselors, five cooks, and one maintenance worker. The staff work eight hour shifts (11 P.M. to 7 A.M.; 7 A.M. to 3 P.M.; or 3 P.M. to 11 P.M.).

The Home is designed to hold twenty-one residents (it has twenty-one secure rooms or cells), but usually has a population of thirty or more residents. When the population exceeds twenty-one, residents must "double up" in the rooms. This means that some youths must sleep on mattresses on the floor.

The Home's mission is to securely and safely hold juveniles who have been arrested and ordered detained by the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, generally pending court action. That is, most residents are held until the court disposes of their case, but sometimes a judge will order that a juvenile spend a short sentence of a few days or weeks in the Home. A juvenile may be detained for as little as a few hours (if their bond is posted or if the judge releases them at the detention hearing), or for the greater part of a year depending on the nature of their offense, age, and prior offenses (cases involving a transfer to the adult justice system often result in extended stays of many months in the Home).

The physical and social center of the Home is the day or recreation room. This large room has a television, ping pong table, pool table, several arcade games, and couches and chairs. Off to three sides of the day room are long narrow hallways or dorms where the residents sleep. Their rooms are small (approximately six by eight feet), and are

furnished with a bed bolted to the floor, a stainless steel
toilet and sink, a fairly large window facing outside that
is covered with heavy wire meshing, and a security door with
a small observation window. In addition to the day room,
there are two small classrooms, a dining area, a small
gymnasium, a clinic (where a physician examines each new
resident) and several offices for the administration.

The first area that an "intake" (newly arrived
resident) sees is the intake office. Here the youth is
divested of his/her personal possessions and clothing,
weighed, measured for height, and issued Home clothing. A
new resident is not allowed to mix with the population until
he/she has been oriented. This involves reading a rule book
and answering questions to verify that the rules are clearly
understood. The youth will take meals in his/her room until
he/she has completed the orientation process. Generally,
orientation takes several hours.

The residents are given everything they will need
during their detention, including underwear, socks, outer
garments, toothbrush, soap, comb, etc. The only personal
item that a youth may keep is her/his shoes, provided that
they are not heavy boots that could be dangerous. Most
youths elect to wear their own athletic shoes. In fact,
athletic shoes are a source of prestige in the Home. The
residents take great pride in their "Air Jordans," "Reebok

Pumps," and the like.

The daily activities, including meals, school, recreation time, showers, and visitations, follow a tight schedule. Cooperation and compliance are encouraged through the use of a token economy (a behavior modification system employing rewards and punishments). "Points" are earned and used for telephone calls, letters, snacks, and other privileges. Generally, the day-to-day operation of the Home runs smoothly.

3.7 In-depth Interviews

Each of the 23 research participants has been individually interviewed for at least three to four hours. This generally involved four to six interviews, each lasting from about fifty to sixty minutes. Occasionally, an interview would go for ninety or more minutes. Spradley's (1980:28-29) ethnographic research cycle was utilized. As Spradley (1980:26) puts it, "While other social science investigators tend to follow a *linear* pattern of investigation, the ethnographer tends to follow a *cyclical* pattern" [emphasis in the original]. What this means in specific terms is that I used the early interviews to formulate new lines of inquiry. Upon subsequent interviews, I would tighten my focus and line of questioning. This stands in sharp contrast to a linear research approach

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whereby all or most of the questions to be asked are formulated before the data gathering process begins. Put another way, I used a process over time to gather data as opposed to a single data gathering event.

The setting for the interviews was often an empty classroom in the Home. Other interview settings included the gymnasium during a quiet game of one-on-one or H-O-R-S-E (a basketful shooting game), or the research participant's dorm room. All interviews were completely confidential as no other youths, staff members, or others were present during the interview sessions.

Although there was a list of very basic questions that were asked of each participant (these questions served more as an ice breaker than anything else), the interviews were unstructured and open-ended. The interviewing process consisted of initial interviews that tended to focus on the youth's attitude about being in the Home, and basic background information such as place of birth, composition of family, school history, and history of involvement with the law. Each additional interview tended to focus more on family relationships, attitudes toward family members and friends, and detailed information on delinquent activity and life-style. In terms of questioning, then, the pattern was to move from general to more specific questions.

The data generated from the in-depth interviews were

recorded in two ways--I took some notes during the interview, and immediately following the interview I wrote extensive field notes. Thus, I have been able to capture specific quotes from the research participants. However, some of the extended quotes are a combination of verbatim and paraphrased utterances. My note taking ability has been sharpened through years of clinical experience, especially investigations of child and spouse abuse cases in which I had to take copious notes that could be used to help prosecute offenders.

Video and/or audio taping interviews has become increasingly popular with many researchers. There are many ethical and legal questions surrounding this practice (for example, see the March 27, 1991 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p.A9). I decided not to use a tape recorder for two key reasons. Primarily, I did not want to have any documentation that could be used against the research participants in any way. I assumed going into the study that I might hear things that could harm the participants if that information ever got into the hands of authorities (this assumption turned out to be well founded as participants shared very sensitive information, sometimes involving serious criminal acts). Secondly, I suspected that the presence of a tape recorder would inhibit the research participants.

Spradley (1980:69-70) distinguishes between condensed and expanded accounts. Of the former he writes:

> All notes taken during actual field observations represent a condensed version of what actually occurred. It is humanly impossible to write down everything that goes on or everything informants say. Condensed accounts often include phrases, single words, and unconnected sentences.

Spradley says of the latter:

> The second type of fieldnotes represents an expansion of the condensed version. As soon as possible after each field session (or after making a condensed account), the ethnographer should fill in details and recall things that were not recorded on the spot.

In the present study, I used both condensed and expanded note taking techniques.

It is my impression that the research participants generally enjoyed being interviewed. They often commented to me that they looked forward to the opportunity to tell their life stories. I was told many times that, "It feels good to talk about this stuff. Bein' locked up is hard, but it helps to talk about it." The important point, as it relates to the methodology of this study, is that I have been able to establish a trusting and supportive relationship with the research participants, and the data that have been gathered are descriptively rich. What is more, the data gathered in the present study are likely more

valid than data gathered in a survey or an experiment (Babbie, 1989:286).

3.8 Participant Observation

There are several varieties of participant observation (Hillery, 1992:224-225). As I am a member of the Home (as a paid staff member), the role that best describes the type of participant observation that I did is referred to as participant-as-observer. In this capacity, I used members (the residents) from a group that I am affiliated with as subjects for this study.

Denzin (1989a:156) provides a definition of participant observation that has informed and guided the present study:

> Participant observation is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in their day-to-day experiences. Participant observers do *ethnography*, which is the description, classification, and interpretation of a particular group's way of life.

Denzin (p.158) goes on to say:

> In participant observation, interviews are typically open-ended, as opposed to close-ended; census data, when analyzed, are usually not a central portion of the research process, but are used only to describe the characteristics of the population under study; and observation of ongoing events is typically less concerned with recording the frequency and distribution of events than it is with linking interaction patterns with the symbols and meanings believed to underlie the behavior.

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I want to distinguish for the reader between my use of
participant observation and in-depth interviews (the latter
is generally regarded as a specific technique of the
former). The important distinction with regard to the
present study is that in the role of participant-as-
observer, I was able to gather data in a fairly unobtrusive
manner, at least as compared to direct interviewing. That
is to say, as a staff member I have been able to observe
detained youths interacting with one another. In the
process, I have learned something of their values, beliefs,
and ways of relating to the world. In turn, I then used
some of this information to develop questions for my
personal in-depth interviews.

In many ways, I believe that I have learned as much
from participant observation (e.g., watching and
occasionally playing in card games and basketball games, and
listening to and observing youths during meals) as I did
from other research methods (in-depth interviews, review of
Home records, and diaries and letters). During such times,
I have been able to see, hear, feel, smell, and taste the
world of the youths in the Home. Casual, and sometimes not
so casual, conversations that I overheard or took part in
were *real*, not contrived. Apart from the in-depth
interviews, youths confided in me, cried before me, and
shared intimate details with me concerning their personal

lives. I believe that much of what I have been able to learn from and about the youths in the Home I could not have learned with conventional survey research methods.

3.9 Diaries and Letters

In addition to in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of Home records, other data collection methods have been employed--the use of diaries or notebooks, and the exchange of letters. The purpose behind these additional methods has been to allow the youths opportunities to share information about themselves in a way that is not a product of face-to-face interaction with the researcher (me). That is to say, use of these materials is less likely to be influenced through interaction or what is sometimes called experimenter demand.

