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**MOTHERHOOD AND DESISTANCE: THE INFLUENCE  
OF CHILDREN IN WOMEN'S OFFENDING**

**BY**

**ERIN KLEYMANN**

**B.A. SOCIOLOGY**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
Sociology**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December, 2010**

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**By**

**Erin Kleymann**

**B.A., Sociology, New Mexico State University, 2007**

**M.A., Sociology, University of New Mexico, 2010**

## **ABSTRACT**

An increasing number of women are being incarcerated, of which almost 80% are mothers. Many of these women have children who they wish to reconnect with upon release. Desistance research, which has focused on male populations, finds that conventional social bonds increase odds of desistance. However, there are few studies of women's desistance and it is unclear if social bonds exhibit the same affect for females. Using desistance literature, social control, and strain theories, I examine the Glueck Women's Reformatory Study data from the 1920's. I focus on two key questions: Is motherhood important to desistance? And under what conditions does motherhood affect desistance for mothers? Specifically I address how custody of children, the mother-child bond, and financial and social resources affect desistance among mothers. I develop and test a set of hypotheses based on these three conditions to determine the role of children in mother's lives. Findings indicate that motherhood is important to desistance; mothers are more likely to desist than non-mothers. Furthermore, mothers with regular employment, strong mother-child bonds, and full time custody of children are more likely to desist than mothers without these factors. These findings suggest that mother-child relationships act as a social control for mothers' behavior but only when the relationship

is strong and positive.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The number of women involved with the criminal justice system has increased rapidly over the past few decades. In 2000, there were over 90,000 female prisoners under state or federal jurisdiction. In 2006, that number increased by 3.2%, relative to the 1.9% increase in the male prison population (West and Sabol, 2008). Consequently, many women re-enter society each year that are expected to desist from a criminal lifestyle. This paper examines if and how children affect their mother's odds of desistance following release from incarceration. While this topic has yet to be well explored in depth, motherhood is a key feature to many women's lives. Post-release women have many obstacles to overcome. Many have limited social and financial resources, which complicates their reentry efforts. Furthermore, those offenders with children must reconnect with their children and rebuild a relationship that has been strained by incarceration. Women's odds of desistance post-release are strongly influenced by how successfully they can navigate the obstacles they face at re-entry. The theoretical and empirical literature on desistance suggests that social and material resources are central to offenders' post release success, but it is not clear whether and how motherhood influences this process. Here I examine the potentially interconnected effects of motherhood and social and material resources on women's desistance. While studies of male populations examine how children (and other social bonds) affect offending and desistance, this question has not been thoroughly examined with females. Often, motherhood is examined as a simple status as opposed to an important and complex

social process. Motherhood involves duties, relationships and responsibilities that can be both satisfying and stressful. In this way motherhood may promote the building of social and material capital and facilitate desistance for some while for others it may strain social and material resources and complicate desistance efforts. This paper addresses two key questions 1) is motherhood implicated in desistance for women? and 2) under what conditions does motherhood increase the likelihood of desistance and under what conditions does it decrease the likelihood of desistance?

Substantive investigation of the link between motherhood and desistance is important for many reasons. First, little attention has been paid to the unique role of motherhood in relation to female offending. Second, the majority of women in incarceration today have children (Snell, 1994). By understanding the affects of this role, re-entry and release programming may be better able to account for the obstacles that motherhood presents. Lastly, policies regarding children and families of incarceration could better facilitate reunification and successful re-entry if the process of desistance for mothers was better understood.

I argue that being a mother is unique from other experiences in a woman's life. Treating motherhood as an ongoing process with changing dynamics, this study examines motherhood differently from other studies. The goal of this study is to expound upon motherhood in a more detailed way and test how elements of motherhood such as resources and attachment affect mothers' desistance outcomes. This paper will examine literature about desistance from crime, mothering, and incarceration's affect on mothers and their children. I will then use that literature to identify the key factors that are important to women, and more specifically mothers, in desistance. Furthermore, using

social control and strain theories, I will outline the conditions under which motherhood may aid in desistance from crime. Then, using the Women's Reformatory Study data from Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (Glueck and Glueck, 1934), I will test a set of hypotheses regarding the relationship between motherhood and desistance. I will conclude by summarizing what this study has found and how it can be used in the future.

## **CHAPTER 2: PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

### ***Desistance***

Desistance from criminal behavior does not occur suddenly, but is perhaps best described as a process, and some researchers have tried to identify the stages that occur in the desistance process to better understand it. Sommers et al. (1994) identify three unique stages of desistance: catalyst for change, discontinuance, and maintenance.

Change, in Sommer's view, can be motivated by many factors, including illness, hitting "rock bottom," fear of death, increased likelihood or severity of punishment, or other factors such as one's reappraisal of life and goals. Moreover, there may be distinct differences in the catalysts for females and males. Discontinuance is evidenced by a new identity or a public assertion to end offending. The third stage of desistance, the maintenance stage, is marked by the ability to renegotiate an identity, the support of others, integration into different social networks, and ties to conventional roles. Further research has identified those elements of the maintenance stage that are strongly related to desistance.

Sampson and Laub (1990) theorize that age-graded informal social control mechanisms such as jobs, marriages, or military service, can explain persistence or desistance in crime, and found that marital attachment and job stability lead to reduced criminal involvement for men. Expounding upon this, in further research Sampson and Laub (1993) found that good marriages and stable employment are particularly related to decreases in criminal activity and posit that the social ties that define traditional adulthood act as social control in order to reduce a person's deviant behavior.

The process of desistance may also be influenced by internal dynamics. In a study of desistance involving cognitive and interpersonal issues, Maruna (2001) found that people in the process of desisting from crime experienced a change in their personality and outlook on life, in that they became more other-centered, took greater responsibility for the future, and generally felt that they had more control over their destiny. For Maruna, internal and social changes that accompany desistance do so by bolstering one's success in the process of desistance itself.

In a study of male offenders, Burnett and Maruna assessed the level of hope for individuals with their 10-year desistance rates. Identifying "hope" as a desired outcome and the perceived means of achieving this outcome, they found that men with higher levels of hope were more likely to desist. These men seemed better able to cope with the problems and obstacles they faced after incarceration. However, the authors also found that the impact of hope decreased as the number of obstacles and problems in an offender's way increased. This indicates that obstacles can derail someone's success, despite their high hope for the future.

Much of what we know about desistance to date comes from longitudinal studies of male samples, though the body of work examining desistance among females continues to grow. This literature identifies theoretical processes that are similar to those highlighted in studies of male desistance, similarly identifying structural context, social capital, and identity shifts as central to the desistance process. The burgeoning subset of literature focusing specifically on desistance rates among females is unique in that it also suggests that the specific factors promoting these processes may vary by gender.

Research on women's desistance must factor in different qualities that may affect

women, as their expected, “conventional” roles are vastly different than those of men. For instance, Giordano et al. (2002) found that almost twice as many women in their study have custody of their children than men. Those men and women who had the “respectability package” (meaning that they led conventional lives with a marriage and employment), desisted at higher rates than those who did not have such a package.

