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Guilty by Association: A Critical Analysis of How Imprisonment Affects the Children of Those Behind Bars

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GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HOW IMPRISONMENT
AFFECTS THE CHILDREN OF THOSE BEHIND BARS

by

WHITNEY Q. HOLLINS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2019

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Whitney Q. Hollins

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Guilty by Association: A Critical Analysis of how Imprisonment Affects the Children of those

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by

Whitney Q. Hollins

Advisor: Wendy Luttrell

As 2.2 million individuals in the United States are currently incarcerated and an additional 5 million are under some form of correctional surveillance, the push for prison reform has reached new heights. Intimately and inextricably connected to mass incarceration and the push for its reform (and in some cases abolition) are the children have been impacted by incarceration. About half of the individuals currently incarcerated are parents to at least one child under the age of 18. Current estimates suggest that 2.7 million children currently have an incarcerated parent and that 10 million children in the United States have experienced parental incarceration at some point during their lives. Once deemed an “invisible” population, children of incarcerated parents have recently received more attention in academic literature. However, much of the current literature on this population fails to include their voices and presents them at risk for a variety of adverse childhood outcomes, further perpetuating the deeply ingrained negative view of incarcerated individuals and their families. Aiming to join a growing body of inclusive, authentic and asset based research, this study seeks to work in collaboration with children of incarcerated parents to highlight their story and provide insight into the experiences that are important to them and the worlds they occupy.

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Introduction

In Angela Davis' 2003 thought-provoking book *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, she wrote “Because it would be too agonizing to cope with the possibility that anyone, including ourselves, could become a prisoner, we tend to think of the prison as disconnected from our own lives” (p.15). In the 15 years since Davis' assertion, many things have remained the same, while much has changed. For example, the United States still incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country in the world; a statistic that was true in 2003 and remains true today. According to the 2018 Bureau of Justice report on Correctional Populations, the United States currently has almost 2.2 million incarcerated individuals, with an additional 4.6 million being monitored in some supervisory manner such as parole, probation or house arrest (p.2). Despite these figures representing a 20-year low (and nine consecutive years of decreasing numbers), the U.S. is still the world's leading incarcerator¹, much as it was when Davis' book was published. While the numbers show minimal variance, there has however been a change in the amount of disconnection or rather connection that U.S. citizens have with incarceration.

In 2015, Dr. Crystal T. Laura, assistant professor at Chicago State University, stated, "It has become trendy to talk about prison reform.” (Columbia University's School of Social Work: *An Agenda for Transformative Change* Panel). Her statement has only increased in its validity over the last three years. For example, musician Meek Mill has been a source of recent media attention concerning prison reform. The rapper, who was sent back to prison in 2017 after a

¹ According to *World Prison Brief* the United States places first in terms of prison rates (655 per 100,000) followed by El Salvador (610 per 100,000) and Turkmenistan (583 per 100,000). The *World Prison Brief* measures the incarceration rate differently than the Bureau of Justice Statistics. While the BJS measures the prison rate per 100,000 adults, the WPB measures the number of incarcerated individuals of any age per 100,000. (Walmsley, 2018).

probation violation, was recently released after it was found that not only was his original conviction questionable, but that the length and terms of his probation were ridiculously harsh. This situation is not new; young people, especially young men of color are disproportionately targeted and jailed in this country starting from a very early age. However, what was different about Mill's situation was the amount of media attention his case received. Everyone from entertainers such as Jay-Z to sports franchise owners such as Robert Kraft spoke out in support of Meek Mill and the case received unprecedented consideration in the mainstream media. The rapper has acknowledged that without his celebrity, his situation could have ended differently stating, "Although I'm blessed to have the resources to fight this unjust situation, I understand that many people of color across the country don't have that luxury and I plan to use my platform to shine a light on those issues" (Victor, 2018, p.1). A month after Mill's release, reality television star and entrepreneur Kim Kardashian met with President Donald J. Trump to discuss sentencing and prison reform. While the mixing of pop culture and politics is not new, the topic and the way it was handled was. What some referred to as a "media stunt" eventually succeeded in guaranteeing a pardon for 63-year-old Alice Marie Johnson, a first-time, non-violent offender who served over 20 years in prison. Kardashian's credentials and reasons for being invited to the White House aside, what cannot be denied is that her visit brought tremendous attention to the issue of our prison nation² and the devastating effects it has on individuals, families and communities. Although these situations are very real for those directly impacted, it is worth noting that Dr. Laura was correct- speaking out about prison reform is in vogue. Because of this, more people than ever are not only aware of certain injustices in this country but feel more

² Beth E. Richie (2012) writes, "The notion of a prison nation reflects the ideological and public policy shifts that have led to the increased criminalization of disenfranchised communities of color, more aggressive law enforcement strategies for norm-violating behavior, and an undermining of civil and human rights of marginalized groups (p.3).

confident speaking about them. "Trendy" has brought many closer to the justice system and prisons than Davis may have ever envisioned.

Despite the new amount of celebrity surrounding prisons, trendy is not the only or most profound way more people have become more connected to incarceration. With almost seven million people in the country currently involved in the correctional system in some manner, whether it be incarceration or probation, it is becoming more and more difficult to find someone who does not have a loved one who has been or is currently incarcerated. Therefore, even if people have not been incarcerated themselves, they are often connected to incarceration in a very personal way. As Wakefield and Wildeman (2014) observe, "Decades of research, in part motivated by the prison boom in the United States, tells us the image of the inmate as an isolated loner is simply false" (p.6). The U.S. can no longer ignore the fact that the effects of incarceration go beyond the walls of prisons and jails and directly into our homes. As Drucker (2018) states, "...mass incarceration is a deadly and tenacious epidemic that damages the lives of individuals, families and communities" (p.1).

As the conversation broadens to include communities and families and the image of the isolated inmate slowly vanishes, a complex picture emerges of the people who are connected to incarceration, but not actually incarcerated. One of the largest groups directly impacted by incarceration are the children of those who are imprisoned. Research shows that about half of the men and women currently incarcerated in the United States are parents to at least one child under the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). The number of children with incarcerated parents has increased dramatically during the last two decades. In the early 1990s, 950,000 children in the U.S. had a parent in a state or federal prison; by 2007 that figure jumped to 1.7 million (Farrington, Murray, & Sekol, 2012). Today most studies estimate that

somewhere between 1.5 and 2.5 million children currently have a parent or parents who are incarcerated (Bernstein, 2005; Eddy & Kjellstrand, 2011; Hairston & Seymour, 2001; U.S. Department of Justice, 2014; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). This number becomes much higher when all children who have experienced parental incarceration are included, instead of just those who are dealing with it currently. Bernstein (2005) writes, “Two-point-four million American children have a mother or father in jail or prison right now. More than seven million, or one in ten of the nation’s children, have a parent under criminal supervision-incarcerated, on probation, or on parole.” (p.41). Eddy and Kjellstrand (2011) agree that the number of children affected by incarceration increases considerably when we consider all children who have ever had a parent in prison. They write, “In 2007, roughly 1.7 million minor children (approximately 2.3% of our nation’s children) had parents in State or Federal Prison. If children whose parents have been involved in the system but are not currently incarcerated are considered, the numbers of children of incarcerated parents may be 5 times greater” (Eddy & Kjellstrand, 2011, p.552). To put this in perspective, the number of children who will experience parental incarceration this year is higher than children who will experience divorce (1%) and nearly as high as those children who will witness domestic abuse (3%) this year (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Wakefield and Wildeman (2014) encourage us to “consider the amount of research and discussion each of these groups [children of recently divorced parents and children who witness domestic abuse] receives (and merits). That the share of children of incarcerated parents is similar (or larger) in size suggests these children deserve far more attention than they currently receive” (p.20). Despite their sizeable and ever increasing numbers, the body of literature surrounding children with an incarcerated parent is lacking (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). A comprehensive study conducted in 2012 concluded:

The number of children experiencing parental incarceration in countries like the United States is unprecedented. Identifying and understanding the possible effects on children is of great importance...Relatively little is known about the causal effects of parental incarceration on children. This topic warrants large-scale investment... (Farrington, Murray, & Sekol, p.193).

The aim of this study is to examine the strategies (if any) used by children of incarcerated parents to protect and/or maintain their identities from being tainted by incarceration in the figured worlds they occupy. This study looks at children with incarcerated parents as actors and creators of their own lived experiences. The study assumes that incarceration has negative connotations in American society and seeks to understand how children understand, address and navigate this complex situation. Much of the current research on this topic pathologizes these children and actively seeks to identify the adverse effects of parental incarceration. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) write, “Investigators have been much more vigilant in documenting failure than they have been in describing success” (p.8). However, there is a growing body of literature that is inclusive, authentic and optimistic. This study intends to fit firmly within the latter body of literature by providing a holistic view of children with incarcerated parents and challenging the often less than complimentary way they are currently constructed in scholarly texts and in everyday life.

Personal Interest

Parental incarceration and the incarceration of other loved ones has never been merely a trendy topic to me. It has been a way of life for as long as I can recall. I am the child of a formerly incarcerated parent. My father served a 20-year sentence in Federal prison and was released in August 2017. He was incarcerated twice before the last sentence and therefore, spent

a major portion of my childhood in jail or prison. I was not living with my father at the time of his incarceration since he and my mother had divorced prior. My situation was not uncommon. 77% of incarcerated mothers reported that they provided the daily care for their children prior to incarceration, while only 26% of fathers reported the same (Elmalak, 2015). This means that when a mother is incarcerated, their child is more likely to end up living with a grandparent, extended relative or in foster care. When a father is incarcerated, the child will more than likely remain with their mother, as I did. In fact, a 2015 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, found that “Children with mothers who are incarcerated in State prisons are more than five times as likely to reside in a foster home or agency than children with fathers who are incarcerated in State prisons.” (p.2). Despite my father's frequent interactions with the justice system, I did have a relationship with him prior to and throughout his earlier incarcerations. I could never claim that my father and I were particularly close, even when he was free to do as he pleased and this remains the case today. In fact, my memories of him are few and far between. However, that has not stopped his incarceration from playing a major role in my life. His absence and the feelings that accompanied it have left me yearning to know more about incarceration and other children, who like myself, found out that the effects of parental absence can be just as powerful as the effects of a physically present parent.

Besides my father, I have also experienced the incarceration of other loved ones. Both of my brothers have been incarcerated at some point in their lives. I often compared my brothers' situation to my own experiences. We were raised by the same mother, in the same household, and given similar amounts of love and attention; yet our lives took different paths for a time. While this is not abnormal for siblings, I used to wonder if my father's incarceration played some role in my brothers' difficulties with the justice system. In a sense, I wondered if the cycle

was perpetuating from father to son. While I knew a criminal gene did not exist, I wondered if somehow my father had paved a road to jail for my brothers. For a time, all I saw was a succession from father to son, a sort of unwanted inheritance. Both of my brothers have been "free" from physical incarceration for some time (although we know the effects of incarceration cling to individuals post release) and fortunately have found support, love, community and employment. They are also both fathers who are still working on their relationships with their children as well as rebuilding bonds with the rest of their family members and community.

In addition to daughter and sister, I also approach this topic as a new mother. My son was born in September 2016 and his birth allowed me to look at parenthood in a new way. Having already made so many mistakes in the first two years of his life has humbled me. Having so much love for an individual I have only known for such a short period has grounded me. Having so much responsibility when so much is out of my control has overwhelmed me. Having given birth and survived the day in and day out of parenthood (thus far) has emboldened me. I am changed and yet more myself than ever. I am a parent and because of this I have gained a new, if not appreciation then definitely understanding, of my father. I now know that despite his mistakes, he did not willingly leave. I now know that despite our best intentions as parents, we will sometimes be selfish and make mistakes. I now know what it feels like for a child's smile to brighten your whole day and the eagerness you feel to see it. I now know what it feels like for your child to need you and the desire to make everything okay for them, even when you know you cannot. I now know how much your child means to you, even when you cannot express it. Because of this, I know that my father wishes he could have been a more present parent. I also know that I want my son to know him. My son is the first grandchild my father has that does not remember his incarceration. They are not strangers in any way. They can grow together in a

traditional sense, without the limitations and obstacles that incarceration imposes and this is important to me as I am sure it is important to him, even if neither of us has managed to speak those words. Because I now recognize the importance of a child's bond with their family and vice versa, I have a new understanding of how important it is to maintain connections with your loved ones who are incarcerated even through the anger, pain and sadness.

The last hat I wear in this research is that of an educator. Having spent 10 years in the New York City public education system has put me in contact with thousands of children. Statistically speaking, this means that I have probably been in contact with hundreds of children during my career who have currently or formerly incarcerated parents. This is evidenced by the following troubling statistics: one in 9 African-American children has a parent who is incarcerated; one in 28 Latinx and one in 57 white. (Gaynes, Krupat, & Lincroft, 2011). Throughout my career, I have encountered less than 10 students that openly acknowledged having an incarcerated relative. As a child, I never discussed my father's incarceration with my teachers and looking back I am not sure if they knew or not. As an educator, I perpetuated this silence early in my career by failing to speak about my situation or introducing incarceration in the classroom. It was not until I began exploring this issue as a research topic and had to confront my own personal experiences, that I realized it needed to be discussed in schools. Being an elementary school teacher has allowed me to see how important the parent-child bond is and how detrimental it can be for students to be separated from their parent. Working as a lecturer at CUNY (City of New York) colleges with current and prospective teachers has allowed me to see how uninformed educators are about this topic. Being a daughter, sister, mother and educator has allowed me to approach and view this topic in many ways that often counters the current body of literature available on the topic. My personal connection with the topic shapes the way I read and interact

with the literature. It also supported my interaction with the youth involved in this study and provided the space for them to express themselves in a way that provided an authentic contrast to the way they are currently portrayed.

Literature Review

Prison: The Boom

To understand the issues surrounding children with an incarcerated parent, it is imperative to first explore mass incarceration in the United States. While I am unable to cover all the very complex and intricate issues that led to and are currently involved with mass incarceration, I will attempt to briefly discuss some of the major topics that are associated with the current state of jails and prisons, namely the prison boom of the 1980s and 1990s, the prison industrial complex and the school-to-prison pipeline/carceral continuum. Reviewing the literature written about these areas will allow for a better understanding of incarceration, how it affects communities and families and how this relates to the children of incarcerated individuals.

It is worth noting that mass incarceration is a relatively recent phenomenon in a historical sense. As Currie (1998) notes, “In 1971 there were fewer than 200,000 inmates in our state and federal prisons. By the end of 1996 we were approaching 1.2 million. The prison population, in short has nearly sextupled in the course of twenty-five years” (p.198). The exponential growth of prisons, jails, and the incarcerated population is referred to by many as the prison boom (Alexander, 2010; Currie, 1998; Meiners, 2007; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). Both Alexander (2010) and Davis (2003) maintain that the “war on drugs” introduced by President Richard Nixon and championed by President Ronald Reagan, led to millions of people being incarcerated. Davis (2003) states, “When the drive to produce more prisons and incarcerate ever larger numbers of people occurred in the 1980s during what is known as the Reagan era,

politicians argued that ‘tough on crime’ stances-including certain imprisonment and longer sentences- would keep communities free of crime” (pp.11-12). Alexander supports the idea that new tough tactics of the 1960s-1980s, including the increased policing of poor people of color and mandatory sentencing, caused the mass incarceration movement. She writes:

The reason is simple: Convictions for drug offenses are the single most important cause of the explosion in incarceration rates in the United States. Drug offenses alone account for two-thirds of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000.