Diaries were really no more than notebooks that I provided to the research participants to record biographical data about themselves that they thought would be interesting for me to know. Sometimes I would ask a youth to comment on something specific, such as their relationship with their father, or what it is like to be a drug dealer. At other times, I would simply ask them to write about whatever they chose. I asked all of the twenty-three research participants if they would be willing to record information in a diary. Only six of the twenty-three actually recorded

data in a diary; many youths chose not to, and they were never pressured to do so. A common reason given for not wanting to write in a notebook was "Writing is boring. I'd rather just talk to you, Mr. Wolfe." An additional reason that so few notebooks were utilized had to do with security measures. That is, I was only able to provide research participants with writing instruments and notebooks if I was physically present in the Home to collect them, or if I arranged to have another staff member collect them. I generally did not ask other staff to do this as it is something of a burden to be responsible for the collection of such items. This situation limited the opportunities for collecting data with this method. As only about one fourth of the participants recorded information in diaries (i.e., notebooks), I do not rely heavily on this method. However, some excerpts from notebook entries are reported with the other data in chapter 4.

Letters are actual correspondence between myself and some of the research participants. As with the diaries and interviews, I always asked for and received permission to use what was in the letters for inclusion in this study. I informed all twenty-three of the research participants that I was willing to exchange letters with them if they chose. I exchanged letters only with a very small number (three out of twenty-three) of the research participants. Generally,

these youths were writing to me from either prison (after they had been transferred to the adult system), or from a state learning center (these institutions are simply referred to as "state" by the juveniles, and this is where one "pulls their time"). Again, as so few participants exchanged letters, I do not rely heavily on the letters for information, but some data are reported in chapter 4 that come directly from letters I received.

In summary, the present study is ethnographic and inductive. Its purpose is to examine in a detailed and qualitative way the lives of African American male youths from fatherless homes who have been detained in a juvenile detention facility. The research methods used are participant observation, in-depth interviews, diaries and letters, and review of institutional records. The bulk of the data presented in the next chapter comes from interviews and participant observation. The goal of this research is to develop hypotheses for future research into this topic.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the data obtained from in-depth interviews, participant observation, diaries, letters, and review of the Home's records are reported. I rely heavily on quotes obtained from the research participants during in-depth interviews. None of the quotes that are offered (it should be noted that some are quite extensive and explicit), have the real name of the speaker attached. In some instances, I have also changed certain facts such as location, victim, or other specifics of the offense so that the speaker's identity cannot be determined. The chapter ends with a presentation of hypotheses that are generated from the literature review combined with the data gathered from the present study.

4.2 Background Information

The ages of the youths in the study sample range from 13 to 17 years. The mean age of the research participants is 15.9 years (SD = 1.12). Most (74%) of the research participants are 16 or 17 years old (see chart A.2 in the Appendix). The average age of all of the black male youths that have been detained in the Home over the past year is 15.4 years (SD = 1.42) (see chart A.3 in the Appendix); for

all black females that have been in the Home over the past year the mean age is 15.2 years (SD = 1.65); for white males 15.7 years (SD = 1.33); for white females 15.4 years (SD = 1.17).

The average number of times in detention per research participant is 4.2 (SD = 2.06). Most (82.6%) of the research participants have been in the Home three or more times. One research participant has been detained in the Home on ten separate occasions. Only two participants in the study sample have been in the Home just once. The Home defines recidivists as youths that have been in the Home on three or more occasions. On average, then, these research participants are recidivists (see chart A.4 in Appendix). The mean number of times in detention for all black male youths who have been detained in the Home over the past year is 2.9 times (SD = 2.18) (see chart A.5 in Appendix); for black females 1.8 times (SD = 1.03); for white males 2.15 times (SD = 1.97); for white females 2.3 times (SD = 2.75).

The offenses of the research participants range from attempted burglary (for example, attempting to break into a sporting goods store) to murder. Two of the research participants have been charged with murder; two have been charged with grand larceny; four were charged with attempted larceny; sixteen research participants have been charged with narcotics charges, all of them involving crack cocaine.

Five research participants have been charged with weapons violations (possession and/or use of handguns). Chart A.6 in the Appendix shows the number of violent, drug, and property offenses committed by the research participants. The reader will notice that there are more charges than research participants. This is because some research participants came into the Home with multiple charges.

The background information as outlined above indicates the following: 1) on average, the participants in the study sample are older than any race-gender group (other black males, black females, white females, and white males) that has been in the Home over the past year; 2) on average, the participants in the study sample have been in the Home more times than any other race-gender group, and they are recidivists; and 3) the research participants are primarily drug (crack cocaine) dealers and violent offenders. The findings from the present study, then, are most applicable to the Home's older African American male teens who are recidivists, crack dealers, and violent offenders.

4.3 As They See It

In this section, the perceptions and opinions of the research participants regarding father-absence are reported. The young men in this study have strong opinions regarding how father-absence affects young boys as they grow up.

Seventeen of the twenty-three research participants (74%) explicitly stated that they believe that by growing up without a father or father figure for much of their lives, they were able to "get away with more" than boys who did grow up with fathers or father figures. Many of the youths reported that they behaved differently when their fathers were in the home as compared to when their fathers were not living in the Home.

Raheem, age fifteen, is characteristic of this position. He reported to me that, "Boys be gettin' over on they moms 'cause a woman can't control a boy like a man can. When my dad's around, I definitely be better 'cause he don't let me get away with shit. My moms loves me and all, but she too soft on me. I tell her that I be behavin' good and she believe it, sometimes." Raheem also described for me how his mother's threats of punishment were infrequently carried out. He told me that he believed that he could always "do my own thing, and my moms wasn't really gonna do nothin' 'bout it." He told me that his mother nagged him about "runnin' the streets," but that she rarely punished him for not following her instructions or obeying her rules.

Tracy, a very bright and talkative sixteen year old, put it this way:

> The main thing is that without a dad you can get over on your mom. My mom would constantly tell me that I shouldn't be dealin' drugs 'cause I could get killed or

go to jail. I would always tell her not to worry, and that I got it goin' on Mom. It ain't like she approved of it, but there wasn't really nothin' she could do about it. I mean since I was about ten or eleven years old I just be doin' whatever I want to do. With all the kids in my family she couldn't watch what I was doin' all the time. I just hang-out on the street with older kids and do what they doin'. I bet if my dad was around, I probably couldn't just hang out so much.

Tracy's statement seems to support the notion that some single-parents have a difficult time providing appropriate supervision and guidance for their youngsters. His comment about hanging-out was often repeated by other research participants. Many of the youths spoke about keeping very late hours, sometimes coming in as late as 6:00 A.M. Some of the youths reported that they would not come home for days at a time, choosing instead to stay with a girlfriend or maybe a "homie[13]," often in a motel or hotel room paid for with crack money. While their mothers did not approve of such behavior, they generally did not sanction their sons in any significant way that impacted on this type of behavior. Indeed, a common theme that I heard was that mothers tended to complain about their sons' behavior, but

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[13] "Homie" is short for Homeboy or Homegirl. Both refer to a friend that comes from the same neighborhood or "'hood." It appears to be the case that some of the gang lingo from Los Angeles is finding its way into the vocabulary of Roanoke's youth. Other gang terms, such as "dis," which is short for disrespect--as in "don't dis me!"--are becoming increasingly popular.

they typically did not discipline in any consistent or effective way.

As Tracy put it, "My mom bitches at me all the time, but she lets me do what I want. My friends' moms be doin' the same." This same youth said to me that "Every person, I mean every one, I hang with doesn't live with their dad." He spoke of how he and his friends have adopted the attitude of "doin' our own thing," and "livin' mad" or "goin' all out" which all refer to living very much in the moment without any real regard for the consequences of their actions. Tracy said that he knows that his lifestyle will likely land him in prison at some point, but that the important thing is to not worry about that, and focus instead on getting more "money, bitches, and respect."

When I asked Tracy how he felt about not having his dad around he responded by saying, "Sometimes I see him as an enemy. He left when I was five. He don't never come around. I love him 'cause he's my dad, but I really hate him for not stayin' around." When I questioned him about his own child (his girlfriend was several months pregnant at the time of this interview) he said, "I want to be a good dad--be with my kid, be hard on him. That's what a kid needs, someone to be strict with him."

The anger that this young man expressed toward his father was not at all unusual among the research

participants or many of the youths I have come to know in the Home. Indeed, anger toward the absent father was another common theme. Michael, seventeen years old, told me that his father left his family when he was just a baby. He said that he has seen his father only a few times in his entire life. He could not remember very well when he last saw his father--he thought it might have been seven or eight years ago. He said of his father that, "He called about a year ago and told me that he wants me to come live with him now in New Jersey, but it's too late. I hate the motherfucker! He should have been a father earlier. I don't need him now."

Tyrell, age sixteen, said of his father, "My dad doesn't give me anything. He's an alcoholic and a bum. I sometimes give *him* money. I ain't got no respect for the man." Tyrell explained to me that his father is a heavy drinker who is unemployed. He said that his father does not have a home of his own, instead he stays with different women who will provide him food and shelter. Tyrell reported that his mother used to let his father sleep and take his meals in her apartment, but that she finally stopped this because his father frequently became angry and violent, especially when he drinks. Tyrell told me that it hurts him to see his father living such an empty life. He does not want to end up like his father. He said, "My kids

ain't never gonna see me on the street with no place to
live. My kids are gonna be proud of me 'cause I'm gonna
give them what they need."