Although, Giordano et al.’s quantitative analysis did not find a significant link between children and desistance, their qualitative analysis did suggest an important role for children in the desistance process of females. In their study, the authors found that cognitive shifts are important to desistance for women offenders and that one of the “hooks” that hastens these shifts for women was their children. They also note that women cite a general lack of resources as an obstacle and many of the women with children do not have custody of them. Giordano et al. found that those who have longer periods of desistance seemed to have a deeper commitment to the role and responsibilities of parenting.

Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) examined variation in the factors that contribute to desistance between males and females. They found that the presence of non-deviant friends, the presence of children, and years of education have a larger effect on the self-reported desistance of females than males. According to their study, women were more likely to make the transition out of crime and remain that way for longer periods than men. It would seem, then, that the factors associated with female desistance are slightly different than those for males, and research indicates that children are part of this difference.

Kreager et al. (2010) found that motherhood was associated with reductions in

delinquency and drug use. Their study found support for the hypothesis that motherhood is an important role, a hypothesis supported by qualitative research yet not often reflected in quantitative studies. Specifically, they found that motherhood is an important shift in the lives of women from disadvantaged communities.

Massoglia and Uggen (2007) also found support for the hypothesis that children aid in self-reported desistance. Those individuals with children were more likely to desist than those without among those in their same age group. However, official arrest data showed that children actually decreased the odds of desistance. Massoglia and Uggen explain that it is likely those with children experience limited resources. As well, they state that the impact of children is probably associated with the quality of the relationship between parent and child. Desistance research indicates that children have a role in desistance for women, however this relationship is unclear and merits further examination.

Filtering mothering and motherhood through the desistance frame identifies elements that should matter to recently released mothers. The caretaking responsibilities of mothers are different from those of fathers and perhaps influence offending uniquely. Distinguishing which elements of motherhood and child-rearing have the opportunity to alter a mother's offending is the goal of framing motherhood in desistance and life course theory concepts.

The stresses of incarceration for mothers are multitudinous, but generally stem from the constraints incarceration places on mother-child contact. By the most recent official estimates, almost 80% of women in prison have children and two-thirds have children under the age of 18 (Snell, 1994). Based on a survey of incarcerated mothers,



Baunach (1985) reports that 97% of women who had lived with their children prior to incarceration planned on reuniting with their child, while 89% of those who did not previously live with their child wished to reunite.

However, the difficulty in doing this depends on several factors that are often outside of the control of the mothers. Such things as the location of the facility where female inmates are housed (Koban, 1983; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993), length of incarceration (Bloom, 1995), age of child (Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza, 2001) and custody of children (Genty, 1991; Richie, 2001; Martin, 1997) affect the likelihood of a woman being reunified with her child. While the criminal justice system directs its attention to more immediate concerns, the relationship between an incarcerated mother and her child has crucial implications on a mother's offending.

### ***Motherhood***

Becoming a mother is often seen as one of the most distinguishable features that a female has moved into full womanhood (Morash and Schram, 2002). However, being a mother under less than model circumstances leaves a woman open for criticism, stigmatization, and stress. Thus, motherhood, though a major part of a woman's identity, is a tenuous role that can be judged by outsiders. The literature on mothering provides an understanding of motherhood conceptually and society's standards of motherhood that help to solidify the social importance of this role. This literature explains the salience of motherhood to women's identities, including those mothers who are incarcerated, and how this role impacts their lives and offending.

Societal expectations demand that the ideal or perfect mother embody a certain set of traits (Morash and Schram, 2002). She should encourage and support her children, not

be selfish and self serving; she is solely responsible for her children, and should find the work intrinsically rewarding. Overall, a woman should be fulfilled in her duty as a mother, find it enjoyable, and give selflessly to her children at all times.

Mothers from all walks of life are held to this concept of the perfect and ideal mother. However, as Rich (1986) points out, almost every mother at some point violates this stereotype. Some mothers feel anger, grief or frustration over their inability to meet these standards. Thus, some women may experience feelings of inadequacy and stress about their ability to be a good mother. For incarcerated and post-release mothers, this may be especially prominent.

### ***Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children***

Incarcerated mothers must also deal with being unable to support or have regular contact with their children. Studies have shown that women in prison have infrequent contact with their children, often because of the distance of the facility and the burdens of the current caretaker of the child (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Austin and Hardyman, 2004; Mumola, 2000). Inmate mothers experience shame and guilt over this absence from their children's lives and struggle with the identity of being a mother while incarcerated (Baunach, 1985; Galbraith, 1998).

In a five year study of women in a New York state prison, Fox (1982) finds that one stressor, noted by female inmates but not male inmates, is separation from children. A study of mothers incarcerated at a minimum security prison finds that because of the difficulties in maintaining regular contact with children, the inability to live up to expectations causes maternal role strain, stress caused by failure to live up to maternal expectations, for some inmate mothers (Berry, 2003).

While inmate mothers in general may face strain and guilt because of their incarceration, Berry (2003) finds that certain groups of women experience more role strain than others. She finds that white mothers, mothers who had served longer sentences, mothers who had not lived with their children prior to incarceration and those who did not approve of their children's custody arrangement experience significantly more role strain. The findings indicate that those mothers who are unsure of their child's current location and well-being feel more stress about their role and ability as a mother while incarcerated. They may also be less likely to reunite with their children or may have more strain related to their children's presence post-release.

One of the main consequences of separation by incarceration for women is the loss of custody of their children. For instance, some child welfare laws terminate parental rights if an incarcerated mother has not maintained an adequate relationship with a child who is in foster care, or they could lose their rights if their child has been in foster care for 15 out of the past 22 months (Bloom, 1995; Young and Reviere, 2006). Incongruously, the average time served for incarcerated mothers is 49 months for state prisons and 66 months for federal prisons (Mumola, 2000). Thus, reunification and a mother-child bond may be further hindered because of incarceration related policies.

Furthermore, a mother can lose many of the support services that would help her reintegrate into society. Felony convictions can eliminate eligibility for Aid for Dependent Families with Children, housing programs, job opportunities and other government aid (Allard, 2002). This can make it difficult for female offenders both in terms of reconnecting with her child and in desisting from crime post-release.

## ***Reunification and Re-Entry***

Separation can also greatly affect mothers once they are released. Separation may cause children to display sadness, depression or anger (Bloom, 1995; Snyder, Carlo and Mullins, 2001). This may make custody and bonding problematic for a post-release mother who must deal with this behavior while trying to re-enter society.

Prison parenting programs have been aimed at keeping families in touch with each other during incarceration and helping parents become familiar with struggles that they will likely face upon re-entry. Many programs are developed to assist in the maintenance of bonding experiences between mothers and their children so that re-entry will not be as difficult for both parties (Snyder, Carlo and Mullins, 2001). Sandifer (2008) found that parenting programs can increase knowledge about discipline techniques and healthy parent-child relationships. This can have an important impact on their relationship post-release, possibly aiding in desistance.