Approximately a half-million people are in prison or jail for a drug offense today, compared to an estimated 41,000 in 1980- an increase of 1,100 percent...To put this matter in perspective, consider this: there are more people in prisons and jails today just for drug offenses than were incarcerated for *all* [emphasis in the original] reasons in 1980. Nothing has contributed more to the systematic mass incarceration of people in the United States than the War on Drugs (Alexander, 2010, p. 60)

This increased number of bodies in cells did not however lead to a noticeably lower crime rate. Currie (1998) observes, “...we remain far and away the most violent advanced industrial society on earth...in 1995 there were more homicides in Los Angeles, a city of about 3.5 million people, than all of England and Wales, with 50 million” (p.84). Currie also acknowledges that the effect of mass incarceration on crime is minimal, writing, “...that a society incarcerates such a vast and rapidly growing part of its population-but still suffers the worst violent crime in the industrial world- is a society in trouble, one that in a profound sense, has lost its bearings” (p.147). Davis (2003) agrees stating, “However, the practice of mass incarceration during that [tough on crime] period had little or no effect on official crime rates” (p.12). It is worth noting that while the U.S. remains one of the most violent advanced nations in the world (something that is often discussed

during the frequent debates in the U.S. concerning gun laws), non-violent or low level offenders make up a large portion of the prison population. A 2016 report by The Brennan Center for Justice found that the level of violent crime in the United States is essentially the same as it was in 1970 and that 39% of the current prison population could be released without a negative effect on public safety. This 39% includes non-violent, low level offenders who would be better served by alternative programs such as rehabilitation centers and individuals who have already served extremely long sentences³. Clear, Frost and Monteiro (2018) agree and state, “Age matters a lot with respect to recidivism. People who have reached their late thirties and forties are simply less of a risk to reoffend.” (p.27). The Brennan Center report concludes by stating, “America’s experiment in mass incarceration has failed. Not only does using prison as a knee-jerk reaction to crime devastate families and communities, but many of today’s overly punitive prison sentence produce little public safety benefits.” (Brennan Center for Justice, 2016, p.46). If we determine that mass incarceration stemmed from tougher laws designed make our country safer, but that mass incarceration has done little to increase public safety, another question emerges. Why would the United States invest in the building of more prisons if prisons and incarceration do not lower crime rates?

It is imperative to remember that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, not only were prison populations increasing, but the numbers of facilities to house these individuals were increasing as well. Using California as an example, Davis (2003) writes:

However, a massive project of prison construction was initiated during the 1980s- that is, during the years of the Reagan presidency. Nine prisons, including the Northern California Facility for Women, were opened between 1984 and 1989.

³ To read more about aging in prison and movements to release older incarcerated individuals, please see the Osborne Association’s 2018 report *The High Costs of Low Risks: The Crisis of America’s Aging Prison Population*.

Recall that it had taken more than a hundred years to build the first nine California prisons. In less than a single decade, the number of prisons doubled. And during the 1990s, twelve new prisons were opened, including two more for women. (p.13)

As stated above, the building of prisons and increase in the incarcerated population seems to have little real effect on crime rates, so it then becomes more plausible that there are other reasons besides the crime rate that have kept the prison industry booming. Many would argue that the government and society's dependence on prisons is less about crime rates and more so about racism, oppression and the ability to make money from both of those things. As Meiners (2007) notes, "The foundation of the U.S. penal system is intimately connected to slavery, white supremacy, and capitalism" (p.71). Davis (2003) confirms the connection between slavery and the penitentiary, writing, "The population of convicts, whose racial composition was dramatically transformed by the abolition of slavery, could be subjected to such intense exploitation and to such horrendous modes of punishment precisely because they continued to be perceived as slaves" (p.33). The connection between slavery and the justice system is seemingly solidified by the U.S. Constitution itself, which states in Amendment 13, "*Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction*" (Meiners, 2007, p.73). The amendment is telling in that slavery, a heinous violation of human rights and a source of free labor, was outlawed except for as a punishment for crime. It therefore makes sense that those who supported slavery would have a vested interest in the penal system and seeing certain groups, especially former slaves, incarcerated. As Meiners (2007) observes, "Prisons create legal sites where labor can be exploited" (p.73). These legal sites of labor

exploitation were especially important following the abolition of slavery, and served to maintain the racialized social order and promote white supremacy. As Stevenson (2017) points out:

Before the end of the nineteenth century, states looked to the criminal justice system to construct policies and strategies to maintain white supremacy and racial subordination. Law enforcement officers were tasked with menacing and controlling black people in ways that would shape policing and the criminal justice system in America for the next century... Then relying on language in the Thirteenth Amendment that prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude 'except as punishment for crime,' lawmakers empowered white controlled governments to extract black labor in private lease contracts or on state-owned farms. While a Black prisoner was a rarity during the slavery era (when slave masters were individually empowered to administer 'discipline' to their human property) the solution to the free black population had become criminalization. (p.11)

It is ironic that the 13th Amendment, which is viewed by many as a truly liberating and progressive act, was then used to bolster a new form of legal slavery. In this sense, plantation slavery, outlawed by the U.S. government, did not completely disappear. Instead, white supremacy and law joined forces to create the perception of black criminality that provided the necessary bodies for penal slavery. This new form of forced labor was no less daunting, cruel, or racially motivated. As an example of the harsh conditions, Stevenson (2017) writes:

An 1887 report by the Hinds County, Mississippi, grand jury recorded that, six months after 204 convicts were leased to a man named McDonald, twenty were dead, nineteen had escaped, and twenty-three had been returned to the penitentiary disabled, ill and near death... Under this grotesquely cruel system that lasted decades, countless black men, women and children lost their freedom- and often their lives. 'Before the convict

leasing officially ended,' writes historian David Oshinsky, 'a generation of black prisoners would suffer and die under conditions far worse than anything they had ever experienced as slaves.' (p.12)

Not only was this new form of bondage dangerous because of the toll it took on the bodies, souls and minds of black people, it was also extremely threatening because while many slavery abolitionists could protest the rights of human beings taken away simply because of their skin color, the penal system allowed for a racism that was no longer explicit. Instead of being placed in slavery due to their race, Black people were now placed in bondage because of their perceived lack of morals and alleged tendency toward criminality. This allowed whites, some of who would not be comfortable sanctioning plantation slavery, to support penal slavery. After all, a common saying in the U.S. is "If you do that crime, you do the time", but many failed and still fail to realize, that being a person of color is sometimes a crime in itself. According to Stevenson (2017), "State legislatures passed discriminatory criminal laws, or 'Black Codes,' which created new criminal offenses such as 'vagrancy' and 'loitering.' This led to the mass arrest and incarceration of black people" (p.11). The ramifications of these codes can still be seen today as Black people, especially Black youth, are overpoliced for things such as socializing in groups or spending too much time in a certain area. As Henning (2017) explains, "Young black males who move in crowds, 'jone' and play fight...are even more likely than young white men, young minority women, and older minority men to attract attention from the police and experience verbal abuse, excessive force, unwarranted street stops, and other negative interactions with the police" (p.59). Essentially, the crime is not what they are doing per se, but the fact that they are doing it while being Black and this type of policing can be traced back to the Black Codes. The

passage of the 13th amendment was central in the criminalization of the Black body and paved the way for mass incarceration. Stevenson (2017) writes:

More enduring was the mythology of black criminality and the way America's criminal justice system adopted a racialized lens which menaced and victimized people of color, especially black men. The presumptive identity of black men as 'slaves' evolved into the presumptive identity of 'criminal,' and we have yet to fully recover from this historical frame. (p.12)

Despite prison reform becoming "trendy", the current president's seeming willingness to use his pardoning powers quite liberally and a marginally smaller prison population, it would be a mistake to view the age of mass incarceration as coming to an inevitable end. At the *White House Opioid Summit*, President Trump spoke about Singapore's zero-tolerance drug policy with admiration stating, "Some countries have a very, very tough penalty — the ultimate penalty. And, by the way, they have much less of a drug problem than we do" (Donald J. Trump, 2018). This was not the first time the president mentioned the death penalty as a possible solution to combat the opioid crisis in the United States. No one can deny that the United States is in the middle of an opioid epidemic that should be taken very seriously. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) research shows that 115 Americans die from an opioid overdose every day (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018). While it is understandable that most people want to see something "done" about the crisis, it is important to remember that the "War on Drugs" and its harsh, mandatory drug sentences, began nearly 50 years ago and have not provided any long-lasting effects besides mass incarceration and the devastation of poor, communities of color. As mentioned previously, in the early 1970s, the prison population in the U.S. was comparable to other democracies. This began to change in 1971 when President Richard Nixon declared drugs

“public enemy number one” and the “War on Drugs” began. Many other researchers and authors have already posited that the war on drugs was in reality a war on Black and brown men, especially those of low socio-economic status (Alexander, 2010; Davis, 2003; DuBois Gilliard, 2018; Meiners, 2007). This should no longer be considered a theory as even former members of the Nixon government have confirmed the hypothesis. In 2016, CNN reported on a story where former Nixon aide, John Ehrlichman, explicitly explained the malicious intent of the war on drugs. Ehrlichman stated:

We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war [Vietnam] or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did.

(LoBianco, 2016, p.1)

As fathers, mothers, sons and daughters were locked away for unprecedented prison terms due to this misleading war, the social fabric of communities of color were forever altered. The prison rate is now 5 times what it was when Nixon started the war, but the U.S. still has a drug problem. The U.S. has been employing this tactic (harsher punishment) for nearly half a century, mostly with lengthy incarceration sentences for those involved with drugs, and yet the drug problem in the U.S. has not dissipated. The NIDA notes that the opioid crisis began in the late 1990s when “pharmaceutical companies assured the medical community that patients would not become addicted to prescription opioid pain relievers, and healthcare providers began to prescribe them at greater rates” (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018). It is now common knowledge that this information is false and that opioids are highly addictive. If it is documented that harsher

punishment does little to deter people from selling or using drugs, it should be posited why those within the U.S. government, including the sitting president and (the now former) U.S Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, seemingly want to double down on policies that disproportionately targeted minorities and caused the boom in the first place? Many in the media have recently called attention to “racist dog whistles” which refer to words spoken by a racist individual to alert other racist individuals of their true position and stance without explicitly stating it aloud. Most recently, this was discussed during the 2018 Florida gubernatorial primary. After Democrat Andrew Gillum, a Black man, won a surprise victory, his new opponent Republican Ron DeSantis went on national television and urged Florida voters not to “monkey this [the election] up” by voting for Gillum (Kenny, 2018, p.1). Many took the use of the word monkey, a term which has historically been used as an insult to Black people, as a coded message from DeSantis to white nationalists. President Trump has also been accused of using these “dog whistles.” His campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” is supposed to be a call to return America to its former glory and status. However, many have taken aim at the slogan and view it as a call to return to white supremacy since much of America’s former and current success was built on the backs of disenfranchised people of color. Former President Bill Clinton, spoke about this at a 2016 Orlando campaign rally for Hillary Clinton. President Clinton stated, “I’m actually old enough to remember the good old days, and they weren’t all that good in many ways. That message where ‘I’ll give you America great again’ is if you’re a white Southerner, you know exactly what it means, don’t you?” (Huffington Post, 2016). While President Trump’s stance on racial inequality and racism is sketchy at best, his former Attorney General Jeff Session’s civil rights record is straightforward. In 1986 Coretta Scott King, wife of slain civil rights leader,

Martin Luther King Jr. and advocate in her own right, wrote a statement attempting block Sessions confirmation as a federal judge. Mrs. Scott King wrote:

Mr. Sessions has used the awesome power of his office to chill the free exercise of the vote by black citizens in the district he now seeks to serve as a federal judge. This simply cannot be allowed to happen. Mr. Sessions' conduct as U.S. Attorney, from his politically motivated voting fraud prosecutions to his indifference toward criminal violations of civil rights laws, indicates that he lacks the temperament, fairness and judgment to be a federal judge. (Lowery, 2017, p.1)

Sessions was not confirmed in 1986, but 30 years later he would get his wish as his loyalty to Donald Trump would be rewarded when the latter became President of the United States and Sessions became U.S. Attorney General. With both Trump and Sessions having a checkered past in relation to civil rights, their desire to reignite the "War on Drugs" especially when this war has already been exposed as racist front or "dog whistle" is concerning. As Stevenson (2017) writes:

In America, no child should be born with the presumption of guilt, burdened with expectations of failure and dangerousness because of the color of her or his skin or parent's poverty. Black people in this nation should be afforded the same protection, safety, and opportunity to thrive as anyone else. But alas, that won't happen until we confront our history and commit to engaging the past that continues to haunt us. (p.26)

Until we confront the racism of our justice system and rebuke the policies that have not succeeded in making our country safer, but instead have only left it more divided and troubled than ever, we cannot be optimistic that the "boom" is a thing of the past.

Prison: The Industrial Complex

Despite the strong evidence that the penitentiary replaced the plantation as a site of free labor and racial oppression, it is still important to keep in mind that the prison population, despite being racially disproportionate, remained rather low until the 1970s. Therefore, while race and slavery can do a lot to explain the shift in prison demographics following the abolition of slavery, we must look for other reasons to explain the why are so many people are currently incarcerated. As stated above, the 1980s and 1990s are representative of a time that the U.S. government decided to get tough on crime. The American Civil Liberties Union (2013) states, “The explosive growth and prison population since the 1970s-and the increasing prevalence of LWOP [life without parole] and life sentences in particular-is the inevitable consequence of more than four decades of ‘tough on crime’ policies” (p.32). However, the continuation of being “tough on crime” makes little sense in 2018 when we have three decades of evidence that shows being ‘tough on crime’ does very little to deter or eradicate crime. Meiners (2007) writes, “This growth in the prison (and jail) population cannot be explained by crime and victimization rates, as between 1970 and 2005, the murder rate in 1995 was essentially the same as the rate of 8.3 per 100,000 in 1970” (p.98). To explore why more prisons are being built and more citizens are becoming inmates, this section will focus on the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). Davis (2003) states:

The term ‘prison industrial complex’ was introduced by activists and scholars to contest prevailing beliefs that increased levels of crime were the root cause of mounting prison populations. Instead, they argued, prison construction and the attendant drive to fill these new structures with human bodies have been driven by ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit. (p.84)

It has already been established that prison replaced slavery as a site of free labor. Chain gangs were not uncommon in the early 20th century and some believe them to be even more cruel than plantation slavery. Davis (2003) states, “Scholars who have studied the convict lease system point out that in many respects, convict leasing was far worse than slavery...they [convicts] could be worked literally to death without affecting the profitability of the convict crew” (p.32). Today, most prisons and jails would shy away from a chain gang because of public perception (while the U.S. likes to punish, it does not want to appear inhumane), but that does not mean that the labor potential of those incarcerated is going unused. Businesses are now closely connected with prisons and jails; viewing those who are incarcerated as both worker⁴ and consumer.