Seventeen year old Thomas told me in an interview that
he would kill his father if he had the opportunity. He
said, "The son of a bitch don't deserve to live. I'll kill
him if I ever see him again. He hurt me, my mom, and my
sisters. I don't understand how a man can just leave his
family like that." Thomas went on to say that since his
father's departure (which occurred when Thomas was about
four years old), his family has struggled financially. He
told me how they had to leave their home in a nice
neighborhood for an apartment in one of Roanoke's public
housing projects. Thomas said that he believes that a big
part of the reason that he has had so much trouble with the
law is because he lives in the projects where "there ain't
nothin' to do but hang with guys that like to get in
trouble. We get bored, and start doin' stuff like gankin'
[robbing] somebody just for the fun of it."

Many of the youths reported that they used to feel
angry at their absent fathers, but that they no longer care
very much about these men. As sixteen year old Dantrell put
it, "Why be mad? I can't change nothin' anyway, so I just
forget about it most of the time."

Curtis, seventeen years old, said of his father, "I

really don't even think of him as my father anymore." He explained to me that his father somewhat regularly moves back and forth between Roanoke and Mississippi. He said that when his father is in Roanoke, he (father) will usually visit with him. He further told me that he enjoys seeing his father, but the visits are becoming less frequent, and that he cares less and less for his father. Curtis wrote the following concerning his feelings toward his father in a diary that I provided for him [reported here exactly as written in the notebook]:

> Tell you the truth I realy don't care much about him but I love him for who he is and what little bit he have done for us.

This same young man went on to write:

> I am a father and I am not going to be like my father. Me and my baby's mama is together and we are happy and trust and love each other. My mom and dad don't get along to well and they just seperated and I hope that want happened to us because I want to be with my kid until death do us apart.

Anthony, fourteen years old, said to me that he did not mind that he had not seen his father for several years. Later in the interview, however, he added, "I try not to think about my dad. He's in jail. Sometimes, though, I can't stop thinking about him, and I cry a little."

Interestingly, anger, hurt, and indifference were not

the only emotions expressed by the research participants concerning their relationships with their absent fathers. Several youths reported that they really admired and wanted to be like their fathers. Most of the youth who admired their fathers actually had very limited or in some cases no contact with their fathers. Kenny, seventeen years old, reported that he has only seen his father once, about four years ago at a family funeral. He said that his father was big and strong, and that he liked that about him. He said to me that, "My aunt always tells me that I look just like him, and that I'm good with my hands just like he is. I don't really know him, but I want to be like him. He's a mechanic, I think. That's what I want to be, too."

Nathan, age fourteen years, said that he has never met his father, but he has always heard that his father is a tough man who can fight well. He said that he thinks that he will grow up to be just as tough and strong as his father. He told me that, "I want to meet him some day, and show him that I am just like him." Nathan had no idea where his father lives. He said that no one in his family knows his father's whereabouts.

In addition to reporting their feelings and opinions about their fathers, the research participants also reported to me on how they relate to father surrogates--for the most part, grandfathers, uncles, and stepfathers. Many of the

youths related that they at one time had positive relationships with father figures, but that as they (the youths) grew older, they spent less time with father figures, and more time with peers.

Sixteen year old Henry told me that he was very close with his maternal grandfather, "Pops," until his grandfather's death which occurred when Henry was twelve. He stated, "Me and my Pops used to do everything together. We'd pick vegetables in his garden, go driving around in his old truck, and just be together all the time." He went on to tell me that he did not get into trouble at school or with the police until after his grandfather had passed away. He said, "I never got into trouble when Pops was alive. He would kill me if I ever got arrested for dealin' crack. I never would have sold drugs when he was alive, 'cause I couldn't stand to hurt him. I really loved my Pops a lot. He was like my dad to me." Henry told me that since the loss of Pops there has not been another adult male in his life that he looks up to. He further related that the most important people in his life are his "homies."

Sixteen year old Eric reported that he was especially close to his maternal uncle, John, when he was growing up. He reported to me that Uncle John used to take him to ball games, the park, and sometimes to the movies. He told me that his uncle was very strict with him. He said, "He would

always tell me that he was gonna whip my ass if I dropped out of school and hung out with crooks." Eric also related that he always knew that his uncle loved him deeply. Eric told me that Uncle John moved out of the area about three or four years ago, and it was at that point that he started skipping school and hanging out with older male youths who dealt crack.

4.4 What it Means to be a Man

One of the most important findings from the present study concerns the conceptions of manhood that the research participants expressed. By definition male role models are crucial in the gender identity development of boys. Indeed, boys learn how to behave as men by modeling the behavior of older males. It should also be recalled from the literature review that some investigators have found that the absence of a male role model sometimes results in a condition known as compulsive masculinity--a condition marked by overly-aggressive or macho attitudes and behaviors.

While all of the research participants were not living with their fathers or father figures at the time of the study, the reason for separation, the length of separation, and the availability of surrogate father figures differed from individual to individual. Ten of the twenty-three (43%) research participants were born out of wedlock, eight

(35%) had parents who divorced, three (13%) had fathers who were in prison, and two (9%) had fathers who had died.

Nearly all of the research participants stated in one manner or another that manhood means toughness, physical strength, having many sexual conquests, and not displaying emotions other than anger and aggression. My observations of male youths in the Home, generally, support this conception of manhood.

John, age thirteen years, told me in an interview that he was a man because he carried a gun and was not afraid to use it. He also told me that men are supposed to be physically strong, and able to "take care of business" which he said meant being able to fight well. He went on to say that a man was someone who "is not a punk. If you 'dis' me and I don't do nothin' about it, then I'm the punk and you're the man. But, if I shoot you 'cause you 'dis' me, I'm the man." When I asked him how someone might "dis" him (show him disrespect), he said, "It could be anything, like not payin' me my money, callin' me a name, maybe lookin' at me crazy. You know, anything that don't show me respect."

This expressed willingness to shoot someone over what appear to be trivial matters was not limited to this particular youth. I often heard very similar comments. Indeed, two of the research participants who were found guilty of murder (one had a jury trial, and the other plea

bargained) committed these crimes over non-life-threatening events. One killed a crack buyer because the buyer tried to drive off with $50 worth of the substance without paying for it. In the other murder, the victim and the murderer exchanged angry words, and the murderer, seventeen year old Patrick, felt that he had to prove himself and his manhood. Patrick told me that he would not have been arrested for this murder except that he boasted about it. His bravado, apparently, gave the police a lead that resulted in his arrest.

Borrowing a line from a recent article in *U.S. News & World Report* (November 8, 1993, p.32), "One is struck less by the armament [among today's teenagers] than by the evident willingness to pull the trigger." Many of the research participants readily admitted that they would not hesitate to pull the trigger if they believed that it would suit their immediate purpose. As fifteen year old Tim told me, "On the streets I'm known as a niggah that will definitely shoot someone if they fuck with me. I'm all-out lethal, I don't bullshit." Tim's comments seem to be verified by his records that indicate that he has been charged with malicious wounding (shooting someone in the leg), a weapons charge (same incident), and a count of narcotics possession with intent to distribute (crack cocaine). Within the confines of the Home, he has a

reputation and history of being very explosive and
dangerous.

Antwaun, fifteen years old, reported to me that being a
man means "having a lot of girls. The girls like me 'cause
I spend money on 'em and give 'em crack." He told me that
he takes a different girl to a motel room several times each
week. He discussed how he and his friends use crack money
to stay in a hotel for up to a week at a time. He described
parties where alcohol, crack, and other drugs are used to
entice females into having sex with him and his homeboys.
He spoke of "trains" where one girl has sexual intercourse
with many boys, one after another. Antwaun went on to say
that he has been "burned" by girls. This means that he has
contracted a sexually transmitted disease. He said, "If a
girl burns me, I'm gonna burn someone else. One time, I
burned a whole bunch of girls before I went to the clinic to
get fixed." When I asked him about HIV and AIDS, he said,
"No, I don't really worry 'bout it. I don't wear rubbers
'cause it takes away the feelin'." This is another example
of "goin' all out," or living in the moment.

"Gettin' over" on girls was a familiar theme. In fact,
one of the clearest themes that emerged from both interviews
and general observations of the male residents was that
females exist to their way of thinking to be exploited. The
male residents spoke often of "rappin'" or talking to

females in such a way that the females "fall for it." What
this means is that the young man will promise love,
fidelity, sometimes even marriage, in short, a "future" of
some kind. The young man will do this with a feigned
sincerity such that the young woman believes it. Once she
believes in him, it is likely that she will sleep with him,
thus completing his conquest. Conversations with some of
the female residents of the Home confirm that this is a
common practice. For example, one young woman said to me,
"I know that my boyfriend fools around with a lot of other
girls, but when he tells me how much he loves me I just do
want ever he wants. I guess it's better to share a
boyfriend than to not have one at all."