In a study to determine the effect of children's visitations to mothers in prison on mother's parole outcomes, Martin (1997) found a unique difference between custodial and non-custodial mothers. Nearly two thirds of mothers she studied went on to become active, primary caregivers for their children, while the remaining third were no longer connected to their children. The non-custodial mothers still identified as mothers, however they were uninvolved and had accepted the loss of their children. Non-custodial mothers were more than three times as likely as custodial mothers to have chemical dependency issues; they had erratic contact with their children, and had a lack of consistent intimate relationships. In the end, non-custodial mothers were more than twice as likely to continue their criminal activity. Martin's findings imply that these mothers may have essentially been non-custodial mothers before their prison term and they

continued these behaviors after release. Moreover, the research provides an understanding of behaviors of non-custodial mothers and how they differ from those mothers who resumed parenting responsibilities.

Once released, some inmate mothers have the difficult task of reuniting with their children, which is often dependent on many factors outside their control. For instance, if released on parole, the inmate may have to find suitable housing and a job before she is allowed to have regular contact with her child (Richie, 2001). Furthermore, a mother may have lost many of the support services that would help her reintegrate into society. Felony convictions can eliminate helpful government aid programs and other opportunities (Allard, 2002). This can make it difficult for female offenders both in terms of reconnecting with their children and in desisting from crime post-release.

It is also likely that an inmate mother has had limited contact with her child while incarcerated. Bloom and Steinhart (1993) found that 54% of children with incarcerated mothers had never visited their mother while she was in prison. Though about 60% of incarcerated mothers have some form of weekly contact with their children, it is often only through letters (Mumola, 2000). The lack of regular contact between mother and child make it difficult for reunification to happen seamlessly, which can later become a stressor for a post-release mother.

Baunach (1985) noted that many inmate mothers felt anxiety about their children rejecting them or not knowing them anymore. Furthermore, mothers expressed fears about being able to provide for their children and were unsure about whether they would get custody of them after release. Clearly such uncertainty would leave an incarcerated mother unable to know the social resources that would be waiting on the outside.

Reintegration and unification also carry risks if there is no structured form of social support for inmate mothers. Haney (2003) points out that the psychological effects of prison may not become apparent until after release. For instance, an inmate's tendency to withdraw or be socially distant may hinder her ability to become close with her children. Dowden and Andrews (1999) found family factors like affection and supervision to be strong predictors of female offenders' success. The experiences that inmate mothers have with family members and other social support can positively contribute to their desistance.

In Bloom and Brown's study (2009), women stated that parenting classes or rehabilitation programs did not target realistic re-entry problems and that more focus on housing or financial assistance would have made it more comprehensive. Additionally, Holtfreter et al. (2004) examined the role of poverty in rates of recidivism for women recently on probation or parole and found that women with incomes below the poverty level were more likely to re-offend. Furthermore, state aid also affected re-offense: poor women who did not receive state assistance were more likely to re-offend than those who did receive assistance. Thus, they argue, economic resources are important to a female's ability to desist from crime.

The role that children play in the offending patterns of females has not clearly been defined. For many reasons it is a difficult task, as other conditions are likely to affect how children impact their mothers. For instance, the impact of children will be different for a single mother who has sole custody of her children with family support than for a mother who has lost custody of her children and has little or no contact with them. As mentioned earlier, being a mother is an important aspect to a woman's identity.

The ability to desist from crime stems partly from the formation of new identities (Pogrebin, 2004), including the identity as a mother (Giordano et al., 2002). Because of the constancy and complexity of the mothering role, children have the potential to act as both risk factors to offending and protective factors that deter offending following release.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

It is clear from the literature on mothering and incarceration that incarcerated mothers struggle with their roles and identities as mothers. Less clear, however, is how motherhood and children shape the post-release experiences of incarcerated mothers. For some, children may be among the key resources for desistance while for others they may be an additional source of stress. Building on general strain and social control theories and the life course/desistance literature, I outline the conditions under which children might be a resource or a liability for incarcerated mothers post release.

The desistance literature helps frame mothering and motherhood in the context of criminal offending. However, the existing literature does not directly apply to females, and in particular mothers. Likely to reduce the odds of desistance are strains that may be experienced by mothers because of the responsibility and care that comes with children. Contrarily, odds of desistance may increase through the social control experienced by the presence and responsibility of children. On the outset it may seem that the role of children is varied for mothers and therefore unclear. However, outlining both Strain theory and Social Control theory clarifies the roles that children may have. Furthermore, applying these theories along with tenets of desistance and life course theory to motherhood, specific conditions emerge that should impact desistance in mothers.

General strain theory posits that individuals respond to strains or stressors with negative emotions, which can lead to criminal coping (Agnew, 2006). Certain factors influence the effect of strains and emotions on crime: ability to cope in a legal manner, costs of criminal coping (social controls), and disposition for criminal coping. Embedded in Agnew's (2006) theory are elements of social control. In fact, even though most



individuals experience strain at some point, they do not engage in criminal behavior because, among other constraints, the social costs of doing so are too high. Increases in social control and in related legitimate coping resources that ties to adult institutions generate should reduce the tendency towards criminal coping responses.

As Hirschi (1969) states in his control theory of delinquency, delinquent acts occur when an individual's bonds to society are weak or broken. An individual's bonds to society are attained through the structure of interpersonal relationships with others. An individual's relationships with others exert social control that makes them less likely to commit delinquent acts.

Building on life course, strain, and social control, we can begin to articulate the ways in which children might influence women's desistance. Children can be both a source of social control and a source of strain. Mothering requires an investment of time and energy as children are generally dependent on their parents for basic needs. The parental role comes with obligations to both the child and to society's general expectations. As the mothering literature indicates, inmate mothers often support the common beliefs in what a good mother embodies (Morash and Schram, 2002; Enos, 2001). Thus, the role of being a mother and the presence of children may activate informal social control. However, it takes time to adapt to the role of mother and the realization of the importance of this role may grow over time. Therefore, being a mother can also be a stressful experience for some women, especially given certain conditions, such as lack of support or limited resources.

Agnew explicitly states that burdens associated with the care of others (sick spouses, children) are not strains that are likely to lead to criminal coping, because they

are more often a form of social control rather than a stressor. These relationships are conventional means of social support and should decrease or inhibit criminality, especially for primary caretakers. Conversely, Agnew mentions that the loss of custody of a child may be a strain to females, likely because it is a loss of an expected role. Thus, the relationship between motherhood and criminal behavior may play out in different ways.

For females, however, the relationship between adult social bonds and desistance is more unsubstantiated than for men. While there is limited research on female social bonds and desistance, existing literature finds that adult social capital and related social controls do not inhibit criminal behavior among females the same way they do for males. Studies have found, for instance, that marriage can actually increase deviant lifestyles for women (Richie, 1996). In fact, De Li and MacKenzie (2003) find that having spouse, a job or attending school all increase the probability that a female would engage in crime, all things that have been linked to male desistance. Thus, understanding how children impact women's desistance may be particularly important. Life course, social control, and strain theories help to understand that the effect of children may vary depending on situations and certain conditions. The current research aims to explore these situations and understand the facets of motherhood that important to desistance.

### ***Key Conditions of Motherhood***

Both the mothering literature and information on incarcerated mothers helps to garner those factors that are important to mothers post-release. Three major conditions emerge from the literature, which indicate the role that children play in their mothers' post-release success. Custody, mother-child bond, and financial and social resources are noticeable threads throughout previous research. Here I outline how these factors ideally

aid a mother in the desistance process, followed by an outline of how these factors can also become an obstacle in the reality of post-release life.