This binary of inmates as both worker and consumer is vital to understanding why prisons remain such a large part of our society even though research shows that they do not work, at least if the operating assumption is that the end goal of prisons is to reduce crime (Currie, 2013; Davis, 2003; Meiners, 2007). As Davis (2003) states, “The fact, for example, that many corporations with global markets now rely on prisons as an important source of profit helps us to understand the rapidity with which prisons began to proliferate precisely at a time when official studies indicated that the crime rate was falling” (p.85). Those who are incarcerated, like those of us on the other side of the bars, have needs and wants. They need food, toiletries, blankets, uniforms and a variety of other things that are now provided by big corporations. When the prison population was less than half a million in the early 1970s, providing supplies for prisoners may have made been a decent business venture. However, now that that number has sextupled,

⁴ The term worker is used loosely here as Merriam-Webster (2018) defines a worker as “a person who does a particular job to earn money. While those who are incarcerated earn a “wage”, the work cannot be considered completely voluntary and the wages are not aligned with pay rates outside of correctional facilities. A 2017 study by the Prison Policy Initiative found that in the U.S., an incarcerated individual makes between \$0.83 and \$3.45 per day, a decrease from 2001 where average rates were \$0.96- \$4.80 (Sawyer, 2017).

providing items for prisons has become an extremely profitable business. Davis (2003) observes, “Corporations producing all kinds of goods—from buildings to electronic devices and hygiene products—and providing all kinds of services—from meals to therapy and healthcare—are now directly involved in the punishment business” (p.88). In addition to the items that need to be purchased for those who are incarcerated, incarcerated individuals are also consumers and purchase items as well, often at an extreme cost. For example, The American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska found that the state was charging its female occupants as much as 50% more for feminine hygiene products than they would normally pay in grocery stores or pharmacies after deeming them “luxury items” (Schulte, 2017, p.1). The policy was subsequently changed without enduring the usual legislative process due to public outcry. In July 2017 Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Senator Elizabeth (D-MA) introduced the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act. One of the reforms introduced in this bill, which was created with the input of formerly incarcerated women, was free access to healthcare items such as tampons and pads. Although the bill did not pass, in August 2017 the Bureau of Prisons released a memo stating that in Federal prisons “Wardens have the responsibility to ensure female hygiene products such as tampons or pads are made available for free in sufficient frequency and number” (Simko-Bednarski, 2017, p.1). Despite this memo, the policy has not been widely enforced and some prisons have yet to make the change.⁵

However, prisons are not just sites of consumption. They are also sites of (practically) free labor. Davis (1998) highlights how major companies utilize prison labor when she writes:

⁵ This policy change only applies to Federal Prisons. Most state prisons still are not required to provide females with tampons or pads. Prior to the Bureau of Prisons decision, Colorado and New York City had already passed legislation to ensure woman received menstrual supplies in both state and local correctional facilities. Maryland, Arizona and Virginia introduced bills on this topic (O’Connor, 2018).

Many corporations whose products we consume on a daily basis have learned that prison labor power can be as profitable as third world labor power exploited by U.S.-based global corporations. Both relegate formerly unionized workers to joblessness and many even wind up in prison. Some of the companies that use prison labor are IBM, Motorola, Compaq, Texas Instruments, Honeywell, Microsoft, and Boeing. But it is not only the hi-tech industries that reap the profits of prison labor. Nordstrom department stores sell jeans that are marketed as “Prison Blues,” as well as t-shirts and jackets made in Oregon prisons. The advertising slogan for these clothes is “made on the inside to be worn on the outside.” Maryland prisoners inspect glass bottles and jars used by Revlon and Pierre Cardin, and schools throughout the world buy graduation caps and gowns made by South Carolina prisoners (p. 1)

In addition, prisoners have created furniture for colleges and produced items for Victoria’s Secret (Davis, 2003). When we combine that fact that incarcerated individuals perform a tremendous amount of labor for free with that fact that prisoners are overwhelmingly people of color, it is easier to make the connection between the plantation and penitentiary. Jones and Mauer (2013) highlight the amount of Black and Latino prisoners available for free labor when they write, “Nearly 40% of all prisoners are African American and 40% are Latino...Far out of proportion to their numbers in the general population” (p.81). The winners here seem to be the corporations who make a profit from the unfortunate situations of incarcerated individuals and those who wish to keep the status quo of white supremacy in place, although these two are not mutually exclusive. Consumers often pay a high mark up on a product, which becomes even higher when we consider the use of free prison labor, as major corporations reap the benefits of this legal

slavery. Society's unwillingness to look prison in the face, allows major corporations to exploit the labor of one group, while exploiting the capital of the other.

In addition to the consumption and labor of prisoners, there is another layer of the PIC that supports the argument that the government and those involved in prisons are more concerned with profit than crime rates. Meiners (2007) observes:

Perhaps more central than the possibility of exploiting the labor of those incarcerated, the construction of multibillion-dollar prisons and the subsequent staffing and maintenance of these institutions is perceived to function as an economic engine for depressed rural communities, where those incarcerated, from one vantage point, are commodities. (p.73)

Wilson-Gilmore supports this analysis with her research on California prisons. She writes:

California's new prisons are sited on devalued rural land, most, in fact on formerly irrigated agricultural acres... The State bought land sold by big landowners. And the state assured the small, depressed towns now shadowed by prisons that the new, recession-proof-polluting industry would jump-start local development. (p. 184)

The idea of prisons as a stimulator of economic growth explains why prisons are often built in small towns where land is cheap and residents welcome the industry that they believe prisons will bring. Meiners (2007) writes, "Communities lobby for these prisons because they need jobs" (p.75). However, the promises of economic growth in the community are often unfulfilled.

As Meiners (2007) points out:

Prisons are perceived as a viable economic solution to the problems incurred by economic shifts, but they do not deliver on their promise. Most new jobs that prisons provide do not go to local workers. Construction and higher-wage jobs go to outside firms. Those incarcerated may even take jobs away from low-wage workers in the region,

and the establishment of a prison may discourage other industries from opening in a ‘prison-town.’ (p.76)

While economic promise, despite how unfulfilled it may be, is an understandable reason for depressed communities to actively seek prisons (although a better solution may be to join forces with advocates who fight for increased minimum wage among other things), little is thought about the humanity of these locations. Parents who are incarcerated often serve time in jails or prisons that are geographically far away from their homes and are not easily accessible by public transportation. The Bureau of Prisons states that it *tries* to keep those who are incarcerated in proximity to their loved ones. However, someone is “proximate” to family if they are within 500 miles (Bureau of Prisons, 2018). Assuming the family owns a car, has extra money for gas and tolls and can afford to use their time for visits, driving 500 miles without any stops is estimated to take over seven hours. For most, it will take much longer as road trips with children often require stops along the way for bathroom and food breaks. The most recent data on parent-child distance found that 62% of incarcerated parents in state prisons and 84% of parents in the federal system live more than 100 miles away from their children.⁶ The humanity factor, namely the separation from loved ones, is rarely considered. Instead, faulty economic promises drive prison location decision making.

In addition to the construction and operation of prisons by the State and Federal Government, we also must look at the privatization of prisons. In a 2016 memo to the acting director of the BOP (Bureau of Prisons), acting Attorney General Sally Yates wrote:

Between 1980 and 2013, the federal prison population increased by almost 800 percent, often at a far faster rate than the Federal Bureau of Prisons could accommodate.

⁶ Mumola (2000), *Incarcerated Parents and Their Children*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, p.5.

In an effort to manage the rising prison population, about a decade ago, the Bureau began contracting with privately operated correctional institutions to confine some federal inmates. By 2013, as both the federal prison population and the proportion of federal prisoners in private facilities reached their peak, the Bureau was housing approximately 15 percent of its population, or nearly 30,000 inmates, in privately operated prisons. (p.1)

The privatization of prisons is problematic when we dissect what it means to have prisons for profit. Corporations such as CoreCivic (formerly The Corrections Corporation of America or CCA) and The GEO Group, Inc., have a vested interest in keeping people in prison. Simply put, the more prisoners, the more profit. Therefore, the ideas of rehabilitation and release are at odds with their business. In addition, these corporations have no interest in working to create a fair and balanced justice system because their livelihood depends upon people remaining behind bars. How the inmates end up in prison, whether just or unjust, is of little concern. The 2005 annual report from the CoreCivic made this tenuous relationship clear when it stated:

Our growth is generally dependent upon our ability to obtain new contracts and develop and manage new correctional and detention facilities...The demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by relaxation of enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction and sentencing practices or through the decriminalization of certain activities that are currently proscribed by our criminal laws. (Meiners, 2007, p.230)

This statement is telling in many ways. One, it acknowledges that the growth of their business is dependent upon more individuals being incarcerated and those who are already incarcerated remaining that way. Two, it acknowledges that reform to the criminal justice system, especially the decriminalization of certain offenses, for example being in possession of a small amount of marijuana, would be counter to the company's best interests. This illustrates the inherent conflict

of private prisons. They need people to be incarcerated and therefore have no reason to rehabilitate or release those who are currently incarcerated.

In addition to the conflict of interests, private prisons have been found to be unsafe and ineffective. In the same 2016 memo, Yates wrote:

Private prisons served an important role during a difficult period, but time has shown that they compare poorly to our own Bureau facilities. They simply do not provide the same level of correctional services, programs, and resources; they do not save substantially on costs; and as noted in a recent report by the Department's Office of Inspector General, they do not maintain the same level of safety and security. The rehabilitative services that the Bureau provides, such as educational programs and job training, have proved difficult to replicate and outsource- and these services are essential to reducing recidivism and improving public safety. (p.1)

The purpose of Yates memo was to instruct the BOP to cease renewing contracts with private prisons-an Obama era policy that hoped to decrease the number of private prisons in the U.S. Most states adhered, but there were some holdouts. California for one, continues to renew contracts for private prisons, partly due to increased immigration policing. GEO Group, Inc. and CoreCivic are two firms that currently have government contracts to detain individuals in private settings. Buiano and Ferriss (2018) write:

The state of California, Hininger [CoreCivic's CEO] added, is a major CoreCivic client. But he explained during the call that as the Golden State continues efforts to reduce prison overcrowding—and its need for out-of-state inmate placement—immigrant detainees are expected to fill many of the CoreCivic beds that the loss of California inmates will leave vacant. Data that ICE supplied to the Center for Public Integrity

confirm a significant increase in immigrant-related detention. From 2015 to 2018 the average daily number of immigrants in detention went from 28,449 to 41,836. (p.1)

California's reliance on private prisons seems counterproductive considering the costs of housing a person in a California detention center was \$75,560 in 2017 (Associated Press, 2017, p.1). Increased salaries and benefits for prison employees has resulted in "a per-inmate cost that is the nation's highest — and \$2,000 above tuition, fees, room and board, and other expenses to attend Harvard⁷. Since 2015, California's per-inmate costs have surged nearly \$10,000, or about 13%. New York is a distant second in overall costs at about \$69,000." The increase in per prisoner spending can be attributed to the reduction of prisoners without the reduction of staff. There is now a ratio of one corrections for every two-people incarcerated versus a 1:4 ration in 1994. (Associated Press, 2017, p.1). In contrast, a 2017 report by California Budget and Policy Center found that California schools spend about \$10,291 per K-12 student in the state. Depending on the scale used (with cost or living adjustment or without) this places California somewhere between 22nd and 44nd in the nation for pupil spending, but number one for spending on incarcerated individuals. Davis (2003) who does not call for the reform of prisons, but instead the abolition, views schools as an alternative to incarceration. She states, "Schools can therefore be seen as the most powerful alternative to jails and prisons" (2003, p.108). However, in situations like California where annual spending on incarcerated individuals is almost seven times the annual spending on school aged children, it seems unlikely that schools can become a site for the abolition of prisons.

⁷ Harvard has recently come under scrutiny for its investments into private prisons. In fall 2018, students formed the Harvard Prison Divestment Campaign. Part of their statement reads, "The Harvard Prison Divestment Campaign seeks to sever the university's financial ties to the prison-industrial complex by advocating for Harvard's total divestment from all corporations whose existence depends on the capture, caging, and control of human beings." (Burnes & Ward, 2018).

The Prison Industrial Complex provides a useful tool for the analysis of the current incarceration situation in U.S. It is through the lens of the PIC that it becomes more understandable why the amount of correctional facilities and institutions are increasing despite their limited effect on the crime rate. The business of prisons is reliant upon the number of those incarcerated increasing and people of color, especially Black people, being forced into penal servitude. With this knowledge, it is imperative to discuss the institutionalization of punishment and how the cycle continues.

Prison: The Pipeline

The answer of how prisons can retain the population necessary to be extremely profitable can be partially answered by analyzing a third prison phenomenon: the school-to-prison pipeline. There are many variations of the school-to-prison pipeline including the schoolhouse-to jailhouse pipeline, the cradle-to-prison pipeline (Laura, 2014) and the universal carceral apparatus or carceral continuum (Shedd, 2015). I will use the term carceral continuum to acknowledge the large-scale apparatus that feeds prisons and jails, although the literature may refer to it in one of its variations. Despite semantics, all of the terms denote a path that leads and pushes certain children, primarily poor and/or children of color, toward a future that includes incarceration. Laura (2014) writes, “The schoolhouse-to jailhouse track conjures a vivid, evocative, and unambiguous image: poor and Black and Brown children being derailed from academic and vocational paths, and directed toward jails and prisons” (p.15). While Shedd (2015) states, “...the prisonlike conditions created when schools implement a universal carceral apparatus in the name of safety have unintended consequences for youth’s attitudes toward criminal injustice” (p.82).