Males who have been successful in getting many
girlfriends, especially older girlfriends, gain a reputation
that is very prestigious. As seventeen year old Carl told
me, "Niggahs [good friends] respect me 'cause I got the best
rap in Roanoke. I get more pussy than anyone. Bitches love
me 'cause I tell 'em how much I love 'em." Carl's
perception of his reputation is apparently well founded as I
have often heard other residents ask him how he does it, and
ask him for specific lines that will work on attracting
girls. Carl relishes in this attention, and happily
dispenses advice.

4.5 Crack: Feemers, Guns, and 'Bein Paid'

As indicated earlier, most (70%) of the youths in the study sample have been charged with narcotics possession and distribution (crack dealing). There are actually more total violent offenses--murders, assaults, and weapons charges-- than drug offenses, but more youths were charged with crack dealing than any other offense. Put differently, a small number of youths in the sample committed a large number of violent offenses, but the greatest number of research participants in the sample have been charged with drug dealing. It is accurate to say, then, that the study sample is primarily composed of crack dealers. Even youths who have not been officially charged with drug dealing admitted to me that they have at least occasionally been involved in the world of crack cocaine dealing. Every single research participant reported that they had sold crack on at least one occasion.

Crack is an enormous social problem. It is associated with violence more than any other street drug (Inciardi, 1993). The research participants made it very clear that crack has an amazing grip on the "feemer[14]" as they like to

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[14] I have tried to track down where the term "feemer" originated. As best as I can determine, some users high on crack look like they are "out in space," with their eyes dilated and faces somewhat blank in appearance. Some dealers would say to a user, "you look like Scotty beamed you up," referring to the television series "Star Trek." Getting high

call the user. Feemers will "do anything for another rock [piece of crack]," sixteen year old Marcus reported. He said, "They will steal from anybody, even they moms. They will give you they body, car if they got one, or anything that you want. They gotta have another hit off the pipe, no matter what!"

Another sixteen year old dealer, Roger, related to me how an older man who was a feemer, "stole his own kids Christmas presents out under the Christmas tree to trade for another rock. I felt kinda bad, but I got a Nintendo game for a $50 rock." He also told me that feemers will trade food stamps for more crack. He said that he doesn't like to take stamps, but that a lot of his friends will. He also, like many of the crack dealers I have met, recounted explicit accounts of sex for drug trades. He said, "I get more booty [sex] from feemers than anything else. They will do anything. Sometimes a whole bunch of us will have sex with a good lookin' feemer. She don't care as long as we give her the rock."

Crack is not only powerfully addictive for the users. The benefits of crack dealing provide powerful incentives to

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on crack became "beam me up, Scotty." Users became "beamers," and somehow this got changed to "feemers." Whatever the origin of the term, it is clear that it is a highly derogatory name. "Feemers," though paying customers, have no respect among the dealers who routinely beat them up, and otherwise exploit their addiction.

stay in the drug trade. As seventeen year old Curtis wrote

in his diary for me:

> Realy I want to explain how drugs is bad for users and
> dealers. When you is selling drugs the money come so
> fast it is impossible to stop. When I was out there
> before I got locked up for the second time you could
> not tell me anything because I use to always say I had
> it going on so much. It makes you feel good to go out
> and buy a $5000 car straight out at the age of 16 and
> wear new clothes to school everyday and so much money
> it takes to pockets to carry. And drugs can buy you
> anything. If only people new how much time was in this
> shit they would not sail drugs. I wish I could get a
> message across to all the little guys who look up to
> me. I would like to tell them that clothes, girls,
> money ain't no good if it ain't bought or made
> honestly, because all the expensive things I got ain't
> doing me no good right now. I felt good when people
> use to tell me I was paid and girls all on me. It was
> like I was a king but when it's over it's over. All
> the smiles and friends I had when I was living like a
> king I don't have any more.

Curtis was not the only youth to express such views,

although he did it in a very compelling way. I often heard

comments such as, "I admit that I'm addicted to the money

and the stuff that I get from dealin'. People be lookin' up

to me, wanna be like me."

Daryl, sixteen, told me in an interview, "When I was

about 12 years old I used to look up to the dealers. I

wanted to be paid like they was. I liked the gold chains

they had, the cars, and the respect. Now, the young kids in

my 'hood be lookin' up to me the same way." Daryl raised

the interesting point that he wished as a young boy to be

like the older male drug dealers in his neighborhood.

An observation that I have made on many occasions in the Home is that the younger male residents admire and try to emulate the older male residents, especially those with "bad" reputations. The two youths in the sample charged with murder had almost a fan club among the younger residents of the Home. I would hear eleven and twelve year old boys say how they wanted to be "ganstas" like the older males were who had shot someone. The older males knew that they were admired, and they would tell stories of how they "beat down" [assaulted] someone, or how they can "smoke" [shoot] someone without thinking anything of it. These "war story" sessions lasted sometimes for hours to an audience of wide-eyed youngsters.

Both the younger and the older male residents generally admire and sometimes try to emulate some of the male staff. I have noticed that many times those youths who have been in the Home for extended periods (several months or longer), adopt the role of "junior staff." In this role, the resident displays outstanding behavior in terms of cooperation, helpfulness, and especially in sanctioning other residents for violating the Home's rules.

Several of the Home's male staff have developed very positive relationships with some of the male residents (especially the older residents, like those in the study

sample). The characteristics of the staff who develop these relationships include openness, honesty, empathy, a good sense of humor, but perhaps most importantly a consistency and strength of character. The residents will sometimes complain about staff being "too strict," but the youths respect such staff. Staff who are inconsistent and "soft" are taken advantage of, and generally not well liked by the residents. I believe that this observation is instructive. Open and honest communication, a sense of humor, consistency, and firmness are key elements in establishing rapport with teens. These are some of the very same elements that are associated with effective parenting.

Another concern associated with crack dealing involves handguns. I have heard on numerous occasions that "You gotta carry a gun if you are in the business. If you don't, somebody is gonna gank [rob] ya." Even youths who are not drug dealers report that they feel compelled to carry a gun for protection. Many youths have told me that school can be an especially dangerous place to be without a gun as so many youths are more likely to carry a gun than a textbook to school.

Guns appear to do more than simply provide protection, though. Guns are symbolic of power and prestige. As one youth told me, "I feel like nothin' can hurt me when I got my nine [9mm handgun] with me." Many youths draw pictures

of guns, carve gun replicas out of soap or fashion them out of paper and tape, and otherwise demonstrate how much they like guns. Many of the Home's youths speak of the advantages of semiautomatics, larger clips to hold more rounds, and hollow point bullets that do tremendous damage to human flesh. I have witnessed spontaneous role plays in the Home where residents hide behind furniture, pop up and shoot at each other, and play out what many of us know as "cops and robbers" except that in this case they are all robbers or "ganstas" as they like to be called.

During interviews, no other topic was as interesting for the research participants as guns. When I asked questions about types of guns, availability of guns, and use of guns, the research participants tended to become excited and animated. In terms of gun procurement, I was surprised to learn how easily youths as young as ten years old can get handguns from other youths and adults, especially feemers. As seventeen year old James told me, "If you want a gun, just find a feemer who ain't got no money and tell them that you got the boomin' [high quality] dope that they want if they get you a gun. Believe me, you'll get a gun, quick."

Sixteen year old Robert told me that he knows people who specialize in black market gun sales. He told me how one particular fellow will open up the trunk of his car to reveal dozens of handguns. He said, "This guy got

everything. I mean you can get a mack 9 [a very powerful 9mm semiautomatic handgun], a glock [another 9mm semiautomatic], a .22 [a small caliber, usually semiautomatic handgun] a .357 [a large caliber, often a revolver], whatever you want. He will even sell you an AK-47 [a deadly Soviet-styled assault rifle] if you got the money. You just gotta have the money." Robert reported that a .22 caliber handgun may be as cheap as $35 or $40, while a 9mm may cost as little as $80 to $100. He said, "You can get guns even cheaper than that if someone is trying to unload a really hot piece, or if a feemer has a gun they wanna trade for dope."

Other research participants told me that handguns will sometimes float around a group of friends. That is, sometimes youths in a friendship group will take turns keeping a communally owned gun. If one youth is under suspicion by the police or maybe his mom, then he will pass the gun along to another friend to avoid detection while still maintaining access "in case I need it."

Before moving on to the hypotheses, I want to comment on observations I have made concerning the impact of popular culture on youths. Specifically, it is my impression that ganster rap (that brand of rap music that glorifies guns and violence, and degrades women by referring to them as "bitches" and "ho's") has a deleterious effect on some

youths who are avid listeners. For example, I have heard
youths in the Home recite word for word the lyrics of some
of the most violent and pornographic rap songs. These same
youths routinely refer to females as "bitches" and "ho's,"
and they tell each other how they are just as crazy as the
characters depicted in violent rap videos. The Home
instituted a policy of "no MTV viewing" precisely because
the residents would get "pumped up" (excited and more
aggressive) after viewing ganster rap videos[15].