Ideally, a mother would enter post-release with both social and financial resources to support her. A key factor in post-release success regardless of motherhood status is the availability of resources. Social resources, such as friends and family, lend support to a woman who may be unfamiliar with the world outside of prison, or in helping her adjust to the unaccustomed role of mother. Resources also foster ties to the community and prove to be crucial to a women's re-entry success (Holtfreter et al, 2004). Financial resources, such as employment or savings, also aid in desistance. Mothers with resources are able to provide adequate care, housing and food for their child. Resources provide support to the mother and child during and after a time of transition. Mothers who are able to provide for their children should reap the benefits of a positive social bond with their children. Moreover, social support and resources may offer a form of legitimate coping that fosters desistance in times of high stress. Social resources can aid post-release mothers in coping with the world outside of prison and managing their lives with their children.

The bond between mother and child is also important to desistance. Ideally, a mother and her child would have strong bond to each other, and a mother would sacrifice time spent on other endeavors in order to develop this bond further. Desistance and social control literature bolster this claim, as close and meaningful bonds serve to inhibit crime. Sampson and Laub (1993) find that for men, close quality bonds to spouses and children are positively connected to desistance. It is likely similar for mothers because of the primary care giving role. A mother seeking desistance develops and maintains a close

bond with her child. Of course, a mother-child bond would be facilitated by other conditions, such as custody.

In optimal circumstances, a mother would have some level of custody or contact with her child post-release. Custody would be beneficial to a mother who most likely still identifies heavily with the mother role. Furthermore, custody facilitates contact with a child, which connects a mother to a conventional role that inhibits offense. Having custody of a child requires that a mother take responsibility for the child's day to day activities such as school, homework and friends. These responsibilities are not conducive to a criminal lifestyle and focus a mother's attention and energy elsewhere. Not only does custody provide opportunities for contact, but it is probably evident of further social resources. However, this is an optimal case, where all the conditions are ideal and a post-release mother has resources, support, and other factors in her favor for desistance.

In reality, most mothers being released from prison will not be in this situation; they face limited resources, both financial and supportive, and ongoing legal repercussions of their incarceration. These conditions likely play out in ways that affect a post-release mother negatively. Resources are often a source of stress for recently released inmate mothers, perhaps even more so than for non-mothers because of external restraints put on their ability to connect with their child. Jobs and housing often must be obtained before regular contact with a child is granted.

Furthermore, some mothers struggle with providing the basics such as clothing, food and shelter for their children. Custodial mothers with little resources might experience their children's presence as a strain because they are unable to provide adequately for them. This strain may put post-release mothers at risk to re-offend. They

may choose to commit a crime for financial benefit in order to support their family or they may be overcome with stress and engage in risky behavior to cope. They may also spend large amounts of time working to make ends meet, which takes away time spent with their child. Thus, children may become a stressor to mothers with limited resources.

Lack of resources, however, is not the only obstacle that newly released inmate mothers' encounter. The relationship between a mother and her child can also become an obstacle to desistance. In order for her child to have a positive impact on offending, a mother needs to have a strong social bond that helps exert social control over her. Without such a bond, a mother may be at risk to reoffend because there is no informal control mechanism present to deter crime. Furthermore, given the significant time spent apart while incarcerated, this bond may be difficult for a mother to develop.

Finally, legal and physical custody of the child should play an important role in motherhood. Incarcerated mothers may see custody as the defining feature that connects them to motherhood. There are many reasons a post-release mother may not have custody of her child including the length of their sentence, nature of their crime, or willing family that have taken the child. Those mothers who no longer have custody of their child likely do not receive many visits or calls while in prison, and this most likely continues after release. Custody facilitates in regular contact between mother and child which should strengthen their bond, inhibiting criminal behavior. Without custody of their child, post-release mothers do not receive these benefits and may be at risk to offend again. Thus, children may become a liability post-release for those mothers who do not have custody of their children.

While it is likely that some combination of custody, contact, bonds and resources

exist for a post-release mother, the reality is likely far from optimal for their desistance. Examining inmate mothers as if they have ideal circumstances is not particularly useful because this study aims to understand how children impact their mother's likelihood of desistance. This can only be achieved by understanding the situations that inmate mothers encounter upon release. Furthermore, interactions between these conditions may affect how they impact the likelihood of desistance. The following discussion begins to untangle these relationships.

Financial and social resources are likely to affect the bond and relationship between mother and child, and perhaps strengthen the effect that other conditions have on desistance. Social resources include family support, marriage status and available community resources. Such support gives a previously incarcerated woman support in daily activities such as child care, errands and a place to express stress and frustration. Financial resources are often key in post-release success. Those mothers without financial support and adequate resources must deal with multiple stressors. Therefore, the resources a mother has should positively impact the other conditions for desistance such as ability to have custody and form a mother-child bond.

Custody affects both mother and child significantly. Without visitation or regular time spent together, a mother may not understand the importance of the mother role and how her child is dependent on her. Without contact via phone or in person, she may not fully recognize the effect her child may have post-incarceration. Thus, custody should influence desistance.

Custody can be either a stressor or strength depending on the presence or influence of other conditions. Both resources and parent-child bond are likely to mitigate

how custody impacts desistance for mothers. Custody probably increases chances of desistance for mothers who have resources after release. However, mothers who do not have adequate resources post-release may experience custody as a stressor, possibly leading to re-offense. In the same way, custody is most likely strengthened by a strong parent-child bond, as mother and child get along and spend more of their time together. In contrast, for those mothers who do not have a strong emotional bond with their child having custody of their child may become a stressor for them, as they are unable to connect with their child. Realistically, it is likely that many of the conditions act differently for each individual woman.

It is clear that resources matter for ex-offenders regardless of whether they have children or not. However, resources may be more important for mothers than for non-mothers. One reason for this is that a connection to children relies heavily on a mother's ability to properly care for her child. Mothers can be subjected to timelines and goals that require them to have certain resources, including housing, food, and clothing. Resources may also help a mother to reap the full benefits of a mother-child bond. Therefore, resources, both social and financial, should matter more to mothers than to non-mothers.

### ***Hypotheses***

Both the desistance literature and research on incarcerated mothers help to outline the conditions that should be important to successful desistance for mothers. The literature on desistance highlights the importance of both material and social resources. Given the potential stresses of motherhood these resources are likely to be especially central to successful desistance among mothers. The following set of hypotheses test the broad argument that motherhood matters and those resources are especially important to

mothers. Therefore, the following hypotheses emerge:

- Hypothesis 1: Motherhood matters independent of financial and social resources.
- Hypothesis 2: The influence of resources is stronger for mothers than non-mothers.
- Hypothesis 3: Mothers who have financial and social resources are more likely to desist than those who have limited resources.
- Hypothesis 4: Mothers with a strong mother-child bond will be more likely to desist than those mothers with a weak or non-existent bond.
- Hypothesis 5: Mothers who have custody of their child will be more likely to desist than mothers who do not.
- Hypothesis 6: The influence of social and financial resources, strong mother-child bond, and child custody all hold independent of one another.