One of the main issues associated with the carceral continuum is the use of discipline in schools, especially as it is applied to students of color. This is increasingly important because for the first time in the history of the United States a majority of the children public schools serve are children of color, with them currently making up 51% of the public school population (ACLU, 2018). With this new finding, the overzealous use of discipline on children of color has even greater consequences. Flannery (2015) writes:

The practice of pushing kids out of school and toward the juvenile and criminal justice systems has become known as the ‘school-to-prison pipeline... Fueled by zero tolerance policies and the presence of police officers in schools, and made worse by school funding cuts that overburden counselors and high-stakes testing that stress teachers, these excessive practices have resulted in the suspension, expulsions and arrests of tens of millions of public school students, especially students of color and those with disabilities or identify as LGBT. (p.43)

School discipline can be an indicator of a student’s future academic success. When a student is suspended, expelled or otherwise punished by being removed from class, they miss valuable instruction. The same ACLU report found that during the 2015-2016 school year, students missed 11 million days of school due to suspension. The report states:

The 11 million days of lost instruction from suspensions as disciplinary actions from 2015-2016 translates to more than 60,000 school years, more than 60 million hours of lost education, and billions of dollars wasted. And this is all in a single school year. (ACLU, 2018)

Their findings also show that these missed days due to suspension overwhelmingly belong to Black children. A map of the country provided by the ACLU shows the highest concentration of

suspensions in the south east, particularly in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. For example, in Nash County, North Carolina the map indicates that for every 100 Black students in the county, 169 days are lost to suspension while for every 100 white students, 41 days are lost to suspension (ACLU, 2018). It is worth noting that the states with the highest concentration of days' loss to suspension are often former confederate states who have a history of slavery, penal servitude, and black codes. Regardless of race, students who face severe discipline measures in school, including expulsion and suspension, are less likely to graduate. A report from the Civil Rights Project (2000) found that:

Suspension is a moderate to strong predictor of a student dropping out of school; more than 30% of sophomores who drop out have been suspended. Beyond dropping out, children shut out from the education system are more likely to engage in conduct detrimental to the safety of their families and communities. (p.13)

The issue of school discipline is worth exploring for all children, but it is particularly important to Black children. Black males, who as noted before make up a disproportionate amount of the prison population, also receive a disproportionate amount of discipline in school. Laura (2014) states, "Black youth, particularly males are more likely than any other group in the United States to be punished in schools, typically through some form of exclusion" (p.17). Aligned with these statistics is the fact that "Black youth are overrepresented in juvenile arrests; while only 17% of the population, more than half (51 percent) of all juvenile arrests for violent crimes in 2011 involved Black youth" (Shedd, 2015, p.83). The tendency of adults to overdiscipline certain groups as opposed to others seems to be based on the connotations associated with each group. For example, Black boys are more likely to be labeled by adults as intentionally defiant as

opposed to the perception of mischievous white boys (Laura, 2014). Assata Shakur highlights the tendency of teachers to target minority students in her autobiography. She writes:

For the first time, I became aware of what my mother had been going through all those years trying to teach in New York schools. Most of these principals are caught up in bureaucracy and they force the teachers to be caught up in it too. They care more about what the teachers have written in their plan books than what they are actually teaching in class. My mother was working in an environment where white teachers often showed a hostile, condescending attitude toward Black children and where some teachers thought of themselves as zookeepers rather than teachers. (Shakur, 1987, p.188)

The tendency for Black students to be overdisciplined while being undertaught has been identified by many researchers. Delpit (2012) states, “Because of societal stereotypes affecting African American boys, teachers frequently negatively react to normal young black boy behavior” (p.15). While Emdin (2016) describes his time as a teacher and the process of separating the troublemakers from the good students by stating, “For many white teachers, the process held an unmistakable element of racism. Phrases like ‘these kids’ or ‘those kids’ were often clearly code words for bad black and brown children” (p.33). Emdin’s observations are representative of the “dog whistles” discussed earlier. While the term ‘these kids’ is not inherently offensive, those who understand the implicit meaning behind the words know it is a signal of otherness.

It is important to note that while most conversation about the negative expectations and treatment of Black children in school centers around Black males, Black females are an important, but often under discussed part of the issue. Morris (2016) highlights this deficit, stating:

I argue that the ‘pipeline’ framework has been largely developed from the conditions and experiences of males. It limits our ability to see the ways in which Black girls are affected by surveillance (zero-tolerance policies, law enforcement, law enforcement in schools, metal detectors, etc.) and the ways in which advocates, scholars and other stakeholders may have wrongfully masculinized Black girls’ experiences. It encourages a kind of myopia that leaves everyone involved without a proper understanding or articulation of the school relationships and other factors that put Black girls in ‘the system’ and on paths toward incarceration. (p.9)

Morris’ observation is extremely important because 1) as a patriarchal society, issues relating to males seem to take precedence even in arenas which seek to be inclusive, such as social justice research and 2) while the prison population has slightly decreased as whole, the incarceration rates of women increased by 700% between 1980 and 2016 (The Sentencing Project, 2018). This increase mirrors what is occurring in schools through suspension/expulsion and the disproportionality of the juvenile justice system. While it has not been explicitly stated that the carceral continuum or school-to-prison-pipeline is a male only phenomenon, most literature in the area focuses heavily on the Black and brown male experience. The exponential increase of women being incarcerated, especially women of color, should signal that the same policies that funnel Black males from pre-k classrooms to penitentiary cells, affect woman as well. A 2015 report titled *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected* found:

Black boys are disciplined more than any other group, and are far more likely than white boys to be disciplined. Black girls are also punished more than other girls. In addition, the relative risk for suspension is higher for Black girls when compared to white girls than it is for Black boys when compared to white boys. As such, these data reveal that in

some cases, race may be a more significant factor for females than it is for males.

(Williams Crenshaw, p.17)

While discipline has always been a part of formal schooling, zero tolerance policies are relatively new. Prior to being a school related term, zero-tolerance was used in law enforcement starting in the early 1980s. It is most closely associated with the broken window theory championed by criminologist George Kelling and adopted by the Newark, New Jersey police department. The broken window theory states, “...if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighborhoods as in rundown ones...one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing” (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p.2). The idea at the time was that smaller issues such as loitering, broken windows, and rowdiness, even those viewed more as a nuisance than an actual crime, would lead to larger crimes. Essentially small undesirable behaviors would eventually snowball into larger offenses and that one effective way to stop this from happening was to have zero-tolerance for lowest level infractions. When confronted with the issues of fairness, tolerance and racism in policing, Kelling championed the well-being of the whole community over the rights of the individual stating:

Arresting a single drunk or a single vagrant who has harmed no identifiable person seems unjust, and in a sense, it is. But failing to do anything about a score of drunks or a hundred vagrants may destroy an entire community. A particular rule that seems to make sense in the individual case makes no sense when it is made a universal rule and applied to all cases. (Kelling & Wilson, 1982, p.3)

Zero-tolerance was then adopted by the U.S. Navy in relation to the drug use of its sailors. In 1983 the Navy reassigned over 40 sailors it suspected of drug use; by 1986 any sea craft carrying

or transporting any amount of drugs was impounded and by 1988 custom officials were ordered to “seize the vehicles and property of anyone crossing the border into the United States with even trace amounts of drugs” (Schoonover, 2009, p.22). Soon educational institutions were adopting zero tolerance policies. The Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) signed by President Bill Clinton had a provision called the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) which required a school to expel a student who a student who is determined to have brought a firearm to a school, or to have possessed a firearm at a school, under the jurisdiction of local educational agencies in that State. (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Since this time zero-tolerance policies in schools have evolved to “the policy or practice of not tolerating undesirable behavior, such as violence or illegal drug use, with the automatic imposition of severe penalties even with first offenses” (Detch, Njie, Potts & Walton, 2003, p.16). This broad definition allows zero-tolerance policies to vary greatly from state to state, district to district and even school to school. In fact, while zero-tolerance school policies originated as policies against guns and weapons in school, a 2016 ACLU report found:

Although there were over 1 million ‘serious offenses’ involving students reported in the 2015-16 school year, over 96 percent of these related to fights, physical attacks, or threats without weapons. Only 3 percent of the million offenses actually involved a weapon, and less than 3% of all public schools reported an incident of physical attack or fight *with* a weapon. (p.1)

While all 50 states have some sort of zero-tolerance policy in their state laws, the efficacy purpose of these laws has been continually securitized and questioned. A 2006 report by the American Psychological Association’s Task Force on Zero Tolerance Policies found, “adolescents before the age of 15 were psychologically incapable of understanding the full

significance of their actions as they relate to a mandated punishment” (Schoonover, 2009, p.23). In addition to the student’s inability to fully comprehend the consequences of zero-tolerance policies, much of current research on the topic shows that zero tolerance policies in school fail to improve safety in schools and instead are used to further marginalize certain groups of students including Black and brown children, poor students, and LGBTQ students (Davis, 2003; Hyman & Snook, 1999; Laura, 2014; Morris, 2016; Nolan, 2011; Shedd, 2015). For example, Schoonover (2009) writes:

Many educational leaders have questioned if the reason zero tolerance policies are still in place is that they truly deter violence or if they are an easy way for educational leaders to expel students who traditionally perform poorly on standardized tests (McAndrews, 2001). Expelling disruptive students who perform poorly in school can result in an increase of the school’s overall performance because discipline offenders are often low achievers (McAndrews, 2001). In the case of Florida, a school’s letter-grade may increase if enough low performers are removed. (p.30)

While the popularity of zero-tolerance policies seems to be waning due to increased scrutiny, they are still ubiquitous in the educational domain and other areas. Most recently, the Trump administration has adopted a zero-tolerance policy toward individuals who enter the U.S. without proper documentation and permission. The policy has the effect of separating families at the border as parents are sent for prosecution and their children are held elsewhere. Like broken window policing and zero-tolerance school policies, the hope is that strict enforcement will deter individuals from performing an undesired act because the greater good of the community is more important than an individual’s rights. However, like the War on Drugs, harsh consequences seem

to do little to deter the unwanted behaviors and instead seem to manifest their own set of societal problems.

Despite research that shows that harsh discipline procedures have negative consequences for students, many are embracing even stricter discipline policies. Eva Moskowitz, founder of Success Charter Schools, lauded her schools stern disciplinary protocol in a 2015 Op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal, stating:

Suspensions convey the critical message to students and parents that certain behavior is inconsistent with being a member of the school community...Proponents of lax discipline claim it would benefit minority students, who are suspended at higher rates than their white peers. But minority students are also the most likely to suffer the adverse consequence of lax discipline—that is, their education is disrupted by a chaotic school environment or by violence...Lax discipline won't strike a blow for civil rights. Instead it will perpetuate the real civil-rights violation—the woeful failure to educate the vast majority of the city's minority children and prepare them for life's challenges. (p.2)

Moskowitz's assertion that she is preparing minority children for "life's challenges" is worth dissecting. Moskowitz asserts that the real civil-rights problem is that the current education system is failing to prepare minority children for life's challenges, therefore making it clear that the challenges minority children face are different than white children. The most pressing challenge for minority children in contrast to their white peers is racism and racial discrimination. Moskowitz's view that lax discipline will fail to prepare minority children for racism is interesting. On one hand, she is correct, but not in the way that she intends to be. Strict school discipline policies that disproportionately target minority students are often one of the first places minority children encounter racial prejudice and unfairness in treatment and

consequences. Therefore, if exposure is equated with preparedness, then yes, strict discipline can prepare minority students for the type of discrimination they will face in an unjust society.

However, indoctrinating minority students into an unfair system and teaching them to stay in their place seems more aligned with Moskowitz's thinking than the former scenario. Much like the Black codes were used to maintain the racialized social order once slavery was abolished, Moskowitz supports discipline policies that teach Black children to follow white cultural norms that specifically target them while in the guise of being for their own well-being. Essentially Moskowitz is calling for minority children to assimilate into her view of acceptable behavior. The assumption here is that minority children are not taught how to behave, their homes are culturally bankrupt, and that it is up to the school to teach these children appropriate behaviors. Furthermore, her assertion that "Discipline also helps prepare students for the real world. In that world, when you assault your co-worker or curse out your boss, you don't get a 'restorative circle,' you get fired" is both an extreme example and untrue (Moskowitz, 2015, p.3).

Restorative practices do occur in the workplace. The Restorative Justice Initiative describes restorative justice in the following way:

Restorative justice is a theory of justice that can be employed both re-actively, in response to a conflict and/or crime, and proactively to strengthen community by fostering communication and empathy. Restorative Justice invites everyone impacted by a conflict and/or crime to develop a shared understanding of both the root causes and the effects. Restorative Justice seeks to address the needs of those who have been harmed while encouraging those who have cause harm to take responsibility. (p.1)

The NYC Department of Education offers employees the chance for workplace mediation and restorative practices including "the circle process" and the "community conferencing process."

Therefore, Moskowitz's assertion that people will not receive a restorative circle for conflicts at work is false and the evidence to support that is readily available on the website for New York City government employees. Restorative practices are not only for school and workplace conflicts. Many (Drucker, 2018; DuBois Gulliard, 2018; Travis & Ward; 2003) are touting restorative practices as an alternative to prison sentences, especially in cases of low level offenses.

Unfortunately, the tone of Moskowitz's piece is that of a "White Savior" (Anderson, 2013; Aronson, 2017) who believes that she knows what is best for minority children. As Aronson (2017) writes:

In the larger system of white supremacy, we are falsely taught being white is better so it makes sense why we would instill our white values upon students of Color. We falsely believe ourselves to be the "chosen ones" who can save these children through our hard work ethic, our creative teaching methods, and our enthusiasm and dedication. (pp.51-52, emphasis in original)

Moskowitz's belief that she knows what is best for minority children may be well-intentioned, but it is dangerous and rooted in white supremacy. The strict discipline policies she promotes are exactly the type of policies that push minority children out of school and into the penal system.

As Shalaby (2017) observes:

Teacher preparation programs around the country train new teachers to believe that these less-than-human responses are strategies of good classroom management. These often idealistic and earnest teachers-to-be are taught that good teachers command control over students, and they are encouraged to learn to use behavioral systems of reward and punishment that are actually more appropriate for training animals than for educating free

human beings. Teachers-in-training learn to punish transgressions because it is not controversial to be castigated if you misbehave. It is your choice and your fault. This logic is deeply embedded in the American psyche-the nation with one of the highest incarceration rates in the world-and it justifies our decision to throw away young lives by making young people think the fault for that exclusion is entirely their own. (xxii)

In addition to school instituted discipline policies, many students now face police officers in their schools on a daily basis. In fact, “millions of students are in schools with cops, but no counselor, social worker or nurse...The federal data indicates that many of these schools prioritize law enforcement rather than mental health and social services” (ACLU, 2018, p.1). School violence, particularly school shootings, have been given as the reason that police officers are needed in schools. These officers, called School Resource Officers or SROs, are there in theory for worthwhile reasons. Henning (2017) writes:

Many policymakers advocate for the presence of SROs in schools as a strategy for deterring violence and delinquency. Others have loftier goals. They hope that SROs will improve the image of police generally and increase the level of respect that young people have for the law and the role of law enforcement. (p.66)

However, respect for the law and a decrease in school violence are rarely the outcomes of having SROs in a school community. As of June 2018, there have been 23 school shootings, an average of one per week, in the U.S. (Ahmed & Walker, 2018). These shootings are geographically varied including Michigan, New York, Texas and California, but have not generally occurred in urban areas. Acknowledging this phenomenon, Henning (2017) writes “Ironically, SROs are especially common in urban public schools in impoverished communities, notwithstanding, evidence that most recent mass shootings have occurred in school and other venues dominated

by middle-class whites” (p.66). On Valentine’s Day 2018, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz entered his high school and murdered 17 people and injured 17 others after being suspended. There was an armed SRO on duty that day. He did not enter the building and subdue Cruz. Instead, he remained outside as many lives were lost and the others were forever changed. Having an SRO on staff did little to deter violence on that day. Since their presence does little to deter the types of violence their positions were created to prevent [mass shootings], the purpose and effects of police in schools needs to be examined. Henning (2017) writes:

Historically, most crime committed at school was not reported to the police. More recently, the presence of SROs has increased arrests for low-level offenses, including non-serious assaults typical of an adolescent school fight or disorderly conduct... As expected, school-based arrests disproportionately affect black boys and contribute significantly to the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Studies show that schools with higher percentages of black and Hispanic students are more likely to employ school resource officers or other security personnel. (p.67)