4.6 Hypotheses

Based upon the data collected and analyzed for this
study, I have discovered or generated several hypotheses.
The purpose of these hypotheses is to offer my research
findings in such a way that other researchers can test their
validity. Some of the hypotheses are based closely on the
data gathered from the present study, while others are based
more upon the review of the research literature.

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[15] I have also observed that the most popular movies among
the male residents of the Home are those films that glorify
drugs and violence. While such movies and other forms of
entertainment are popular among young audiences generally, it
appears that youths who lack prosocial role models are
especially susceptible to the negative images that are
portrayed in such popular culture. The empirical evidence
that I have is anecdotal. However, I offer my observations as
this is a topic that has received attention recently in the
news media, and it is a topic that needs further
investigation.

While future researchers will want to develop their own operational definitions according to their theoretical and methodological approach, the following definitions apply to the key concepts that are contained in the following hypotheses, proposition, and model:

-Family structure: The makeup of a family based upon the actual number and relationships of members living in the household. In the present context, there are assumed to be two primary family structures--single-parent and two-parent families.

-Single-parent family: A family composed of only one parent or guardian and his/her child(ren). The parent may be a mother or father. In this study, all of the single-parent families are fatherless (no natural father or other father figure in the home at the time of interview).

-Two-parent family: A family composed of at least one natural parent and an additional parent or parent figure and child(ren).

-Delinquent behavior: Any behavior, self-reported or officially measured, that is a criminal violation or

status offense.

-Family interaction: A composite of three familial dynamics--parental supervision, parental discipline, and prosocial gender role modelling.

-Parental supervision: The direct knowledge and awareness that a parent has regarding the whereabouts, peer group, and behavior of their child(ren). To oversee or superintend the actions of a child.

-Parental discipline: The structure (e.g., rules, expectations, consequences, rewards and punishments) that a parent provides for a youth.

-Gender role modelling: The social learning of behaviors associated with prosocial or conformist conduct involving a model and imitator both of the same gender.

With regard to family interaction, there are obviously many more dimensions than the three listed above. Parental supervision, parental discipline, and prosocial gender role modelling, however, are the three dimensions of family interaction that emerged most strongly from the literature

review and the data collected from the research
participants. Other dimensions of family interaction, such
as affection, communication, and conflict, did not receive
as much support from the literature and qualitative data.

*HYPOTHESIS 1: Family structure is related to delinquent
behavior through the mediating variable of parental
supervision. Single-parent families provide less
supervision than two-parent families.*

*HYPOTHESIS 2: Youths from single-parent families are more
susceptible to antisocial peer pressure than are youths from
two-parent families.*

*HYPOTHESIS 3: Family structure is related to delinquent
behavior through the mediating variable of parental
discipline. Single-parent families provide less effective
discipline than two-parent families.*

*HYPOTHESIS 4: Family structure is related to delinquent
behavior through the mediating variable of gender
socialization. It follows that the young male without a
positive father figure develops a hyper-masculine and
antisocial male gender identity. A related proposition is
that in the absence of positive male role models, male*

*youths are more likely to adopt base and stereotypical
"macho" gender identities.*

*HYPOTHESIS 5: The more a male youth expresses anger over
his father or father figure deserting him, the more likely
he is to engage in delinquent behavior. Closely related is
the proposition that male youths who are angry with their
absent fathers or father figures are more likely to be angry
with authority figures in general which, in turn, is related
to delinquent behavior.*

The reader will notice that two-parent families, as
conceptualized here, include stepparents. Although it was
pointed out in the literature review that youths from
stepfamilies are often as likely as youths from single-
parent families to engage in delinquent behavior (Dornbusch
et. al, 1985; Steinberg, 1987), stepfamilies appear to
become more successful at insulating youth from delinquent
behavior the longer they are together (Amato, 1987). The
assumption here is that parental supervision, discipline,
and role modelling will improve over time so that
stepfamilies that have been together for some length of time
will begin to resemble two natural parent families.

It also should be pointed out that the hypotheses
assume that the link between family structure and delinquent

behavior is primarily indirect (the possibility that broken homes have a direct yet minor affect on delinquent behavior is left open). The following proposition summarizes the findings of the present study:

Single-parent homes are more likely to have poor family interaction (i.e., less parental supervision, less effective parental discipline, and inadequate role modelling) than two-parent families. Poor interaction, in turn, predisposes youths to delinquent behavior.

Based upon this proposition and the five hypotheses that have been generated, plus the literature that has been reviewed, the following continuum concerning family structure, family interaction, and delinquent behavior is offered:

Delinquency is highest in single-parent homes with poor interaction, somewhat lower in two-parent families with poor interaction, lower yet in single-parent homes with good interaction, and lowest in two-parent families with good interaction.

The relationship between the variables under consideration (i.e., the causal chain or model) can be graphically depicted as indicated in figure 4.1:

Family Interaction

Single-parent Homes – – – – – – – – ➤ Delinquent Behavior
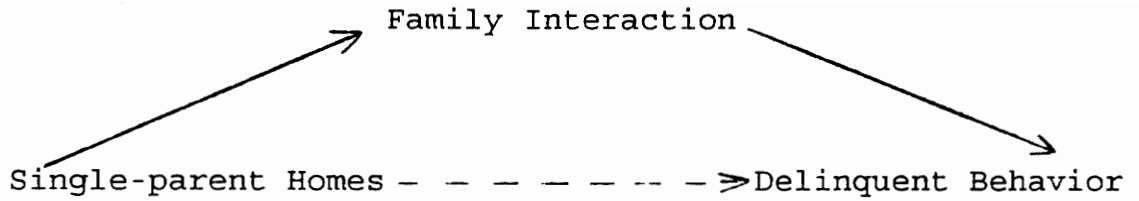
Figure 4.1, Causal Chain

From this figure, it can be seen that single-parent homes affect family interaction directly; the solid line indicates that the perceived relationship is relatively strong. Single-parent homes may affect delinquent behavior directly, but, as the broken line indicates, the perceived relationship is considered to be relatively weak. Family interaction directly affect delinquent behavior, with the perceived relationship being relatively strong.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with a summary and discussion of the literature and how it relates to the findings from the present study. Next, there is a discussion of prevention strategies, especially those involving an Afrocentric approach and positive male role models or mentors. Finally, the chapter ends with suggestions for future inquiry into the issue of family structure and delinquent behavior, and questions that might guide future research efforts are raised.

The extant research literature on family and delinquent behavior suggests that family structure affects delinquency through the mediating variables of parental supervision and discipline. Indeed, while this body of literature is replete with conflicting findings as noted by some reviewers, parental supervision and discipline emerge as important variables when large scale reviews are performed. While studies that have utilized clinical and otherwise non-representative samples have found a stronger relationship between family structure and delinquent behavior than studies employing large representative samples, the latter still find a significant, though weaker, relationship between these variables.

Also emergent from the literature is the notion of hyper or compulsive masculinity. Research into this topic suggests that the absence of prosocial male role models may lead to overly aggressive and unlawful behavior. The literature on fathers' effect on child development suggests that the role of a father is multidimensional and easily misunderstood when treated in a simplistic fashion.

Literature that has examined African American family formation suggests that macro-level factors such as male unemployment account for a substantial portion of female-headed family formation. Historical evidence demonstrates that the black male was largely present in the family until sometime in the early part of this century. The past three decades have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of single-parent families in the black community.

My interviews with and observations of African American male youths from father-absent homes who have engaged in violent and repeated criminal behavior suggest that the youths themselves believe that father-absence is related to their misconduct. Additionally, the data from the present study supports the findings from the literature linking single-parent families to poor family interactions--parental supervision, discipline, and role modelling most prominently. My findings also suggest that feelings of hurt, betrayal, and anger may be associated with antisocial

behavior, a point not handled in the family and delinquency literature.

The above will, undoubtedly, appear to some to blame the victim. Do my findings indict single African American mothers whose sons end up in a detention facility? No. Instead, macro-level social forces, such as economic inequalities between blacks and whites, policies that encourage incarceration over education, and a lack of overall public will to rectify these conditions, are ultimately responsible for the plight of many African American single-parent families in urban America. Given this, it is especially important that single-parents do all that they can to protect their children from the influences of violent streets, delinquent peers, and a popular culture that glorifies violence and misogyny. The empirical data tell us that most youths from urban African American single-parent families do not become incarcerated. I submit that these families are insulating their children from delinquency through positive family interaction (i.e., strong parenting characterized by close parental supervision, effective and consistent discipline, and the availability of positive male role models).

Much of the research in this area has failed to adequately consider how family structure affects family interaction, and, as such, has contributed to the empirical

confusion surrounding this topic. As several reviewers have noted, methodological shortcomings, such as inadequate sampling and overly simplistic definitions, have blurred the issue.