In addition to the independent effects of financial and social resources on desistance, it is likely that these resources interact to influence desistance for mothers. This leads to the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 7: Social and financial resources will strengthen the influence of the mother-child bond on desistance.
- Hypothesis 8: Social and financial resources will strengthen the impact of custody on desistance.
- Hypothesis 9: A strong mother-child bond will strengthen the impact of custody on desistance.



## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN**

While 70 years old, the Glueck Women's Reformatory Study data have many strengths that make it appropriate for this study. First, it has retrospective histories of the women, including parole, with a 5 year post parole follow-up, providing detailed data. The data are extremely rich and documents many aspects of the women's lives, including living arrangements, family life, and attachment to family members. The files include 500 women who were incarcerated in the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women between 1910 and 1926. Full information and post-parole follow-up are available for 424 women. The remaining 76 were lost to death, institutionalization, deportation, inadequate data or their whereabouts were unknown.

One of the biggest difficulties in using this data is understanding the time period in which they lived. Offenses for which women were arrested and incarcerated differ from the crimes that warrant arrest and incarceration today. Many of the women in the Glueck sample came in contact with the law because they did not live up to the standard of a conventional, well behaved woman. Often their behavior was seen as contrary to the morals and standards of middle and upper class women (Odem, 1995). When women failed to live up to these standards, particularly lower class women, they were often sent to reformatories, like in this sample. For example, the majority of women in the data are charged with sex offenses, crimes such as adultery, lewd conduct, night-walking and belonging to a known brothel. In more contemporary times, crimes such as prostitution or public indecency would most likely be comparable.

### ***Dependent Variable***

Desistance is measured by using official arrest records. The Glueck data contain

information about an offender's arrest record during the parole period as well as a five year post-parole follow-up. This provides a semi-longitudinal measure of desistance, rather than a single snapshot after release. Desistance is categorized as yes or no; those with no arrests in either the parole or post-parole period are coded as 1 (desisters) and those with an arrest as 0 (non-desisters).

### ***Independent Variables***

Motherhood Status. Motherhood status was determined using information about the offenders' motherhood status both before and after incarceration. A binary measure of whether the offender had children on intake was combined with a binary measure of whether the offender had children during parole. Combining these two allowed those who had children during parole, or while incarcerated, to be added to the count of mothers. Thus, the measure of motherhood status post parole reflects whether the offender ever had children. Those offenders with children are coded as 1 and those offenders without children are coded as 0.

**Social Resources** are measured using multiple variables.

Marital Status. Marital status is measured in both the pre-incarceration and post-parole period. Those who are married are coded as 1; those who are not married are coded as 0.

Family Ties. The Gluecks collected information on the living situation of women on release and I use these data to identify those women who reside with family immediately after release. Those women who lived with an adult family member, including a husband, were coded as 1. Those offenders who did not live with a family member at their first post-parole residence were coded as a 0.

Membership in society. In addition to ties to family, I also include a measure of ties to the

broader community. “Membership in Society” measures the offender’s participation in community activities such as church, thus providing insight into her relation with a community support system like church groups, ladies groups, lodge/league associations. This is an original Glueck variable that is measured by yes or no. Those offenders with membership in society are coded as 1 and those who did not are coded as 0.

**Financial Resources** are measured by two variables, “Savings” and “Steadiness of employment”.

Savings. Savings provides an insight in to how well prepared and financially stable the offender seems to be. The variable, which they labeled “Economic-Responsibility Savings”, is coded as yes (1) if the offender has savings or no (0) if she does not.

According to the Gluecks, if the offender is single, separated, widowed, or divorced, then the savings is that made by the offender personally. If she is married, it is the joint savings of the offender and her spouse.

Steadiness of Employment. The measure reflecting steadiness of employment also comes directly from the Glueck data. The Gluecks describe the original classification as such: “Regular- continually employed for the period judged, those who have not had more than two months unemployed during a year. Fairly Regular- women who have periods of unemployment in excess of two months, which are compensated for by periods of sustained work. Irregular- women who have frequent or protracted periods of unemployment, and none of sustained employment.” Dummy variables were created for each of these categories: Regular Employment, Somewhat Regular Employment, and Irregular Employment.

**Custody and Contact** are not distinguishable from each other in the Glueck data.

Therefore, a measure for both is “Residence of children” at the 5 year follow-up. It’s likely that residence of children indicates who has custody of the child.

Custody of Children. This variable is for the post parole period only. This variable is constructed using “Residence of Children” which could have multiple entries depending if the child moved or not. Therefore, if a child lived with their mother at all of the listed residences, the offender was coded as “Always had custody of child”. If the child lived with their mother at some, but not all of the residences, the offender was coded as “Some custody of child”. If the child did not live with their mother at any of the residences the offender was coded as “No custody of child”. Dummy variables were created for each of these categories: Always had Custody, Some Custody of child, and No Custody of child.

**Mother-Child bond** is measured by one variable.

Attitude to Children. “Attitude to Children” measures the responsiveness and dedication the offender has to her child. This achieves a sense of whether the mother is nurturing and caring to her child or whether she is ambivalent or negative about her child. It is coded as Good, Fair, or Poor. The Gluecks classification is as follows: “Good- fond of, cares for. Fair- casual toward, or fond of but neglectful because of drink or absorption. Poor- gives no supervision, no affection, or is abusive. If the child was not living with their mother then: Good- if she maintains an interest in them to the greatest possible within limits of the current situation. Fair- if she keeps in touch with them. Poor- is she is entirely out of touch with them.” Dummy variables were created for each of these categories: Good Attitude to Child, Fair Attitude to Child, and Poor Attitude to Child.

### ***Control Variables***

**Age at Post-Parole.** As women get older they may move towards desistance regardless

of motherhood status, therefore age may impact desistance odds.

**Age of first delinquency.** Age of first known official delinquency is included to understand how extensive and long-term the woman's offending trajectory has been.

Table 1 shows descriptive for all of the variables, as well as the number of missings for each variable.

### *Modeling*

All models will be tested using logistic regression. Binary logistic regression is being used because the dependent variable, desistance, is dichotomous measured as a yes or no. The independent variables are a mix of both categorical and continuous variables. Significant regression coefficients indicate that a variable either increases or decreases the odds of desistance. The hypotheses above will be tested using 4 sets of models. One will test the influence of motherhood for the entire sample, one that compares resources for both non-mothers and mothers, one that tests independent effects by variables on mothers, and one that tests interactions between variables.

Due to the nature of the data, such as when it was collected and the difficulty tracking participants, there are some issues with missing data. Missing data are not uniform for the offenders; some women may have data on everything but work status, while other women may have missing information regarding their post-release marital status. Thus, when running regressions, those offenders with a missing value for a variable in the model will be dropped from analysis. Since missing information is widespread (see Glueck, 1934 for more on collection of data) running a full model results in a significant number of cases being dropped, reducing the total N. To combat this, a missing coding scheme was developed. To differentiate between missing values, control

variables are coded with missing values as 1 and non-missing values as 0. When both the original and control variables are put into the regression, a significant control variable indicates that the missing data effect the model.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Model 1 examines the importance of motherhood while controlling for social and financial resources. Model 1 also suggests the importance of motherhood to women's desistance. Mothers are 2.5 times ( $e^b$ ) more likely to desist than those offenders who are not mothers. Results also indicate that marital status, social ties, regular employment and savings are all important to desistance regardless of motherhood status. This is consistent with previous literature indicating the importance of resources post-release for all women because they help to buffer some of the stress connected with reintegration.