Having officers in the school introduces students, especially poor students of color, to police at an early age. Because the SROs can criminalize normal school behavioral incidents, more and more students of color are entering the justice system. The school setting, which many view as an imperative tool to our prison nation, has become for some, a part of the carceral continuum. As Nolan (2011) writes:

Police officers and safety agents had a good deal of authority and influence over daily life in the school...When they became involved in a disciplinary incident, even a minor one, the situation immediately became a ‘police matter,’ and school personnel would need to defer to them. (p.5)

The escalation from small infraction to “police matter” makes it very easy for children to transition from students to “criminals.” As Henning (2017) writes:

The problem is that police are always police...In schools, community policing goals are outweighed by traditional law enforcement objectives such as increasing the flow of information between schools and police; gathering and exchanging information about gangs, drug dealers and other allegedly “problematic” students; referring youth to juvenile courts; investigating suspected criminal activity; making arrests; and reporting misconduct to probation officers. (p.67)

The PIC cannot be separated from zero-tolerance policies and policing in schools. In 2011 Mark Ciaverella Jr., a judge in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania was convicted of racketeering and other offenses for his part in a plot to populate two for profit juvenile detention centers. Ciaverella, Jr. had previously been popular with many due to his tough stance on crime and complete embrace of zero-tolerance policies. He regularly sentenced the youth that appeared before him (often without counsel) to juvenile detention facilities instead of community service. It was later determined that Ciaverella, Jr. and his boss, Judge Michael Conahan, received almost three million dollars from Robert Powell, the co-owner of two facilities that Ciaverella, Jr. regularly sent youth, some as young as 10 years old and often first time offenders. The scandal, which became known as “Kids for Cash” in the media, forced the state of Pennsylvania to overturn 4,000 of Ciaverella’s convictions (Hurdle & Tavernise, 2011). While Ciaverella, Jr. received a 28-year sentence (which he is currently appealing), his crimes should not be viewed as an isolated incident. The carceral continuum is illustrated and exemplified by this case. Students

as young as five⁸ are being suspended or expelled from schools under zero-tolerance policies. Research shows that these policies unjustly target and disproportionately affect youth of color and that students who are penalized under these policies are more likely to drop out. With police in schools, many children are introduced to the criminal justice system at an early age because what historically would have been school or home discipline issues, now have a chance to become a criminal offense. When juveniles go to court, they then have a chance to encounter judges like Ciaverella, Jr. who are not primarily concerned with the youth's future, but instead their own financial gain. Simultaneously, for-profit detention facilities continue to operate with the understanding that their business depends upon keeping bodies in their beds and therefore spend thousands and in the case of Ciaverella, Jr., millions, to ensure their business remains profitable.

When discussing the phenomenon of mass incarceration, including the boom, the industrial complex and the pipeline, it becomes apparent just how vulnerable minority bodies are to the clutches of the criminal justice system. It is no surprise that the boom followed the Civil Rights Movement, a period in United States history where Blacks demanded equal rights and made some tremendous and overdue gains, including the right to vote and the right to quality integrated schools⁹. These gains did not come without opposition and in fact, the prison boom may have been one of the best ways to stifle the movement. Many researchers have highlighted the dangers of the post racial society myth which theorizes that the U.S. has somehow overcome

⁸ In Connecticut, Kindergarten suspensions/expulsions almost doubled between the 2001-2002 school year and the 2002-2003 school year, from 463 to 901 under zero-tolerance policies with many students being punished for developmentally appropriate behaviors such as fighting, defiance and temper tantrums (Schoonover, 2009).

⁹ The goal of the Civil Rights Movement was to attain equal rights for all the citizens of the U.S., in particular Black Americans who had endured years of racism and discrimination. Despite advances in many areas, many hopes of the Civil Rights Era remained unfulfilled. Blacks are still paid less than their white counterparts. Hate organizations such as the Klu Klux Klan still exist and some may say have even thrived in today's political climate. Correctional facilities are still disproportionately occupied by people of color, particularly Black men.

its racist history to become a nation where the color of your skin no longer matters (Bobo & Dawson, 2009; Coates, 2015; Tesler, 2016). The post racial society conversation seems to emerge anytime there are seeming advancements in the rights of minorities, especially Black people, in the United States such as the Civil Rights Movement or the election of President Barack Obama. However, the period of advancement is usually followed by a strong response from a very racialized American public. As noted earlier, the Civil Rights Movement was followed by the prison boom and the presidency of Barack Obama was followed by the election of Donald Trump, a president who seems to have a strong base of white supremacist supporters and wishes to cater to them.¹⁰ If history has taught us anything, it is that periods of progress do not signify a post racial society; instead they incite a strong racial response that can have severe effects such as the mass incarceration of Black and brown people. Additionally, it cannot be ignored that prisons are now a profitable business for many corporations and therefore maintaining prison populations becomes imperative to the financial success of many powerful people.

Now that the context for mass incarceration has been examined, it is important to study the literature currently available about the collateral damage of this phenomenon. As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write, “America’s incarceration policies have led to the greatest separation of families since the end of chattel slavery and quite possibly the greatest separation of children from their parents in human history” (p.179). For the last 20 years, there has been a growing body of literature concerning the children of those who are incarcerated. As stated prior, this study seeks to add to this body of literature by highlighting the “goodness” of these children. In

¹⁰ In August 2017 a white nationalist rally turned violent, leaving one counter protestor, Heather Heyer, dead. President Trump assigned guilt to both parties and said that some of the white nationalists were “very fine people.” Former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard, David Duke, thanked the president on twitter for his support (Wolf, 2017).

the next section, literature published concerning children of incarcerated parents will be examined and classified based on its depiction of its subjects.

Adverse Outcomes

The Lower Intelligence Fallacy

Much of the available literature on the issue of children with an incarcerated parent often constructs these children in unflattering ways. Perhaps in an attempt to draw attention to the topic, the research in this area frequently constructs these children as vulnerable and at risk for adverse outcomes. They are described as children from broken homes and poverty who have behavioral issues at school and jail in their future. Many studies emphasize that these children were already at a “high-risk” for certain outcomes prior to their parent’s incarceration due to a family life which often contains abuse, poverty, community violence and substance abuse among other issues. As Eddy and Kjellstrand, (2011) state, “the incarceration of a family member is unlikely to mark the beginning of problems for a child and family” (p.20). Due to the amount of issues that many children who have an incarcerated parent face, Wakefield and Wildeman (2014) write:

Yet, we caution against too much optimism because of the damaging consequences of mass imprisonment for the children of the prison boom...Optimism about the reductions in the imprisonment rate and the resilience of children must therefore be set against the backdrop of the children of the prison boom—a lost generation now coming of age. (p.25)

Referring to this population as “lost” is representative of the negative, pitiful way children of incarcerated parents are often portrayed. Exploring the wide range of adverse effects that are reported in the literature about children with incarcerated parents is essential to understanding

how the stigma attached to incarceration is then reinforced and reproduced in important spaces such as schools.

For example, the study *Children's Family Environments and Intellectual Outcomes During Maternal Incarceration* constructs children with incarcerated parents as at-risk for lower intelligence. The study set out to determine the experienced risks, IQ scores, and family environments of young (2.5-7.5 years of age) children with incarcerated mothers (Poehlmann, 2005). In order to determine IQ score, the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale was administered by trained graduate students. The study concluded that 32% of the children scored sub average on the scale, while 10% scored in the delayed range. The author then noted that these results are "one and a half times the number expected based on a normal curve" (Poehlmann, 2005, p.1280). The use of this test to determine the intelligence of these children is problematic. The validity of IQ tests has been widely disputed (Aronson & Steele; 1995; Flynn, 1987; Nisbett, 2013; Vergano, 2011). For several decades, many have argued "psychologists should stop saying IQ tests measure intelligence" (Flynn, 1987, p.188). This idea has even made its way out of academic journals and into mainstream news. An article in USA Today from 2011 titled *I.Q. Scores Don't Predict Success as Much as Motivation* by Dan Vergano, cites a recent study which appeared in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. The study, which was led by a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, found that IQ tests measure the motivation of the person taking the test to do well on it, rather than their actual intelligence. Some children may be more motivated to do well on the test than others for various reasons and this affects the outcome. Another issue that attaches itself to the use of IQ tests is cultural bias. Children of incarcerated parents are overwhelmingly children of color and many IQ tests have come under scrutiny for being culturally biased. In addition to culture bias, the stereotype threat may also

account for the performance of African-Americans on standardized tests, such an IQ test.

Aronson and Steele (1995) state:

...whenever African-American students perform an explicitly scholastic or intellectual task, they face the threat of confirming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype—a suspicion—about their group’s intellectual ability and competence...And the self-threat it causes—through a variety of mechanisms—may interfere with the intellectual functioning of students, particularly during standardized tests. (p797)

Delpit (2012) supports the theory of stereotype threat writing, “African Americans, as well as others who are marginalized by the views of the larger society, are also affected deeply by exposure to the larger society’s assumptions of blacks’ inferiority when it comes to test performance” (p.17). Therefore, it does not seem that any relationship drawn between poor IQ scores and parental incarceration should be supported in research. In addition, given the lack of validity of IQ tests and their cultural bias, it becomes alarming that they are used not only in research, but also in schools. IQ tests are often used to qualify certain students for special education programs. Special education, like prison, is another space where people of color, especially those of Black and Latinx descent are extremely overrepresented. In addition to issues of validity, cultural bias, and the stereotype threat, the idea that there is only one type of intelligence and that it can be captured in a single test is flawed. IQ tests should not be used to judge or label anyone, especially people from marginalized groups, whose intelligence is often already questioned prior to even taking the test. As Nisbett (2013) explains:

The measurement of intelligence is one of psychology's greatest achievements, and one of its most controversial. Critics complain that no single test can capture the complexity of human intelligence, all measurement is imperfect, and no single measure is completely

free from cultural bias; they also point out that there is the potential for misuse of scores on tests of intelligence. There is some merit to all these criticisms. (p.11)

The Criminals Breed Criminals Fallacy

In addition to being constructed as less intelligent, children with incarcerated parents are also described as at risk for mental and emotional issues in the present and in the future. Hairston and Seymour (2001) observe, “The existing literature, though scarce, does indicate that children whose parents are incarcerated experience a variety of negative consequences, particularly in terms of their emotional health and well-being; contact with their parents; and physical care and custody” (p.4). The challenges include, but are not limited to separation anxiety, unstable childcare arrangements, stress, and behavioral issues (Farrington, Murray, & Sekol, 2012). As Bocknek, Britner and Sanderson (2009) observe, behavioral issues or conduct problems “are associated with parent criminality, placing children of prisoners at a greater risk to engage in criminal activity and be imprisoned themselves” (p.324).

It is not a surprise that parental incarceration is mostly associated with negative consequences, but it is interesting how the trauma of parental separation due to incarceration is pathologized in comparison to other instances of parental separation. Bocknek, Britner and Sanderson (2009) observe, “Children of prisoners are often compared to children who have been separated from parents through both concrete and ambiguous loss by death, divorce, or child welfare service interventions” (p.324). However, it is rare to read literature that presents divorce or death of a parent as indicators of future criminality. Falk (2001) sheds light on the tendency of a child with an incarcerated parent to be labeled at risk for future criminal activity when he writes, “American criminology has shown that to become a criminal it is necessary to interact with people already involved in that behavior. That is true of all other occupations” (p.316). There are many who

would argue that to become a “criminal” is much easier than Falk proposes; it only takes being the wrong race, being in the wrong income bracket, being in the wrong place at the wrong time or a combination of all three. Despite the shortcomings of his assessment, it does go a long way toward explaining why people acknowledge that while both children of incarcerated parents and children of divorce experience the trauma of losing a parent, only the child with an incarcerated parent is constructed as destined for a future in the criminal justice system. Falk’s view can be applied to parental incarceration; the parent (criminal) interacts with their child and therefore the child is more likely to become a criminal. Bocknek, Britner and Sanderson (2009) explain:

Loss due to parental incarceration is likely to impact children of prisoners differently than children who experience other forms of parental loss and trauma because of the complex family issue and instability experienced during incarceration... In additional, many of these children live in urban areas and are exposed to community violence. (p.324)

There is an assumption about the families that children of incarcerated parents come from that is not present in other types of parental loss, except for child welfare service interventions. Parental incarceration comes with the assumption that the family was in disarray prior to the incarceration.

The Destined for Failure Fallacy

The assumption that children with incarcerated parents come from broken homes is evident in the literature about this population. For example, in much of the literature, incarceration is not presented as the main issue in the destruction of a family unit because essentially, it was already broken. Wacquant (2010) writes:

Consider the social profile of the clientele of the nation’s jail-the gateway into America’s carceral archipelago. The clientele is drawn overwhelmingly from the most

precarious fractions of the urban working class: fewer than half of inmates held a full-time job at the time of arraignment and two-thirds issue from households with an annual income coming to less than *half* the ‘poverty line’; only 13 percent have some postsecondary education (compared to a national rate above one-half); 60 percent did not grow up with both parents, including 14 percent raised in foster homes or orphanages; and every other detainee has had a family member of his behind bars. (p.79)

Looking at this description of incarcerated individuals, it is not surprising that many studies emphasize that children with an incarcerated parent were already at a “high-risk” for certain outcomes prior to their parent’s incarceration. It is possible to infer that if prior to incarceration most of these individuals were living in poor conditions and had little formal education, then those parents were raising their child/children in conditions of poverty and other less than desirable circumstances. Many researchers have already noted that the incarcerated population disproportionately consists of poor people (Alexander, 2010; Davis, 2003; Jones & Mauer, 2013, Laura, 2014). What should be noted is that incarceration also causes families, many who were already financially strained, to experience even greater financial difficulties by removing the earning potential of the person who is incarcerated, while placing an additional financial burden in the form of calls, visits and commissary on the family. In the United States, almost 21% of children are living in a household below the federal poverty threshold in 2018, while 43% of all children live in low-income houses (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2018). This equates to about 15 million children (below the poverty threshold), a number which no doubt includes many children who are currently experiencing or have previously experienced parental incarceration. Research has shown that children who live in poverty are more likely to experience many adverse effects such as low academic achievement, lack of persistence in

school and increased risk of teen pregnancy and incarceration (McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2012). While no attempt will be made here to analyze studies surrounding poverty, it is worthwhile to note that many of the effects that people attribute to parental incarceration have simply been moved from studies about poverty¹¹ and repeated in studies about families who experience incarceration. Therefore, it is almost impossible to separate the effects of incarceration with the effects of poverty using statistical data.