It is more clear that macro-level social forces are in many ways at the root of the increase in delinquency among African American male youths. However, changes at the macro level are cumbersome, complex, and often slow to occur. Prevention strategies and treatment programs that focus on the micro level (that is, efforts that directly involve youths and their families) may offer the best chance of keeping youths from delinquent behavior right now. However, I would hasten to add that such micro-level approaches are band aids at best. Treating the symptoms (e.g., delinquent behavior) without treating the root causes (e.g., structural conditions such as unemployment) is not likely to reduce the problem of juvenile crime substantially. What is needed, then, is a two pronged approach. The first addressing structural conditions, and the second bolstering family interactions that may provide some insulation from delinquency.

Several authors who have studied African American male violence have suggested prevention and treatment programs (the second prong) that are strikingly similar in their content. Hare and Hare (1985), Kunjufu (1985), Majors and

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Mancini Billson (1992), and Wilson (1992) have all put forth and/or reviewed programs that aim to reduce young black male violence. All of these programs can be classified as mentor, manhood training, or rites of passage type programs (for a current review of such programs, see Watts, 1993).

Such programs include an Afrocentric focus that encourages young black males to feel good about themselves and their cultural heritage. These programs also offer strong, positive African American male role models who teach young males about commitment, integrity, respect, and taking care of one's family and community. Further, these programs incorporate measures that hold youths accountable for their actions, and teach them the importance of self-discipline and restraint. Finally, these programs offer practical education, such as computer training, and money investment and management.

Many of these programs are turning up all over the nation (Wilson, 1992). As they are new, their long-term effectiveness is not yet known. However, based upon the findings from the present investigation, such Afrocentric mentoring programs hold great promise as they address the issues of supervision, discipline, and role modelling.

This study, obviously, is not the final statement on fatherless homes and delinquency. It is merely suggestive. It has many strengths and weaknesses. One strength is the

validity and richness of the data that have been gathered through multiple methods. An additional strength is that this study directly examines the points of view of youths who are involved in delinquent behavior. It is weakest in the areas of reliability, generalizability, subjectivity, and lack of comparison and control groups.

One major goal of this study is that it will be provocative enough so that other researchers will want to test the hypotheses that are generated. Another goal is that this effort will stimulate further research that examines family structure, family interactions, and their relationship(s).

There is no *one right* position on an issue as complex as family structure and outcomes for children. The family structure-outcomes for children nexus is extremely complex, and in need of rigorous, multifaceted analysis that is not influenced by ideology and rhetoric.

Although the empirical evidence is somewhat mixed, there is a growing awareness among researchers, clinicians, policymakers, and parents that one-parent families produce less positive outcomes than do two-parent families, especially families with two natural parents. However, the debate over family structure and outcomes is by no means settled.

Another problem with the present study is that it does

perpetuate stereotypes of African Americans. It is yet one more study conducted by a white researcher that focuses on "pathology" in African American families. While I have attempted to avoid perpetuating stereotypes as much as possible, it is impossible to entirely avoid them when the key variables include race, single-parent families, and delinquent behavior. One approach that is suggested for future investigations that might help to correct the perpetuation of stereotypes to some extent is an examination of African American male youths from fatherless homes who are not involved in delinquent behavior. This kind of an approach would point out that many single-parent families produce well-behaved, prosocial youths. Additionally, such an approach should help to disclose the variables that are related to their success.

Other suggestions for future research include studies that examine how family structure specifically affects family interaction. For example, some researchers have suggested that stepfamilies become more like two natural parent families over time. How does this occur? What are the mechanisms at work? While the present study offers some tentative answers to the question, "How are fatherless families related to delinquent behavior?", many questions remain unanswered, but need to be asked.

Some of the most important questions include the

following: What other family interaction variables [besides supervision, discipline, and role modelling] are related to family structure? What accounts for poor family interaction in two-parent families? Single-parent families? Stepfamilies? Can father surrogates provide adequate supervision, discipline, gender role modelling, affection, guidance, etc. to young males? Can single mothers on their own provide the family interactions that male youths need? Do the youths from this study represent unharnessed masculinity? Without constraints (i.e., social controls), do young males develop antisocial and even violent personalities? What effect does popular culture that glorifies violence and selfishness have on youths from various family structures and patterns of family interaction? Finally, what can be done to increase the pool of marriageable black males? Will such an increase lead to lower rates of out-of-wedlock births, less welfare dependency, and a reduction in social problems such as violence, crime, and substance abuse?

In closing, the present study asks many more questions than it answers. Good questions, however, are crucial to good research. If future research is in anyway stimulated by this effort, the primary goal of this project will have been achieved.

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Appendix A: Charts

CHART A1

GENDER AND RACE COMPARISON
(ROANOKE VALLEY VS. RJDH)

Percentage of Population

50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

42% 43% White Males

9% Black Males

40% 40% White Females

12% White Females

9% Black Females

5% Black Females

Group

■ Roanoke Valley □ RJDH
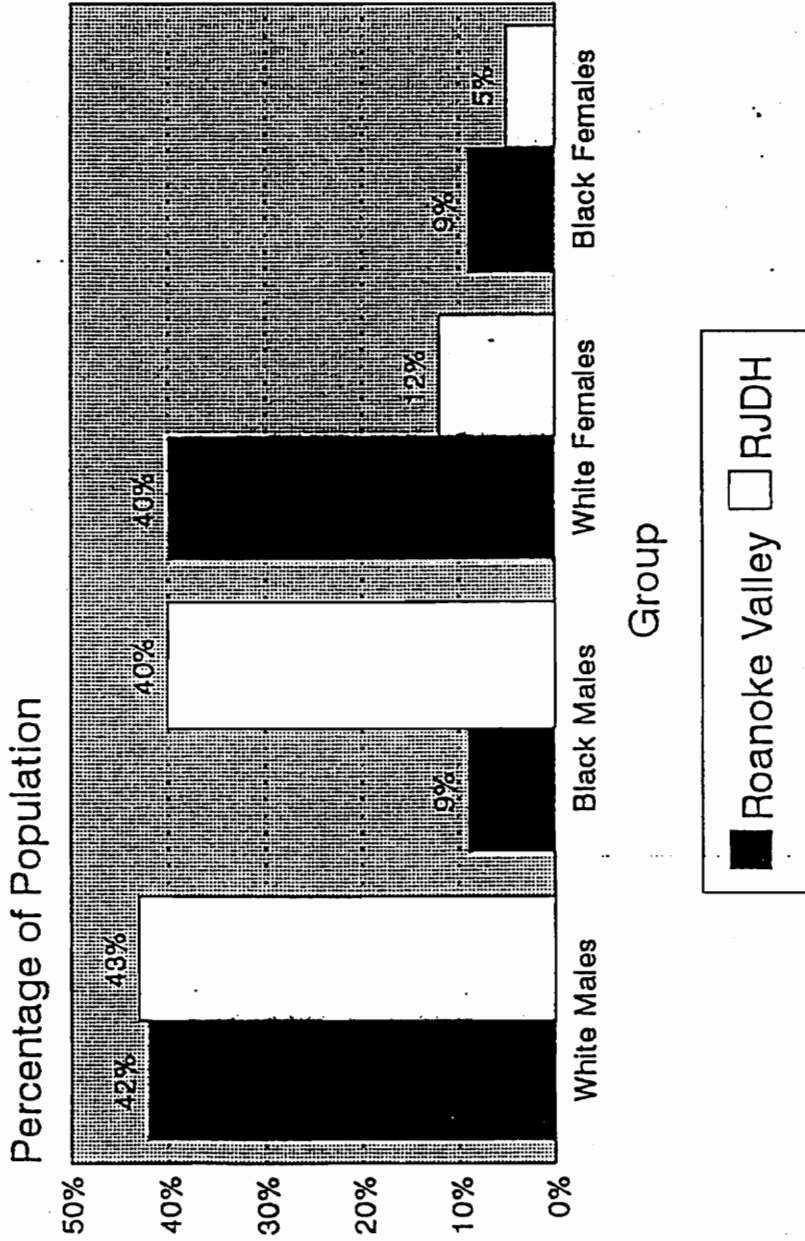
SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of Census 1991a & RJDH Records