Model 2a and b, divided into Mothers and Non-Mothers (Table 2), tests Hypothesis 2, which states that the influence of both social and financial resources on desistance is stronger for mothers than non-mothers. These models test the influence of social resources by examining the effect of membership in social groups, marital status, and social ties to family members on desistance. Savings and employment (as dummy variables) capture the influence of financial resources on women's desistance in this model. In addition, age and age of first delinquency are included as control measures<sup>1</sup>. Some variables within Models 1 and 2 have high standard errors, namely Membership to Society. Collinearity statistics (VIF and tolerance) were run for all models and collinearity is not a problem in these models and is not the source of these inflated standard errors. After double checking the Membership to Society variable for coding problems, it is unclear what the source of the inflated standard errors is, but I elected to leave the variables in the model as it is theoretically important. Note, however, that there

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<sup>1</sup>Other controls from before incarceration were used in initial models, however, model N's were much better without T1 controls and the results for the key measures stay same.

is little variability on this measure, with most women reporting no group memberships.

Within models, some financial and social resource variables are significant. Specifically, social ties and savings were significant for non-mothers, while marital status and regular employment were significant for mothers. However, to test if resources are more meaningful for mothers than non-mothers a z test must be performed for each variable. Paternoster et al (1998) outline the proper test that increases the likelihood of an accurate comparison. Using the formula:

$$z = \frac{b_1 - b_2}{\sqrt{SE_{b1} + SE_{b2}}}$$

The resources variables from both models were tested, the difference between the effect of resources on mothers and non-mothers is not significant. Therefore, Models 2a and 2b do not support hypothesis 2, resources are not stronger for mothers than for non-mothers. This supports literature that states resources are important for all ex-offenders.

Model 2b also tests hypothesis 3, which states that mothers who have financial and social resources are more likely to desist than those with limited or no financial and social resources. Results show partial support for Hypothesis 3. Marital status and employment are related to greater odds of desistance. Mothers who are married are 2.57 times more likely to desist than those who are not married. Perhaps marriage acts as both a social financial resource, as many married women with families probably relied on their husbands to provide for their family. This also means that a mother could prioritize being a mother to her children over bringing in money. However, social ties, membership in society, and savings were not significant to mothers. Consequently, Models 1 and 2 suggest a stronger role for financial over social resources in women's desistance, but also highlight the importance of motherhood in shifting women's offending behavior and the



varying influence of financial and social resources across mothers and non-mothers. One reason that motherhood may be particularly influential on desistance is because the children may act as a “hook for change” (Giordano et al. 2002) and may motivate women to change their behavior. This is most likely when mothers feel strongly tied to their children.

Model 3 (Table 3) tests hypothesis 4, which states that mothers who have a strong mother-child bond will be more likely to desist than those mothers who do not have a strong bond, by examining the influence of attitudes towards children on desistance among mothers. Results support hypothesis 4; attitude to children is statistically significant. Mothers who have a good attitude toward their children are 6.04 times more likely to desist after release from the reformatory than mothers who have a poor attitude towards their child. This reinforces the broader hypothesis that it is not motherhood per se that influences desistance. Rather, attachment to children matters, indicating that the mother-child relationship may provide a social control mechanism against re-offending for the mother.

Model 4 tests hypothesis 5, which states that mothers who have custody of their child are more likely to desist than those mothers who do not have custody of their child, by examining the effects of custody of children on desistance. Model 4 finds support for this hypothesis; always having custody is statistically significant. Mothers who always have custody of their child post-release are 4.14 times more likely to desist than those who never have custody of their child. These results further support the social control aspect of children in their mother’s lives in addition to Model 4.

Model 5 tests hypothesis 6, which states that the influence of social and financial

resources, strong mother-child bond, and child custody all hold independent of one another. Bi-variate correlations (see Appendix A) found a significant relationship between attitude to children and custody variables. Because of this highly collinear relationship two final models are run, one that contains the custody variables and another that contains the attitude to children variables. When both are included in the same full model they failed to be significant, likely as a result of their high collinearity. Membership in society, marital status, social ties, savings, employment, attitude to child, and custody, as well the control variables age and age at first delinquency are examined in these models to determine their effect on desistance. Model 5 reveals support for this hypothesis. Employment is the only resource variable to emerge as statistically significant in this model; mothers who are regularly employed are 5.19 times more likely to desist than those who are not. While in separate models because of collinearity, attachment and custody are statistically significant. Those mothers who always had custody of their children in the post-parole period are 3.47 times more likely to desist than those who never had custody of their child during this period. Those mothers with a good attitude toward their child were 3.09 times more likely to desist than those with poor attitudes. These results challenge this idea that the effects of key financial and social resources and motherhood variables are independent of one another. Relationships that were significant in constrained models (e.g. marital status, attitude to children, custody) are not significant in the full model. This suggests potential interactions among these indicators, which the remaining models will test.

Models 6-10 (Table 4) test hypothesis 7 which states that social and financial resources will strengthen the influence of the mother-child bond on desistance. Each

model contains an interaction term that is comprised of “Attitude to Child”, which has been recoded to include Fair and Good as 1 and Poor as 0, and one of the social or financial resource variables (membership in society, savings, employment, marital status, or social ties). The only interaction term to be significant in these models is between attitude to children and social ties. However, this interaction is not in the direction anticipated; those mothers with social ties and a strong bond are less likely to desist than those without this combination of ties and bond. Conversely, graphing the interaction (See appendix B) shows that mothers with good attitudes towards their children and social ties are still more likely to desist than those with poor attitudes and social ties even though the relationship is negative.

Models 11-15 test hypothesis 8 which states that social and financial resources will strengthen the impact of custody on desistance. These models contain an interaction term that is comprised of “Custody of Child” which has been recoded to include Some Custody and Always Custody as 1 and No Custody as 0, and one of the social and financial resources variables. No interaction terms are statistically significant, suggesting that social and financial resources do strengthen the impact of custody on desistance. However, in many of the interactions, variables that were not significant in larger models were significant in the interaction model. For instance, savings was significant in model 2b or model 5, but it was significant when put in the interaction model with the interaction and control terms.

Lastly, model 16 tests hypothesis 9 which states that a strong mother-child bond will strengthen the impact of custody on desistance. This model contains an interaction term between the “Custody of Child” and “Attitude to Child” variables. This interaction

term is not statistically significant, failing supporting the hypothesis that a mother-child bond will strengthen the impact of custody on desistance. These results indicate that while significant on their own, custody and mother-child bond do not strengthen each other. Perhaps another, unaccounted variable influences both custody and bond and affects desistance.