Most studies acknowledge that there is no real causal link between parental incarceration and adverse outcomes precisely because research shows that these children were already at risk based on their home lives. Wakefield and Wildeman (2014) state, “Based on the disadvantages these children face before going to prison, we might expect null effects of parental incarceration” (pp.58-59). Essentially, what is being said here is that the children’s lives were already so bleak that some would assume that the incarceration of their parent has no effect at all. While the authors go on to counter this assessment, it is amazing to think that these children are viewed as having such terrible lives that one may assume that losing a parent to incarceration would not even be a significant event in their lives. Other studies also acknowledge the difficulty of linking adverse outcomes to parental incarceration. Eddy and Kjellstrand (2011) state:

Because of multiple co-occurring risks, it is unclear if parental incarceration is a risk marker (a spurious indicator of other risks within the family), an additional risk factor over and beyond the other risks the children and their families are experiencing, or a risk mechanism (a situation that leads to additional factors such as financial strain, emotional stress, social stigma, and parenting stress)...Results from these latter studies suggest that the broader psychological risks in families (such as poverty, poor parental mental health,

¹¹ Please see Appendix A for a list of some of the effects of poverty on children. Please note how similar the effects of poverty are with the adverse outcomes associated with parental incarceration.

and poor parenting or family function) rather than specifically parental incarceration account for the subsequent behavioral problems for children whose parents have been incarcerated. (p.553)

It is in this space that the rhetoric of adverse outcomes becomes complex. The argument here is not that parental incarceration has no effect on children. However, it is worth noting that none of the adverse outcomes examined have been directly linked to parental incarceration, yet the literature on this population continually repeats them, while acknowledging that there are most likely additional, preeminent causes. As the National Conference of States Legislatures (2009) writes:

One major challenge confronting researchers is disentangling the effects of parental incarceration from the effects of other factors that could have existed long before incarceration, such as child maltreatment, parental use of alcohol or drugs, parental mental illness and domestic violence. Many studies fail to account for these background risk factors and include other methodological flaws, some claims about how parental incarceration affects children appear in the research, advocacy and policy literature might not be supported by empirical evidence. One such claim is that children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely than other children to be incarcerated as adults. No empirical data currently support this claim. (Christian, p.2)

I am struck by the fact that these adverse outcomes get repeated without proof or causal evidence. It may be said that it is important for these possible outcomes to be known to teachers, caregivers and other adults who interact with children with an incarcerated parent. However, it seems that repeating these outcomes is less likely to inspire understanding and more likely to confirm bias about certain families. Therefore, when imprisonment gets attached to poverty,

abuse, drugs and a host of other negative situations that then allows a person to create a picture of that child's life based on parental incarceration. The current portrayal of these children has piqued my interest in the topic, especially in comparison to my lived experience. While I cannot argue that aspects of these findings are not true of some children who have incarcerated parents (as well as children who do not), I can confirm that the current literature does not represent all of the experiences of these children. The damage-based picture painted by much of the research hinders the audience and society from seeing these children for the complex individuals they are. This is in large part due to the fact that much of this research failed to include the voices of those children in their work. The research was about the children of incarcerated parents, but it did not include children with incarcerated parents. Outside the world of academia, there is common saying that states, "the best person to ask about me is me." Researchers would do well to heed this advice and it is in spirit that I conducted my study. It is my job as someone looking to study and work with children who have an incarcerated parent to confront stereotypes and myths head on while simultaneously constructing what Luttrell (2013) refers to as "alternative visions" (p.170). Walkerdine (1997) echoes this sentiment when she writes:

Social Science research has been central in the management of populations and so we have a responsibility in taking apart those truths to construct narratives of our own, no matter how difficult that might be. The sure march of science will not stop while we are deconstructing! (p.76).¹²

The Move to Include and Understand

Although much of the research victimizes, pathologizes and fails to include the voices of children of incarcerated parents, there is some current literature that seeks to provide a more

¹² This quote from Valerie Walkerdine was retrieved from Wendy Luttrell's book *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds: Gender Race and the Schooling of Pregnant Teens*.

nuanced and inclusive picture of children with incarcerated parents. Nell Bernstein's 2005 book, *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*, was honored as a San Francisco Chronicle Book of the Year. The book includes the voices of children of those who are incarcerated, some parents and family members. Its chapters take the reader through the steps that often occur with parental incarceration: arrest, sentencing, visiting, grandparents, foster care, and reentry.

Bernstein weaves the narratives of those impacted by incarceration with statistics. One of the most alarming stories in the book was about the lack of consideration for a child during an arrest.

Bernstein (2005) writes:

The police came and took my mom, and I guess they thought someone else was in the house, I don't really know,' Ricky said. But no one else was in the house... They just rushed in the house and got her and left'... He remembered that each day, his mother would take him and his brother out for a walk. So he kept to the family routine, pushing the baby down the sidewalk in a stroller every day for two weeks, until a neighbor took notice and called Child Protective Services. (pp.14-15)

Ricky's story seems remarkable and reading words from the source make it all the more powerful. Unfortunately, Bernstein noted that Ricky's story was not an anomaly. Many children recounted being left behind without anyone when their parent was arrested. Through the use of first person narratives, Bernstein is able to uncover issues that many people do not know about. In addition, the children's narratives often support what researchers attempt to show. For example, earlier it was stated that the War on Drug wreaked havoc on families and communities. Bernstein's book provides the human story that supports this statement. Writing about Carl, Bernstein (2005) states:

'I think if somebody looked into it, they'd really have no problem helping her, Carl said.

I know if they hear this story, it's nobody in this world that thinks it's fair'...At FCI Dublin, Danielle [Carl's mother] is surrounded by fellow first-time offenders serving Decades-long sentences, many under mandatory sentencing laws passed in the mid-1980s', when the nation was caught up in hysteria over the spread of crack cocaine.

(p.31)

The use of the children's own words coupled with support from research makes Bernstein's book less about the perceived deficits of these children and more about the horrible challenges they face due to a system that rarely considers them. It should be asked by researchers, how many of the adverse outcomes people have connected to parental incarceration would be lessened or nonexistent if supports were put in place to assist families dealing with incarceration?

The 2011 book *What Will Happen to Me* by Howard Zehr and Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz is a collection of interviews with children with incarcerated parents and/or their caregivers and each interview is accompanied by a photograph. The book is separated into three sections 1) *The Children* includes the voices and portraits of children 2) *For Caregivers* includes the voices and portraits of grandparents and tips for caring for children with an incarcerated parent and 3) *The Issues* addresses the problems raised by children and grandparents during the book. The book itself is accessible to its audience of the families impacted by parental incarceration. It is under 100 pages and features large, beautiful portraits that take up the whole page and are juxtaposed to profound insights by the experts on parental incarceration; namely those with lived experience. The book touches me personally because it is representative of the type of book that either was not available or that I did not know existed when I was growing up. It is a book that lets children and caregivers impacted by parental incarceration know that they are not alone. Sometimes there is a sense of security in knowing that you are a part of a community and that

there are others out there like you. There is also an interview in the book with Stacey Bouchet, PhD. Her interview appears in the section “The Children” as her father was incarcerated during her youth. This particular interview is extremely important because it provides an example of a success story that is missing from so much of the literature on children with incarcerated parents. As discussed previously, studies have honed in on the adverse outcomes associated with parental incarceration without failing to highlight the success of these children. Dr. Bouchet was a child with an incarcerated parent, yet she is successful. Her success is not without struggles and that is evident in her interview. Bouchet speaks about her challenges stating, “At school I felt like I didn’t quite fit. I was different. We were poor, I had a dad who was in prison, my family was really screwed up. I was like a puzzle piece that didn’t quite fit” (Zehr & Amatutz, 2011, p.51). However, the portrayal of someone with an incarcerated parent as a productive, functional member of society is so important because it is rarely seen. This is not because children of incarcerated parents are not all of those things, but because research has been more diligent about focusing on failure than triumph. While most of the children in the book are children of color, which is representative of the prison population in general, Dr. Bouchet appears to be a white woman. While I commend the book for including someone who children and caregivers can look to for inspiration, if the book were reissued, I would suggest including other diverse adult children of incarcerated parents who may be more representative of the audience of the book. This is not to say Dr. Bouchet should be excluded; her story is quite touching, but that other people should be included in order for children to connect with someone who is more representative of them.

Gaynes and Krupat’s (2018) chapter, *Minimizing the Impact of Parental Incarceration* featured in the book *Decarcerating America: From Mass Punishment to Public Health*, does not

include the voices of children with incarcerated parents or caregivers, but is still an excellent example of how the topic of parental incarceration can be approached without pathologizing. Gaynes and Krupat use conscious language choices in their chapter. They never refer to the incarcerated parent as inmate, felon, or ex-con. Choosing to view the parent as a human being and referring to them as such, sets the tone of respect for the parent and their child. In addition, Gaynes and Krupat confront the challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents without placing the deficits within the child. Instead the deficits are viewed as failures of the system. Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write:

Families, including their incarcerated loved ones [humanizing language], frequently reported post-traumatic stress disorder, nightmares, hopelessness, depression, and anxiety. Yet families have little institutional support for addressing and healing this trauma and becoming more emotionally and financially stable during and after periods of a family member's incarceration. (p.183)

Here, the deficit is placed on the lack of support during incarceration rather than deficits within the incarcerated individual or their loved ones. In addition, Gaynes and Krupat use their platform to push back against the adverse outcome narratives, especially the link to future criminality.

They state:

And while the increased risks associated with parental incarceration are primarily associated with children's health and *not* delinquency, future criminality or incarceration, many are unfortunately quick to make that assumption and treat children of the incarcerated as 'criminals in waiting.' (Gaynes & Krupat, 2018, p.183)

The "criminals in waiting" narrative is not just a result of stigma and bias; its foundation lies in much of the aforementioned research which places parental incarceration next to negative

outcomes without being able to make a clear connection. Gaynes and Krupat make the argument that the real issue for children of incarcerated parents is their health, both physical and mental, after their parent is taken away and they are left behind without the proper supports.

While this chapter is devoid of the actual voices of children with incarcerated parents, it highlights those with lived experience and their important contributions to incarceration advocacy. Stories about the power of children of incarcerated parents are included. Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write:

Perhaps one of the first young people to speak out about her experiences as a child of an incarcerated parent was Emani Davis, who-more than two decades ago, while still a teenager- was asked to speak during a federal videoconference called ‘Children of Prisoners, Children at Risk’ about having a father in prison. She agreed to speak-if the conference organizers reframed and renamed ‘children at risk’ as ‘children of promise,” shifting the narrative about children with incarcerated parents from a negative one imposed upon them to a positive one they claimed for themselves. (p.185)

By recounting Emani’s story, Gaynes and Krupat accomplish many things. One, respect and deference is paid to the expert in this situation-Emani or the children of incarcerated parents. Two, the narrative of at-risk is challenged, both in the past when Emani first advocated for herself and other children like her and again in the chapter. Lastly, the power and intelligence of children of incarcerated parents is displayed through a success story, pushing back against deficit based narratives. The chapter goes on to highlight other movements involving youth with an incarcerated parent including Echoes of Incarceration, Project WHAT! and We Got Us Now.

There is an increasing amount of literature that aims to reframe and shift the narrative about parental incarceration, but more is needed. This study hopes to add to this body of literature by

incorporating elements of all the works mentioned above. It seeks to be inclusive and include children's voices just as Nell Bernstein did in *All Alone in the World* and Zehr and Amstutz did in *What Happens Now*. It seeks to use humanizing language and show proper respect to incarcerated individuals and their loved ones, just as Gaynes and Krupat did in *Minimizing Harm*. It also seeks to combine all of these elements and then take things a step further, by using parental incarceration as a criterion for the study, a connection between researcher and participant and a foundation for questions, but not as a central focus. This study hopes to distinguish itself by assuming that parental incarceration is not the sum of these children's parts and all they wish to speak about. It instead acts on the belief that these children are complex, varied beings whose hopes, dreams, desires and experiences are simultaneously unique and universal.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Childhoods

The relationship between critical childhood studies, stigmatization/shame, emotional labor and figured worlds were used to analyze the collected data. A critical childhood lens was vital to the credibility of this research. Barrie Thorne (2010) illuminates the critical childhood perspective wonderfully in her piece *Learning from Kids*, when she states:

In my fieldwork with kids, I wanted to overcome these barriers and to approach their social worlds as ethnographers approach the world of adults; with open-ended curiosity, and with the assumption that kids are competent social actors who take an active role in shaping their daily experiences. I wanted to sustain an attitude of respectful discovery, to uncover and document kids' points of view and meanings. To adopt that basic stance means breaking with an array of common adult assumptions. (p.408)

In addition to the acknowledgment that research on the area of children with an incarcerated parent is limited and unsatisfactory, there also needs to be an acknowledgment that even within the existing literature there is a lack of children's voice. Most of the literature about children with an incarcerated parent writes about them without actually including them. This study sought to learn about children from children. It was of paramount importance that their voices are the most prominent in this research. In order to accomplish this, I had to refute the assumption that I know what it is like to be a kid. This issue was of special importance to me since not only was I once a kid, I was also the child of an incarcerated parent. Therefore, in this study I had to embrace both my "insider" and "outsider" status and challenge the assumptions that I knew what these children feel and that I have experienced the same things that they have experienced. This framework brought with it the benefit of creating more authentic relationships with the children that was built upon mutual respect and trust. As Tsabary (2010) writes, "If you want to enter into a state of pure connection with [your] child, you can achieve this by setting aside any sense of superiority. By not hiding behind an egoic *image*, you will be able to engage [your] child as a *real person* like yourself" (p.6). While the children I interviewed were not my children, the same principle applied. In order to engage with them, I had to present myself not as the best version of myself, but instead as a real person; vulnerable and flawed. I had to model the type of authentic feelings and conversation I sought. Here, I would briefly like to discuss the concept of authenticity as an asset. "Keeping it real", "100%" or in more common terms, being honest about who you are, has always been a valued trait in many groups, and especially within Black and brown communities. Someone's ability to "keep it real" or "100%" is something that is admired and an inability to do so is viewed as a character flaw. This type of authenticity, while always venerated in certain communities, has recently made its way into more mainstream thinking. Musician Cardi B has

become a global phenomenon, not solely based on her musical talents, but also because of a dedicated fan base that is infatuated with her “realness” or in other words, her ability to be honest about certain things without worrying about her image. For example, Cardi B has discussed topics such as her own plastic surgery, her struggles and triumphs as a new mother (including changes to her mental and physical state) and her former career as a stripper¹³. While obviously talented, her authenticity is her greatest asset. Her authenticity and vulnerability allow her to connect with her fans in a way that many artists cannot. Even if people are not fans of her music, her ability to unabashedly be herself in a public space is admirable and this desire for authenticity is already present in academic literature. Hochschild (2003) writes:

We may well be seeing a response to all this [emotion management] in the rising of the approval of the unmanaged heart, the greater virtue now attached to what is ‘natural or spontaneous... The high regard for ‘natural feeling,’ then may coincide with the culturally imposed need to develop the precise opposite- an instrumental stance toward feeling. We treat spontaneous feeling, for this reason, as if it were scarce and precious; we raise it up as a virtue. (p.22)

It should also be noted that here that while vulnerable is often used in academic literature as a synonym for weak, in the discussion of authenticity as an asset, it is used differently. This vulnerability is the willingness to be open and trusting of others. It is an act of love. It is the belief that a person does not hide from the world because the world is not inherently a bad place and that even if negativity comes, the person will be strong enough to withstand it. This type of authenticity and vulnerability is both brave and strong. In the same vein, I argue for researchers to inject more vulnerability and authenticity into their research. This does not mean that researchers must reveal

¹³ While many believe the term exotic dancer is the more politically correct, Cardi B chooses to use the term stripper as evidenced by her 2016 single *Stripper Hoe*.

every private detail of their intimate life. However, it does advocate for honesty, transparency and respect. It also believes that when researchers are vulnerable with their participants, they are modeling trust. When people show a belief that others are worthy of trust, they in turn show that they too are worthy of trust. I employed this technique during this research. It would have been inauthentic to enter this research as a complete “outsider” or an “other”. It required me to be transparent about certain parts of my life. While the research could have been done without my vulnerability or authenticity, it would not have yielded the same results. Some of the stories and thoughts that the youth shared with me were shared in a space of trust, vulnerability and a mutual understanding that we were being our authentic selves to the best of our abilities. In this study, authenticity was my asset. I also had to view the children as competent and mature enough to have a conversation that involved such a heavy topic. Many people, including researchers or even caregivers of children with incarcerated parents, avoid talking to the child about incarceration because they feel that either they are not mature enough to fully understand and participate in the conversation in a meaningful way or because they fear it will (re)traumatize the child. In the space where I did my research and collaborated with the participants to share their story, these assumptions were not welcome. The children were not only viewed as advanced and capable enough to participate the conversation, they were able to lead it. Instead of being traumatized, talking about incarceration and other issues was used as a way to reflect, make meaning and heal. As Emani Davis, an adult child of a formerly incarcerated individual stated, for children with an incarcerated parent “healing is our revolution” (Davis, 2018, no page).