155

AGES OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Percentage

Age	Percentage
13	4%
14	8%
15	13%
16	39%
17	35%

Age
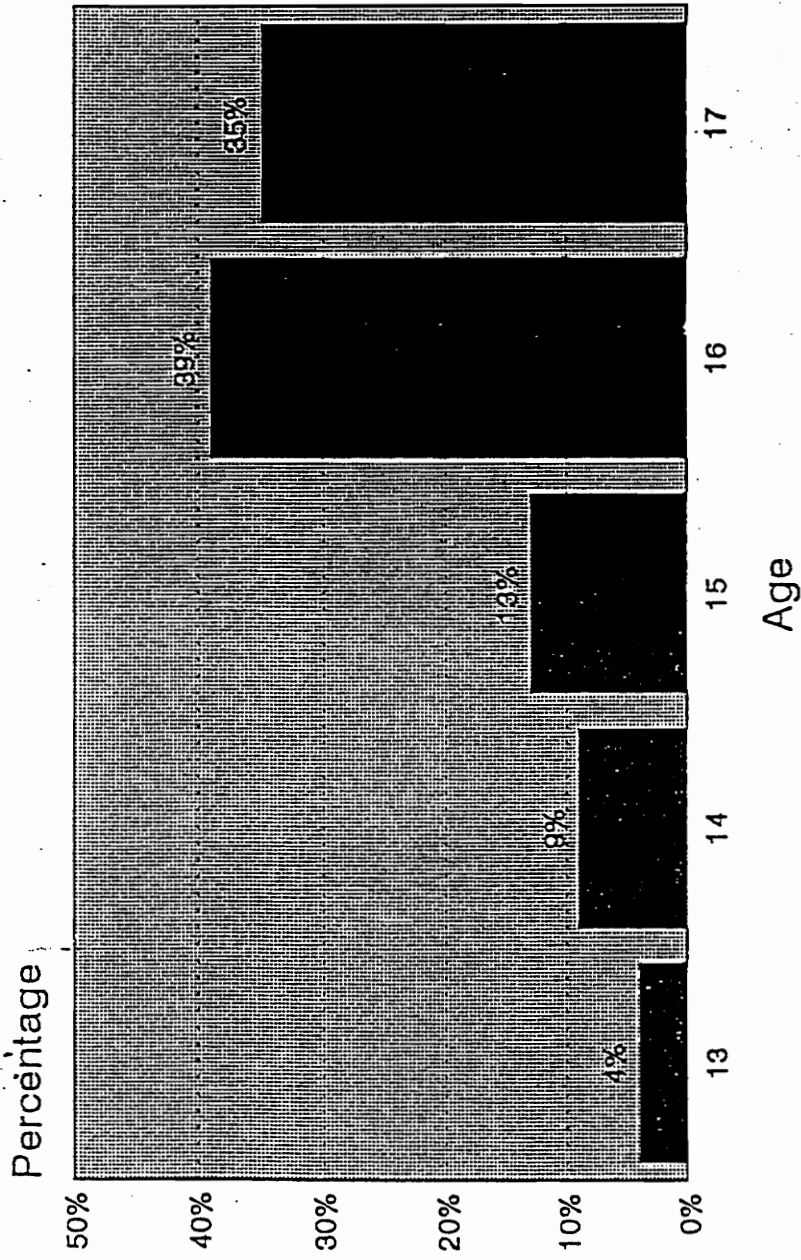
SOURCE: RJDH Records
N = 23

AGES OF RJDH BLACK MALE POPULATION

Percentage

35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%

31%

22%

24%

12%

8%

3%

12   13   14   15   16   17

Age
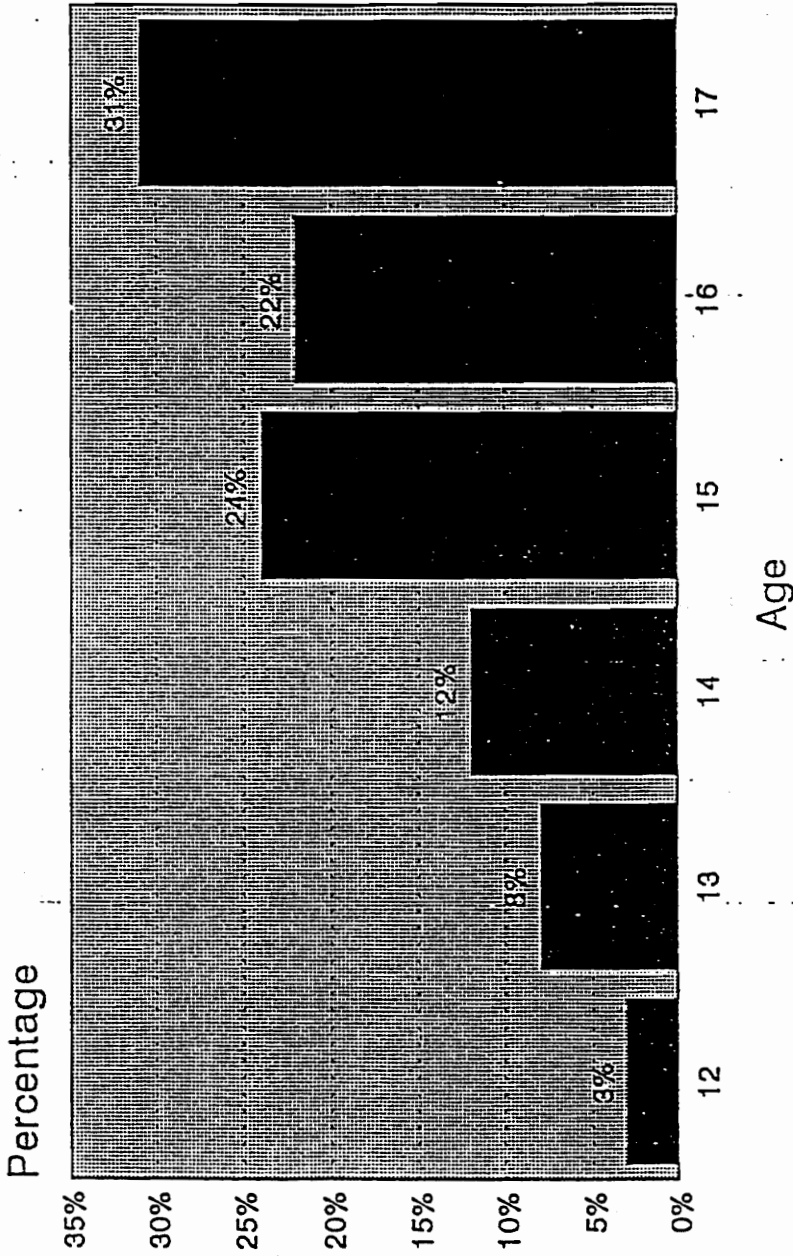
SOURCE: RJDH Records (1992-1993)

N = 141

NUMBER OF TIMES IN RJDH PER RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Percentage
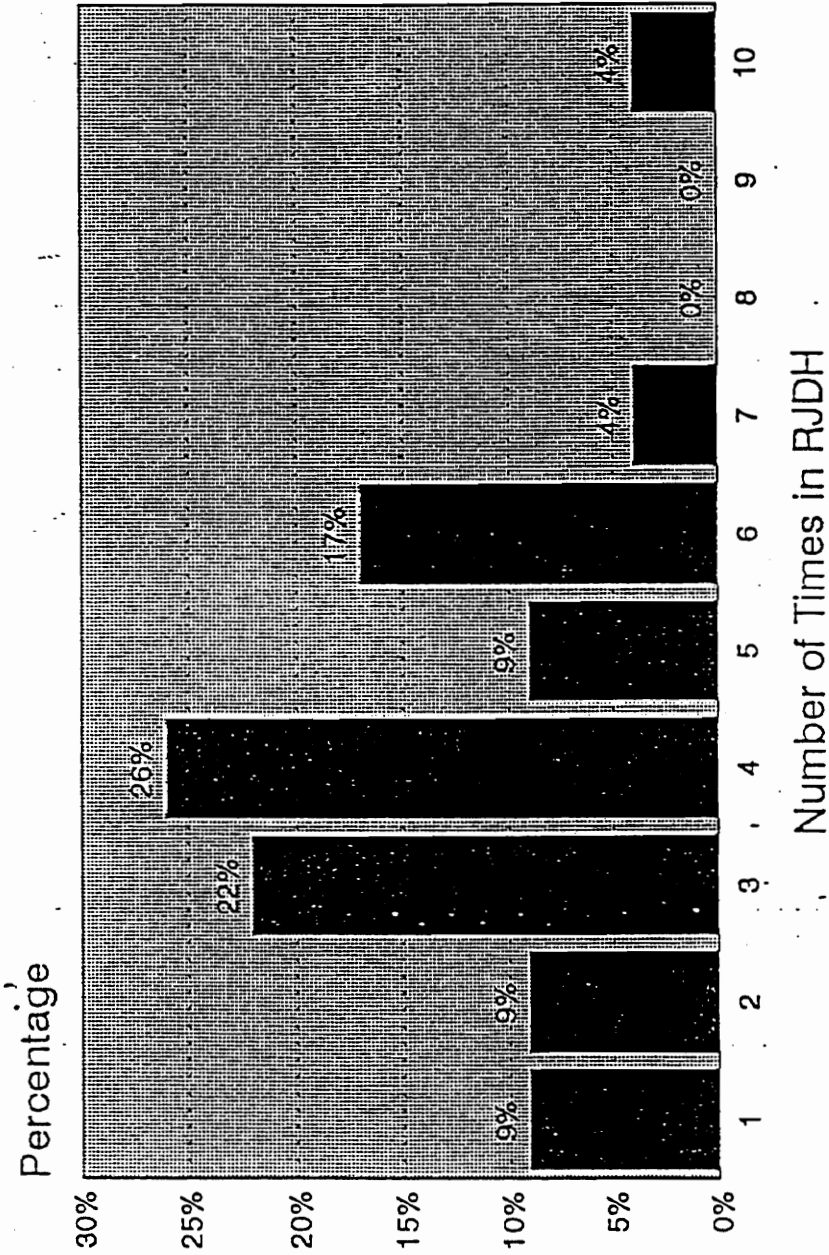
Number of Times in RJDH