Table 1. Descriptives

Variable	N	Frequencies	Missing
Motherhood	424	Not a Mother (0) 33.5% Mother (1) 66.5%	0
Membership in Society T2	424	No (0) 96.7 Yes (1) 3.3	78
Savings T2	424	No (0) 75% Yes (1) 25%	62
Employment T2	424	Irregular (0) 65.6% Somewhat regular (1) .9% Regular (2) 33.5%	189
Marital Status T2	424	No (0) 57.5% Yes (1) 42.5%	4
Social Ties T2	424	0-No (0) 35.1% 1-Yes (1) 64.9%	8
Age of 1 <sup>st</sup> Delinquency	424	Continuous Mean 15.33	21
Age at Post Parole	424	Continuous Mean 38.08	12
Attitude T2	282	Poor (0) 47.5% Fair (1) 16% Good (2) 36.5%	70
Custody T2	282	Never had custody (0) 49.6% Some custody of child (1) 3.2% Always had custody(2) 47.2%	49

Table 2. Models 1 and 2

	Model 1 N=424	Model 2a Non- Mothers N=142	Model 2b Mothers N=282
<i>Variables</i>	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)
Motherhood	.921** (.242)	-	-
Membership in Society	19.99 (10460.585)	20.425 (19784.935)	19.886 (12400.135)
Marital Status	.513* (.249)	-.084 (.411)	.946** (.330)
Social Ties	.597* (.245)	1.039* (.409)	.214 (.323)
Savings	.821** (.313)	1.062* (.540)	.637 (.401)
Somewhat Regular Employment	-.885 (1.547)	-19.833 (27678.99)	-.389 (1.755)
Regular Employment	1.507** (.330)	1.097 (.636)	1.681** (.401)
Age	.001 (.008)	.009 (.014)	.010 (.202)
Age of first Delinquency	-.015 (.026)	-.038 (.051)	-.003 (.031)
<i>Controls for missing data</i>			
Membership in society Control	.154 (.306)	-.288 (.514)	.429 (.407)
Marital Status Control	.405 (1.335)	-1.281 (1.905)	19.717 (25504.07)
Social Ties Control	1.85 (1.15)	1.804 (1.460)	20.136 (19037.267)
Savings Control	.451 (.347)	.838 (.542)	.129 (.476)
Employment Control	1.22** (.303)	.965 (.587)	1.286** (.364)
Age Control	1.384 (.937)	2.307 (1.696)	1.138 (1.223)
Age of first Delinquency Control	-.053 (.696)	-.757 (1.323)	.470 (.900)
Chi Square (d.f.)	100.366 (16)	34.620 (15)	63.015 (15)

\* p &lt;.05 \*\* p &lt;.01

Table 3. Model with Only Mothers

	Model 3 N=282	Model 4 N=282	Model 5a N=282	Model 5b N=282
Variables	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	
Membership in Society	-	-	19.422 (12258.925)	19.215 (12500.714)
Marital Status	-	-	.650 (.354)	.582 (.354)
Social Ties	-	-	.161 (.337)	.205 (.338)
Savings	-	-	.669 (.435)	.635 (.429)
Somewhat Regular Employment	-	-	-.878 (1.969)	-1.526 (1.733)
Regular Employment	-	-	1.522** (.421)	1.647** (.423)
Fair Attitude to Child	.726 (.418)	-	.738 (.468)	-
Good Attitude to Child	1.799** (.402)	-	1.129* (.458)	-
Some Custody of Child	-	-1.026 (.743)	-	-.833 (.821)
Always Custody of Child	-	1.423** (.329)	-	1.245** (.386)
Age	-.004 (.009)	-.005 (.009)	.000 (.010)	.001 (.010)
Age of first Delinquency	.000 (.029)	.009 (.029)	-.015 (.032)	-.013 (.032)
<i>Controls for missing data</i>				
Membership in society Control	-	-	.511 (.423)	.561 (.425)
Marital Status Control	-	-	19.826 (25678.285)	19.950 (25540.127)
Social Ties Control	-	-	20.247 (18794.578)	19.874 (18819.534)
Savings Control	-	-	.636 (.506)	.695 (.517)
Employment Control	-	-	1.200** (.379)	1.064** (.383)
Attitude to Child Control	-.182 (.352)	-	-.640 (.402)	-
Custody Control	-	-.437 (.359)	-	-.620 (.412)
Age Control	.637 (1.205)	.633 (1.182)	1.003 (1.260)	.994 (1.270)
Age of first Delinquency Control	.497 (.842)	.492 (.845)	.206 (.927)	.102 (.927)
Chi Square (d.f)	39.457 (7)	40.958 (7)	82.607 (18)	85.737 (18)

\* p <.05    \*\* p <.01

Table 4. Interaction Models.

	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13	Model 14	Model 15	Model 16
Variables	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)	b (S.E.)
<b>Attitude* Savings</b>	.027 (.773)										
Attitude to Children (Bond)	1.284** (.364)										
Savings	1.264*										
Attitude Control	-.484 (.374)										
Savings Control	1.186** (.454)										
Chi Square	48.821 (5)										
<b>Bond* Employment</b>		-.105 (.637)									
Attitude to Children		1.257** (.401)									
Employment		.868** (.235)									
Attitude Control		-.329 (.372)									
Employment Control		1.588** (.353)									



Chi Square		58.611 (5)									
<b>Bond * Marital Status</b>			-.645 (.601)								
Attitude to Children			1.469** (.423)								
Marital Status			1.012 (.409)								
Attitude Control			-.264 (.359)								
Marital Control			21.42** (28366.11)								
Chi Square			41.809 (5)								
<b>Bond*Ties</b>				-2.27** (.851)							
Attitude to Children				3.045** (.800)							
Ties				.948** (.368)							
Attitude Control				-.356 (.362)							
Social Ties Control				21.415 (18148.94)							
Chi Square (d.f.)				47.501 (5)							
<b>Bond* Membership</b>					-1.599 (42367.11)						
Attitude to Children					1.368** (.337)						

Membership					21.335 (40192.97)						
Attitude Control					-.230 (.349)						
Membership Control					.422 (.361)						
Chi Square (d.f.)					38.281 (5)						
<b>Custody*Ties</b>						-.190 (.613)					
Custody						1.310* (.522)					
Ties						.487 (.357)					
Social Ties Control						21.097 (19332.36)					
Chi Square (d.f.)						45.932 (5)					
<b>Custody* Membership</b>							-1.214 (42367.11)				
Custody							1.214** (.313)				
Membership							21.004 (40192.97)				
Custody Control							-.468 (.360)				
Membership Control							.510 (.362)				
Chi Square (d.f.)							34.849 (5)				





## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This paper set out to test the importance of motherhood on women's offending trajectories. Existing literature shows that factors such as marriage and employment lead to greater odds of desistance (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Qualitative studies of female populations show that motherhood and children are also important mechanisms for desistance (Giordano et al., 2002,). In the current study, results show that motherhood does positively impact odds of desisting for women. In fact, the final models indicate that motherhood variables are more predictive of desistance than most of the social and financial variables.

The literature indicates that financial and social resources impact women greatly in the post-release period (Richie, 2001; Holtfreter et al, 2004). This study provides further evidence that resources increase odds of desistance. Models 1 and 2 indicated that resources, particularly steady employment and marriage were significant to desistance for mothers. While marriage is typically thought of as a social resource, it could also be used as a measure of financial support. While middle and upper class women of this period often did not work, lower class women were increasingly entering the work force to help their families (Smith, 1994). Thus, a marriage helped with financial concerns and demands as well as being a social support. This may hold true today also, as many families require both parents to work in order to meet financial obligations.