Stigma

Stigma is also employed as another theoretical framework in this study. In what some may deem a fitting entry into the discussion about stigma, Falk (2001) writes, “the word ‘stigma’

refers to the branding of slaves in ancient Greece” (p.32). During this time a tattoo called a stigma was used to brand slaves so that everyone who saw them would know without hesitation that this person was someone’s property. It was a way for people to easily identify where that person stood in society and a visual reminder of one’s status in the world (Falk, 2001). Goffman (1963) writing almost thirty years prior, gives the same etymology, writing, “the term stigma [originated] to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier” (p.1). It cannot be overlooked that a word that has its roots in slavery is now so connected to what some view as the modern-day version of American slavery; the penitentiary.

Today the word stigma has developed into “an invisible sign of disapproval which permits insiders to draw a line around ‘outsiders’ in order to demarcate the limits of inclusion in any group” (Falk, 2001, p.17). Goffman (1963) observes that the term is still used in a way that is similar to the original sense, but now applies “more to the disgrace itself than to the bodily evidence of it” (p.2). It is evident that many things are considered taboo in American society and carry some sort of stigma. Homosexuality, dis/ability, race, and weight are just a few of the topics that often carry some sort of stigma, which in Goffman’s words is “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (p.2). These identifiers carry certain connotations that serve to increase and reinforce their stigma. Homosexuals in the U.S. are often touted as immoral, licentious and predatory. People who are considered as overweight are often thought of as lazy and impulsive. Being Black also carries a stigma. Stevenson (2017) states, “The reality is that we live in a society that is uniquely afraid of black boys” (p.59). The fear of Black boys comes from the connotations of Black people as dangerous, dishonest, overly sexual and volatile. Some of these identifiers such as homosexuality can be hidden or “invisible” if the person so chooses, while

others such as race¹⁴ and weight usually cannot. Incarceration is just one of many situations that carry this “special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype” (Goffman, 1963, p.2). While the incarcerated individual’s stigma is visible, their loved ones can often choose to remain invisible if that is their preference.

Although this study is not focused on the stigmatization of incarcerated individuals per se, it is of the utmost importance to understand the negative connotations that engulf incarceration because it is impossible to understand the stigma that children with an incarcerated parent face without an understanding of the stigma that surrounds crime, punishment and prisons as well. In Goffman’s view children with incarcerated parents would be viewed as “wise ones.” He (1963) states:

A second type of wise person is the individual who is related through the social structure to the stigmatized individual—a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one. Thus the loyal spouse of a mental patient, the *daughter of the ex-con*, the parent of the cripple, the friend of the blind, the family of the hangman, are all obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized person to whom they are related. One response to this fate is to embrace it, and to live within the world of one's stigmatized connexion. It should be added that persons who acquire a degree of stigma in this way can themselves have connexions who acquire a little of the disease twice-removed. The problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity (p.42, emphasis added).

¹⁴ There have been cases where people have could “pass” for another race. There are historical anecdotes of very light skinned Blacks passing for white during slavery and reconstruction to gain the privileges white society was afforded.

Incarcerated individuals are often viewed as immoral, sneaky, lazy, uneducated, violent and a burden on society. While those who research this topic know that most of these stereotypes rarely hold true, in the court of public opinion they are often spoken as fact. For example, it is a fallacy that all incarcerated individuals are violent. The Federal Bureau of Prisons site indicates that as of May 2018, 46.2% of the people incarcerated committed drug offenses. Another 7.1% are incarcerated related to immigration offenses while another 6.3% are incarcerated for extortion, fraud or bribery. Homicide, aggravated assault and kidnapping, which are considered the most violent crimes make up only 3.2% of the population (Bureau of Prisons, 2018). Despite this, incarcerated individuals and even formerly incarcerated individuals are still regarded as a threat to society. Many of the stereotypes that accompany incarceration are then attached to the child of the incarcerated individual because as Goffman (1963) asserted stigma spreads from the stigmatized to those most intimately linked to them. In Goffman's view the wise ones, in this case, children with an incarcerated parent, had only a few options to manage their stigma. They could choose to embrace the stigma and socialize within their stigmatized group or as he claims most often occurs, sever the relationship with the stigmatized individual. He (1963) writes "In general, the tendency for a stigma to spread from the stigmatized individual to his close connexions provides a reason why such relations tend either to be avoided or to be terminated, where existing" (p.43). In this view, Goffman gives two options for children of incarcerated parents to manage their stigma; embrace it or remove yourself from the relationship causing it. I would argue that there is a third option that Goffman mentions in relation to other situations but not incarceration and this may be due to the time period his book was written. A third option for children of incarcerated parents would be to hide the stigma or "pass." Goffman (1963) makes a distinction between visible and invisible stigma writing, "Traditionally, the question of passing

has raised the issue of the visibility of a particular stigma, that is, how well or how badly a stigma is adapted to provide means of communicating that the individual possesses it” (p.64). It is quite possible for children of incarcerated parents to pass if they choose to do so. This may not have been the case in 1963 when Goffman wrote *Stigma*. Today many different types of families are accepted, but when Goffman wrote his book a nuclear family was most likely expected. In 1963 a missing parent, especially due to incarceration, would no doubt lead to questions and stigma. It was extremely important to this study to 1) understand the stigma attached to incarceration 2) be aware of how that stigma may attach itself to the children of those behind bars (which was evident in many of the readings) and 3) examine how the children positioned themselves within these characterizations.

Emotional Labor

Connected to stigmatization and Goffman’s work is the concept of emotional labor. Emotional labor, as defined by Arlie Russell Hochschild, describes the work a person does to “induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others...” (2003, p.7). Referencing the connection between this labor and stigma, Hochschild (2003) writes:

My search soon led me to the works of Erving Goffman, to whom I am indebted for his keen sense of how we try to control our appearance even as we unconsciously observe rules about how we ought to appear to others. But again, something was missing. How does a person act on a feeling-or stop acting on it, or evening stop feeling? I wanted to discover what it is that we act upon? (x).

One of the major differences between Hochschild’s and Goffman’s theories is that while both discuss how we “act” or behave, Goffman focuses on the response a person has when they are

“on stage,” or when they feel others are watching. With Goffman’s theory, the person or “actor” in a situation, reacts to a perceived break of a societal rule. Their reaction stems from the fact that others are observing or somehow know about their perceived violation. Hochschild, while using Goffman’s work as a base, goes a step further and discusses how feelings cause us to act or react in certain ways. These acts may occur even when a person is not on stage. A person may feel a sense of guilt or love without others knowing or watching and these feelings may cause them to react in a certain way. Hochschild posits that their reaction to these feelings however, whether it be to act on them or suppress them, and how they react is related to a set of rules that dictates appropriate behavior in certain situations. For example, showing joy or laughing at a funeral may violate the rule that in such a sad situation, a person must appropriately display their grief through tears or stoicism. These rules are not completely static. For example, gender may determine how certain rules are applied. A man may be more likely to express his anger or discontent not because others are watching, but because he has been taught (if not explicitly then definitely implicitly), that he has a right to do so. He may assume that others will not react negatively to his response because in society men are expected to be assertive or forceful and his reaction is in line with preconceived notions about manhood. In turn, a woman may display a more tempered response to the same situation to abide by her feeling rules. Women are expected to be polite, courteous and pleasant or risk being viewed as cantankerous or unfeminine. In this study, emotional labor and feeling rules were used to analyze many of the youth’s responses. While stigma is linked with incarceration and all those who are impacted, the individual feelings and their responses to these feelings cannot be ignored. While all humans engage in some form of emotional labor, the incarceration of a parent poses a unique mix of feelings that requires deep acting and emotion management. Uniquely connected to identity, emotional labor “poses a

challenge to a person's sense of self...In each case, the issue of estrangement between what a person senses as her 'true self' and her inner and outer acting becomes something to work out, to take a position on" (Hochschild, 2003, p.136).

Figured Worlds

Another theoretical framework that deals with identity and the roles a person plays is figured worlds. Figured worlds refers to a person figuring out who they are (identity) based on the "worlds" they are a part of and their relationships inside and outside of these worlds. Figured worlds are "intimately tied to identity work" (Urrieta Jr. 2007, p.107). According to Fearon (1999), "in ordinary speech and most academic writing, "identity" means either (a) a social category, defined by membership rules and allegedly characteristic attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) a socially distinguishing feature that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or, of course, both (a) and (b) at once)" (p.36). Throughout the data collection process, the youth told stories and made comments that described the way they think of themselves and how they believe the world sees them. In other words, they told stories about their identity. Because of the ages of these participants (13-17), a lot of their identity work and meaning making happened in certain "worlds." One of the main worlds in their lives is school. As Urrieta Jr. (2007) states, "...figured worlds...is useful as a tool for studying identity production in education, particular sociocultural constructs in education, local education contexts and can be also be used as a practical tool for crafting figured worlds of possibility" (p.112). Since a large portion of the identity work done in this study was done in the figured world of school, and included a cast of supporting "characters" (including friends and school faculty) that interacted with the youth, this lens was particularly helpful in viewing some of their narratives and comments.

Research Questions and Methods

- What strategies do children of incarcerated parents use to protect/maintain their identities from being tainted by the stigma that surrounds incarceration?
- How are the experiences of children with incarcerated peers similar and different from their peers who have not been impacted by incarceration?

Methodologies

Assuming an interpretivist paradigm, this study used two overlapping methodologies: grounded theory and portraiture. These methodologies allowed flexibility within the study to facilitate the interpretation and reinterpretation of data. Grounded theory “offers a set of flexible strategies, not rigid prescriptions” (Charmaz, 2010, p.185). This supports this particular study because I was not looking to, nor was I able to, prove or disprove a certain theory. As Maxwell (2005) states, “the conceptual framework for your research study is constructed, not found. It incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the structure, the overall coherence, is something that *you* [emphasis in the original] build, not something that exists ready made” (p.35). Instead of trying to tailor my interviews and data to fit a certain narrative, I allowed them to take their own shape and form. Grounded theory acknowledges that “the social world is always in process, and the lives of the research subjects shift and change as their circumstances and they themselves change” (Charmaz, 2010, p.195). This held true, as I engaged in conversation and meaning making with the participants. Although I had guided questions, the interviews flowed freely and took us to unexpected places at times. No two interviews are the same and therefore the results while showing some similarities are simultaneously vastly different. This complexity adds to the authenticity of the project and its results.

This methodology works well in unison with portraiture, “a genre of inquiry and representation that seeks to join science and art” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. XV). Portraiture is well aligned to this study because it seeks to highlight the goodness of its participants through a balanced look at both strengths and vulnerabilities. Portraiture does not create false narratives or sanctify those who are involved; it simply rejects a deficit based approach and instead of seeking what is going wrong, it uplifts what is going right. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) write:

To some extent the focus on pathology is understandable, maybe even laudable. Certainly some investigators have identified things that do not work, or work poorly, as a prelude to trying to figure out ways of fixing what is broken. In this case, social scientists have regarded their investigations as providing the evidence for better-informed and strategic social action. But the relentless scrutiny of failure has many unfortunate and distorting results. First, we begin to get a view of our social world that magnifies what is wrong and neglects evidence of promise and potential. Second, this focus on failure can often lead to a kind of cynicism and inaction. If things are really this bad and there is no hope for change, then why try to do anything about it? Third, the documentation of pathology often bleeds into a blaming of the victim. Rather than a complicated analysis of strengths and vulnerabilities (usually evident in any person, institution, or society), the locus of blame tends to rest on the shoulders of those most victimized and least powerful in defining their identity or shaping their fate (pp.8-9).

It has already been established that parental incarceration is a very complex issue that is currently presented in an unbalanced, often pathologized way. Portraiture removes the children of incarcerated parents from the category of objects and soundly into the world of speaker,

creator, and meaning maker. It allows for a space where their vulnerabilities are acknowledged, but their strengths take center stage.

Participant Recruitment, Selection and Participation

Prior to beginning the study, recruitment was identified as a potential obstacle due to the secrecy that surrounds incarceration. Often when parents are incarcerated the children are told not to discuss their situation outside of the household. At other times, the child may not even be aware that the parent is incarcerated. College, vacation and work are often presented to children as excuses why a parent is not present in the household when they are in fact incarcerated. In order to try to avoid this issue during recruitment, children that attended organizations specifically for incarcerated individuals such as *The Osborne Association* and *Hour Children* were targeted. Originally, attempts to recruit through flyers at these organizations yielded very few results. Many caregivers and parents expressed interest after seeing me speak about my own experiences during *See Us, Support Us* month¹⁵ (October 2017). It was through conversations and shared experiences during these events that most of the participants were recruited. There were some benefits and obstacles to this type of recruitment. One benefit was that often the parent or caregiver not only expressed interest, but gave consent immediately. This made scheduling interviews and discussing certain issues easier, as the parent or caregiver was very much aware and in agreement with the study. However, this posed its own obstacles as I had to make sure that the child was interested as well as the parent. Forced interviews with an unwilling participant were not in the spirit of study. There was one young woman whose mother

¹⁵ SEE US, SUPPORT US is an annual “month-long, national campaign to increase supports for children of incarcerated parents. We invite you to take action to SEE the strength and resilience of children, their caregivers, and parents, and SUPPORT them by reducing the stigma and systemic barriers they face” (The Osborne Association, 2018).

volunteered her for the study. During most of the interview she remained quiet, which appeared to be her natural disposition, but once asked about her father's incarceration she became visibly upset and asked to be excused. She never returned and her profile is not included in this body of work (due to the lack of time we spent getting to know one another), although her story is used (with her permission) anecdotally here to demonstrate the emotional weight of parental incarceration and the complexity of recruiting children.