SOURCE: RJDH Records
N = 23

NUMBER OF TIMES IN RJDH FOR ALL BLACK MALES

Number of Times in RJDH
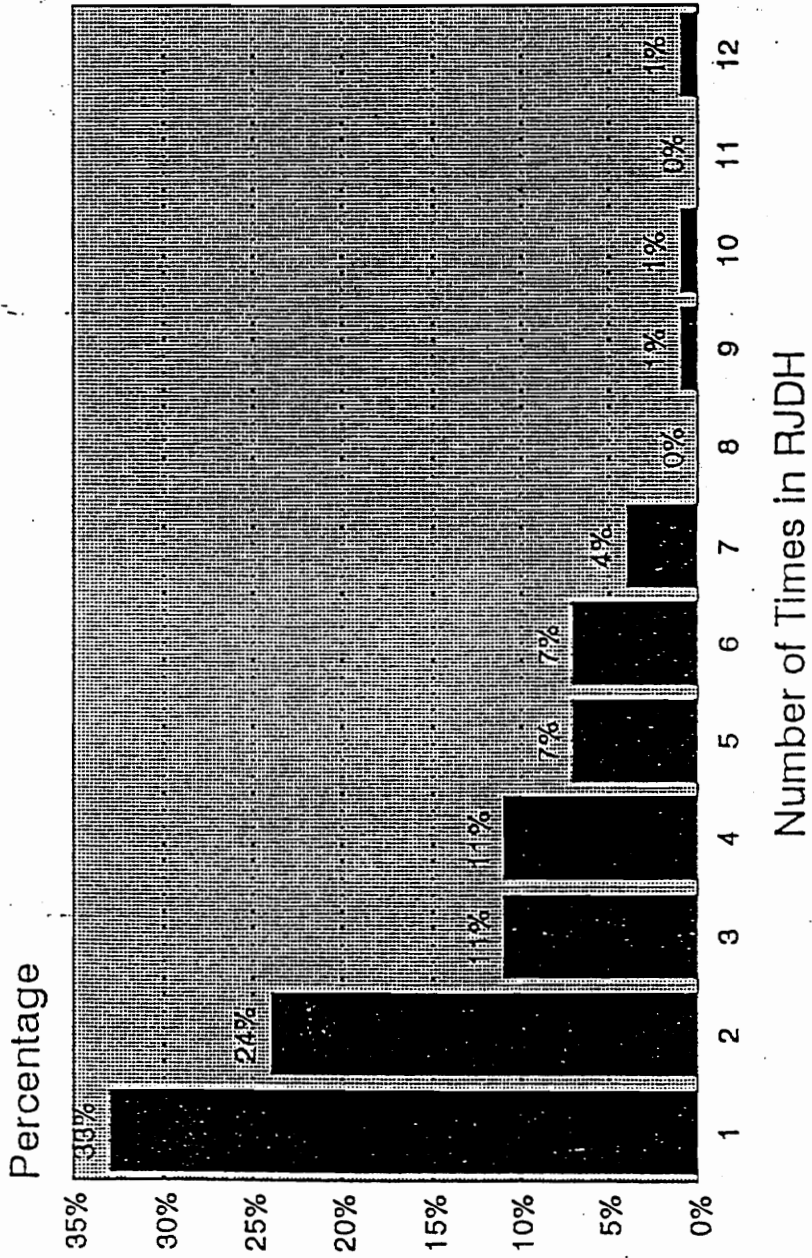
SOURCE: RJDH Records (1992-1993)
N = 141
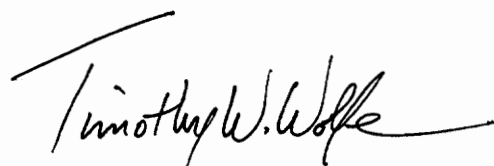
OFFENSES COMMITTED BY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

CHART A6

Frequency of Offense

Violent	20
Drug	16
Property	6

Type of Offense
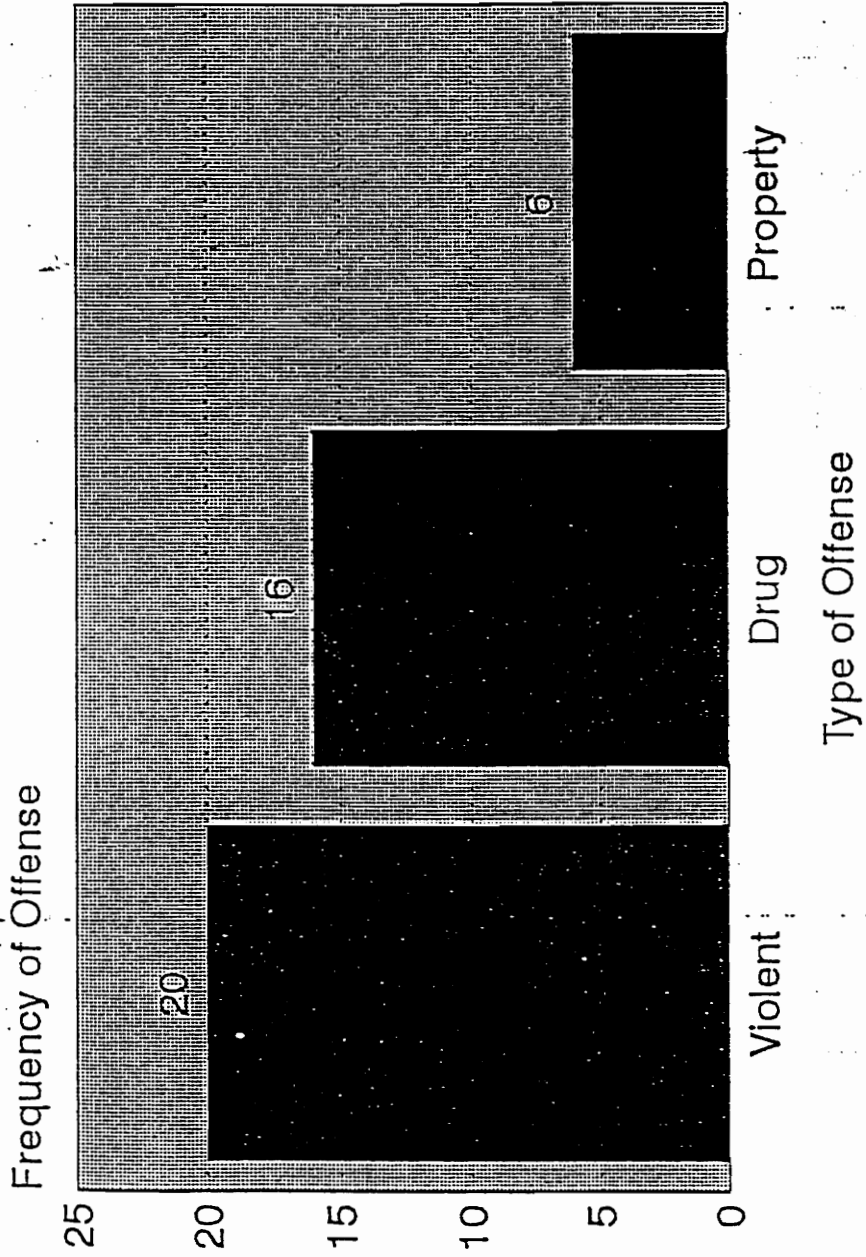
SOURCE: RJDH Records

Vita

Timothy W. Wolfe was born in Washington D.C. on February 24, 1963. He served as a Behavioral Science Specialist in the U.S. Army from 1982 to 1987 counseling families involved with child and spouse abuse. He attended Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia from 1988 to 1990. He received a bachelor's degree in Sociology, magna cum laude, in May, 1990. He began graduate studies in Sociology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in August, 1991. He received his master's degree in Sociology in January, 1994. He has worked as a Child Protective Services Worker in the military and as a civilian, as well as a Detention Home Counselor in Roanoke Virginia. He is currently the Clinical Services Provider for the Parent Empowerment Project in Lexington, Virginia where he provides family therapy and teaches classes on parenting skills. He is married and the father of three sons.

Timothy W. Wolfe