In the overall models, employment emerges as the only significant resources variable, while good attitude to child and always having custody were also significant. Thus, financial resources that we would still expect to be important today are shown to

lead to increased odds of desistance for this sample also. Sampson and Laub (1993) indicate that jobs are related to male desistance. While women's entry to the work force was relatively new at this time period, and women today have a larger role in the work force, steadiness of employment indicates that regular employment aids in desistance for women.

Models 3 and 4 indicated that good attitude to children and always having custody of children increase the odds of desistance. Many qualitative studies have found that women mention children as a turning point in their criminal trajectory (Giordano et al., 2002, Brown and Bloom, 2009). This study finds support for the argument that child are important to women's desistance. Furthermore, the dummy coding helps to outline what specific conditions aid a mother the most: a mother-child bond and time with child heavily impact a mother. Thus, those studies that measure motherhood as a simple status do not measure the complexities and variations that exist in mothering.

Interaction models fail to reveal significant findings that help to further untangle the relationship between motherhood and desistance. These models instead suggest that the relationship between social/financial resources and desistance for mothers is not conditioned by whether they have custody of their children or by how strong their bond to their children is. Rather, it appears that these factors affect desistance for women largely independent of one another.

Motherhood is significant to desistance when mothers have good attitudes towards their children and when they always have custody. Therefore, strong mother-child bonds and full-time custody aid mothers in desistance more so than weak or nonexistent bonds and limited custody/contact. These variables point to a relationship

between investment in a mother-child bond and odds of desistance. It becomes clear that children act as a social control for their mothers' behavior but only when the relationship is strong and positive.

One of the major limitations to this study is the measurement of key variables. Since the data were collected in the 1920's, I had no control over information that was collected or how it was collected. In many instances I had to use a single item to measure constructs that are more complex than a single item measure implies. This is problematic and means that in many instances variables only partially reflect the construct they are intended to measure. For instance, family ties was measured based on who an offender lived with at release from parole. An offender may have more social ties that help during the post-release phase, yet are not captured in this measurement such as a strong network of friends or family that they do not live with. Moreover, the variables measuring elements of motherhood are limited and attachment to children or time spent with children could be measured better in future studies, perhaps by measuring the quality of time spent with a child or the parent-child relationship. However, more likely is that issues with the data are compounded to impact the final model.

A second limitation to the current study is the amount of missing values. Some variables had larger numbers of missing data than others. This made it difficult to drop those cases with missing data because missing information was random. If this had been done, regression models would have very low N's, perhaps leading to skewed results. The coding scheme for missing data was not a fully desirable fix to the problem. When using these data in the future, imputation may better solve this problem. Thus, the results of this study are partially constrained by the available form of the data and original construction

of the variables.

Finally, the current data have measures on the lifestyles of the offenders, but limited information on offender's beliefs and views. There were no measures of an offender's attitude to incarceration or attitude to change in the data. While the data were able to capture their life circumstances at many points in time, it does not account for any internal processes that may facilitate change. Maruna's (2004) explanatory style focuses on offender outlook and the relationship to odds of desistance, finding that positive outlooks matter. Therefore, a key factor of internal agency is missing from the current analysis. Substantively, this could explain why many of the resources variables, such as savings or membership in society, that were hypothesized to be important, did not play out that way. Perhaps attitude towards change and acceptance of a law-abiding life mediate social variables. An offender who does not want to change their behavior may make social ties that do not act as social control mechanisms, but in fact reinforce their criminal behavior.

Future studies on women's desistance should continue to examine the effects of motherhood. Longitudinal data provide a look at an offender's life that is not captured by cross-sectional studies. Furthermore, measures of attitudes and outlooks would help to understand the complex relationship between motherhood and criminal offending. Past studies (Giordano et al., 2002) have been able to find support for children as a positive influence through women's narratives. Perhaps a greater focus on qualities and experiences that are unique to women will help identify the factors that influence odds of desistance for female populations.

Future studies could also address timing of children. A child pre-incarceration



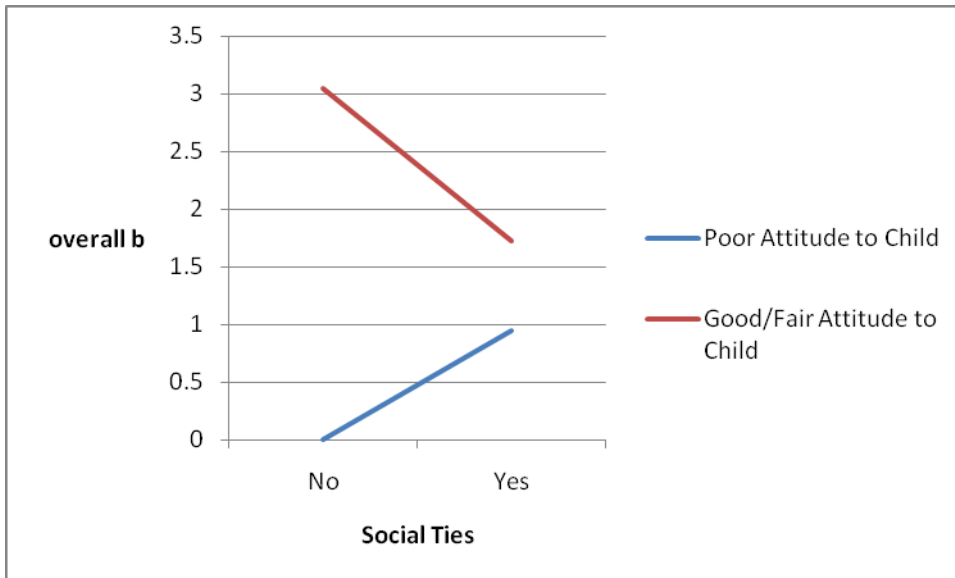
may have a different affect on a mother's desistance than a child who was born post-release. The burgeoning literature focusing on desistance in females has already begun to narrow the focus on how and why women desist from crime, and how this differs from male populations. Further studies can tease out the multifaceted relationship between motherhood and desistance. This study found that motherhood is significant to the desistance process for women. While resources were also important, variables measuring the mother-child relationship impacted odds of desistance. Focusing further studies on motherhood and children may reveal what about this unique role bolsters successful reentry. Moreover, the findings from this study have strong implications for policies regarding incarcerated mothers and programming for mothers near release. Future studies could to help to establish the importance of strong mother-child bonds for successful re-entry.

## APPENDIX A. Bi-variate Correlations

	Membership in Society	Savings	Steadiness of Employment	Social Ties	Marital Status	Attitude to Child	Custody
Membership in Society	1.00						
Savings	.198**	1.00					
Steadiness of Employment	.007	.249**	1.00				
Social Ties	.025	.071	-.041	1.00			
Marital Status	.082	.209**	-.047	.312**	1.00		
Attitude to Child	.119*	.225**	.081	.192**	.299**	1.00	
Custody	.127**	.155**	-.029	.174**	.306**	.805**	1.00

\* p < .05    \*\* p < .01

**APPENDIX B.** Graph of Interaction between Attitude to Child and Social Ties



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