The participants in the study live in the New York City area (Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn) and are between the ages of 13 and 17. They are all currently enrolled in school, although the type of schools varies (standard public school, charter school, residential school). Three males and five females were interviewed. The target enrollment for the study was 5-10 youth, with an even split between males and females. The study met its enrollment target, but had slightly more female participants than male. All the participants had a father incarcerated. Three of the participants experienced maternal incarceration previously, but their mothers are not currently incarcerated. Originally the study aimed to speak to younger children between the ages of 9 and 12. However, this age range was adjusted prior to the beginning of the study with IRB approval. The new age range was chosen for a few reasons including the comfortability of the child and parent/caregiver, the level of maturity, and the pool of available candidates.

Data Collection

The interviews took place between the months of November and February. Each child profiled in this study was formally interviewed twice. This does not include additional conversations with the children or caregivers where background information was sometimes collected or transcriptions were clarified. Interviews were conducted in a place of the participant's choice. All, but two of the youth chose to be interviewed in their homes. Due to

scheduling conflicts, two of the interviews were conducted via video chat (FaceTime or Skype). The participants were informed about the goal of the study and my personal and professional relationship with the topic. They were informed that their real names would not be used and that they could choose a pseudonym. Six out of eight participants chose their own pseudonym. Two out of eight participants decided that I could make the choice for them. Some of the youth took joy in choosing their alias and seemed to already have one in mind. Interviews lasted anywhere from one to two hours and were audio recorded and then transcribed. During each interview, the participants were asked open-ended questions (please see Appendix B for guiding questions). This allowed participants to lead the conversation instead of me “steering” it to a destination of my choice. I was able to follow their lead and go to the places they wanted to take me. In portraiture, the dialogue between researcher and subject is seen as a dance where they create the story together. Interviews with children were recorded so the data was not lost, misquoted or subject to the researcher's paraphrasing. Interview transcripts were read multiple times because “nuanced interpretive analysis requires that the researcher read and scrutinize an interview transcript four different times...each reading offers the researcher the opportunity of listening for a ‘different voice’” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.191).

Validity

In keeping with the methodologies being utilized, data coding was an ongoing, reflexive process. In *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997), Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis describe this process:

Each day in the field is followed by reflection, interpretation, and analysis. Each day in the field is followed by reflection and critique as the researcher works to reconcile what she is observing...She writes...to record emerging hypotheses, develop more discerning

questions, become more focused in her inquiry, and chart a course of action for the next day. (p.214)

I listened to the audio of the previous interviews to prepare for the subsequent interviews.

Sometimes I asked the participants to clarify or expand on a previous statement or thought. This was particularly helpful with accumulating thick data. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis write:

Both forms-thick and thin description- are important to the texture and authenticity of a portrait. But in making an interpretation, the portraitist must be vigilant about providing enough descriptive evidence in the text so the reader might be able to offer an alternative hypothesis, a different interpretation of the data. (p.91)

Providing thick descriptions (which were later turned into participant portraits) lessened the probability that I interpreted the data in an inauthentic way.

When the interviews were complete and transcribed, I read and listened to each interview multiple times. The purpose of listening to the interviews again, even though they were available to read, was to determine tone and emotion. Listening to the interviews provided me with details that a transcript did not. There were giggles, pauses, or a lowering of voice that sometimes did not appear on the transcript. As I read and listened, I began to identify emergent themes. This process actually began during the interview process, as some of the participant's responses clearly mirrored other participant's responses even though they had no knowledge of one another. Therefore I entered the data coding process with some clear themes in mind such as bullying, hope for the future and stigma. Other themes only emerged as I viewed the interviews as a complete set and began to classify not by child, but by similarities. For example, a few of the participants made mention of who they believe themselves to be versus who other people think they are. Their self-perceived identity in relationship to their identity as perceived by others was

something I was not expecting, but that emerged none the less. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) state:

Emergent themes occur within and across stories, language, and rituals of subjects and sites. Naming convergence, emergent themes clarify the ways in which parts of the whole fit together and make tangible the intangibles through which insiders experience their realities. (p.232)

The authors are aware that use of emergent themes can seem like that is a simplification of the data. However, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) express the need for this type of coding when they write:

...in selecting emergent themes they [the researcher] reach for the souls of the subjects or sites that they portray. In daring to name convergence, they provide essential clarity and elevate their portrayals from the sphere of individual to the realm of more universal human experience. (p.238)

This quote is so fitting to my data coding process. By using emergent themes, I was able to create a shared experience between the participants that I believe is not just relatable to children of incarcerated parents, but often relatable to the issues of youth and family as a whole. There is a basic human experience weaved throughout their interviews, that make their words not only important to the area of children of incarcerated parents, but to a larger audience. The use of emergent themes also led me to realize that another type of data coding was necessary. As I reviewed the interviews, I realized that there were often places where the participants stopped to tell me an important story. I did not always realize I was being told a story at the time of the interviews. Because of this and my conscious effort to listen in a new way, which required me to show interest through cues such as head nod, but not engage in a tennis match of conversation,

the participants often went into storytelling mode. Some of the stories were short, no more than a few minutes, while one continued for almost 15 minutes. I was so involved in the stories at the time of the interview, that it was not until data analysis that I realized I had collected quite a few narratives and that these narratives must be important to the children. With the suggestion of my committee chair, narrative analysis was employed as a means of data analysis as well. Riessman (1993) states, "Storytelling, to put the argument simply, is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us...Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself" (p.1). The emergent themes are what I see in the data, but the narratives are the stories the children wanted to tell.

This data was then used to create a portrait of each child which can be found later in the text. These portraits present an aesthetic whole that has been co-created with the children. These portraits "capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). Each portrait begins with the child's alias and their identifier. The child did not choose their identifier, I did. It was chosen from the way the child presented themselves during their interviews; the way *I felt* they wanted to be seen. By highlighting the uniqueness of each child in a portrait, it is hoped that the portrait resonates with the audience in a powerful, humanizing way. By creating a story so detailed and whole, the portraiture is meant to connect with a wide audience. This idea of finding commonality among the individuality is referred to as *the sensing of the universal in the particular* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

To add to the validity of the data, copies of the transcribed interviews were made available to respondents in order to ensure "respondent's validity." None of the participants chose to access or

read their interviews. In addition, any remarks that were unclear during the interviews were clarified after I read the transcript. Sometimes the clarifications were made during the subsequent interviews, while other times I had to reach out to the participant to ask a clarifying question. I chose to clarify as much as possible after the interview because I did not want to interrupt the interview process at times, especially if the child was engaged in a narrative.

The peer review process was also used for this dissertation. Some work from this study was shared with an advisory group who gave feedback including how to engage in a deeper analysis of some of the emotional work and meaning making the youth did as they were interviewed. In addition, feedback was given about my tone in the piece. For example, I made more than one remark about the validity of the youth's statements. These remarks were not made because the youth were not believable; instead it my attempt to appear objective or to acknowledge that both sides of the story were not being presented. However, it was brought to my attention by more than one reviewer that the purpose of this study was to allow the youth to tell their story in their own words and share their truth and by making the remarks in my position as researcher (a position of authority) and active listener, I cast doubt on their assertions even when I did not mean to which was counterproductive to my aim. By acknowledging and studying these viewpoints, my study became stronger and more valid. "In consultations with other researchers...portraitists can find sounding boards for their developing ideas and seek colleagues input in naming emergent themes" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.225). Allowing for the airing of discrepant voices bolstered validity because it encouraged me to think, "*how might I be wrong?*" and helped me avoid overlooking important information. This was imperative because "In portraiture we refer to this perspective that deviates from the norm as 'the deviant voice' and we never stop listening for it" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & David, 1997, p.193). This voice

was useful to assess the salience of the themes I have chosen. What I saw in the youth's stories was not always aligned with what other people saw. This back and forth between myself and others enhanced my arguments and made for a stronger study.

One of the most crucial validity checks for this study was understanding the role of self in my work. "The portraitist inevitably renders, a self-portrait that reveals her souls but she also produces a systematic examination of the actors' images, experiences and perspectives. This balance... is the difficult, complex, nuanced work of the portraitist" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.87). In this study, it was imperative that I understood the role of self that will never be separated from my work. I have a particularly strong self in this study due to my personal connection with the topic. Therefore, it was important that I acknowledged my experiences, my pain, my journey, my prejudices, and my joy in my work while striving to provide a balanced picture of children with incarcerated parents. I had to monitor my own voice, making sure it is not the one telling someone else's or even my own story. I had to be cognizant of the role I play in the research, where to insert myself and when. I also had to come to terms with the fact that realistically, I was not able to completely remove myself from the work I did with these children and ultimately accepting and appreciative of the fact that I did not have to, nor did I want to. The themes I chose are no doubt what I see in their words based on my soul. My hope is by including the narratives, it will provide some balance by making sure some of what the participants want to be seen is available in this work.

Participant Profiles

Amber: The Straight Shooter

At age 13, Amber has already been in handcuffs more than once. She recalls that it happened when she was "going in crisis." According to Amber, when she was younger, small

things would make her angry and she would begin throwing stuff and “going crazy.” This led to her family calling the police, who would handcuff her and take her to the hospital. Amber does not recall the reasons for her anger, but she does give clues. She was arrested while living with her grandmother upstate. Some of her siblings lived there as well. She mentions that she had to go to live there because her mom was in jail at the time. Her mother is home now. She does not recall these incidents fondly although you can only decipher that from her words and not her actions. She tells the story about being arrested as if it is not a big deal, with a mischievous glint in her eye and tone that says “Can you believe this?”, but is sure to mention that she hopes to never be in handcuffs again just in case her tone is confusing.

When speaking with Amber it is hard to imagine her ever being handcuffed. Amber is lean with caramel colored skin. She wears her black hair pulled back from her face. She speaks quickly and quietly for the most part, but her voice can become full of expression when she wants. She makes very blunt statements that are not necessarily intended to be jokes, but are funny nonetheless. For example, Amber does not hold a grudge against police officers because she was previously handcuffed. She just does not want to ever become a police officer because they are “broke.” Amber’s distaste for being broke is clear. When she talks about her sister’s phone, she sarcastically calls it an “Obama phone,” meaning that it came from the government and it is not as high tech as some other phones available. She calls it “trash” and mentions that she needs a new phone. Amber’s focus on money may have something to do with her life experience. When she speaks about her father’s incarceration, she says she knows why he committed burglary, simply stating, “he’s broke.” Amber is not judging her father; in fact she shows a level of understanding. He did not have money so he stole, but she does not want that to

be her fate. Therefore, she does not want to be a police officer because they do not get paid enough money.

Amber now lives in Manhattan with her mother and younger sister. She has only been living with her mother for a little over a year. As mentioned earlier, she lived upstate with her grandmother during a period when her mother was incarcerated. She has two older brothers who are both young adults. Her oldest brother is incarcerated in the same prison as her father. She seems to have a good relationship with all her siblings, but admits that she does not speak to her older brother as much since he was arrested. He can “catch her” when he gets out of prison. She mentioned that her other brother has a tenuous relationship with their mother, noting that they are both stubborn and that her brother was so upset with her mother he even refused to answer her texts about what he wanted for his birthday. Amber was perplexed by this because he “could’ve got a nice electronic. Is he crazy?”. Amber does not know her father well. He has been incarcerated since she was two years old. She feels that she knows some of her sibling’s fathers better than she knows her own. Still, they communicate and have a relationship; one that seems important to her, even though she is hesitant to use those words. She refers to her dad as “stupid” for getting arrested, but quickly lets it be known that he has good qualities as well, stating “he did spend time with me. Even if it was in a crack house, he spent time with me.”

Amber’s eyes light up most when she is talking about “drama”; things that happen at school that causes tension between people, something that is probably true of many teenagers. Amber is “friends with everyone” and was so popular in elementary school she “hated it [how popular she was].” Still this popularity did not keep her out of trouble. By third grade, she was placed in an anger management class. She has been diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and has been told that she possibly has bipolar disorder, although

she is too young to be officially diagnosed. However, Amber does not accept all of these classifications. She believes the ADHD is simply a result of boredom and normal behavior for a child. She admits she may actually have ODD although her behavior has improved since she was younger. She currently attends a residential school in Westchester although she is not a resident like most of the students there. This allows her to be bused to and from school each day instead of having to live on campus. This is something she seems grateful for as there to seem to be a lot of struggles for students who reside there. Amber spoke about a girl whose father did not allow her to come home for a visit and she became very upset. The girl smashed out her father's car windows when she got the opportunity. Although Amber calls her "crazy," it's clear that she understands the girl's anger, stating "that's all they [the residents of the school] really look forward to [going home for visits]. And if they don't, they spaz out." Amber acknowledges that her school is similar to a prison in some ways. Just as the residents of her school look forward to visits and going home, so do people in prison. She said the difference is at school, they can leave if they want (even if they are not supposed to). They can run out to cars and run off campus. They could hop on a bus and go home.

Amber's dad was arrested for burglary and is serving a 15-year sentence although he is expected to be released in 2018. Even before his last bid, he was in and out of jail and an alcoholic. During his incarceration, Amber has been to visit him, but not often. Her grandmother (her father's mother) took her to visit a few times when Amber lived upstate. Amber did not enjoy the visits. Her dislike stemmed from the prison experience instead of the interaction with her father. She did not like the one institution he was incarcerated at because she had to talk through the glass. She has also been made to cover up when visiting. One time she recalls that she went to visit when she was 11 years old. She was wearing a dress with large straps, but the

guard told her she needed a sweater. She went back to the car and retrieved a sweater she did not want to wear so she could visit. Another issue that dampens her desire to visit is the distance. Amber estimates it takes over four hours to travel to where her father is currently incarcerated. However, the biggest obstacle to visiting seems to be the way she feels about seeing her father there, even though it is hard for her to articulate. She describes seeing him there as “weird and creepy.” When pressed for more details she states, “It’s weird looking at him in there. I’m like well, it’s not like he’s coming home with me. He’s going to go back there when we’re done.” Amber claims that when her father calls she doesn’t speak to him, instead opting to give the phone to her mother or little sister. When she writes him, she writes only her name or maybe a line or two. However, she keeps everything that he has sent her over the years and she expects him to show up on her doorstep when he is released.

In the future Amber has big plans that all revolve around money because money is “life, like you can’t do nothing do nothing if you don’t have money.” She plans to travel, noting that she would specifically like to see France. She would like to learn Spanish and attend college. She is looking at colleges in Tennessee. She also has an interest in Washington, D.C. because that is where the government is located. Whatever she does she plans to be successful and wealthy, but through the right means. Having money would give her the opportunity to do what she loves best—showing off. Amber loves “making people jealous” and she is devising a plan to make that happen in the future.

Delilah: The Survivor

Delilah entered the foster care system at the age of five. She moved through eleven foster homes in less than 10 years along with her sister and younger brothers. During her time in foster care she experienced domestic violence, sexual abuse and what she describes as a lot of

“confusion.” Throughout her experience in foster care she remembers thinking of the words her parents told her, “We’re going to come back to get you.” However, her parents never came back to get her. Both substance abusers, her mother’s whereabouts are currently unknown and her father is currently incarcerated. Delilah harbors more anger towards her mother as she believes that while a father’s love is strong, a mother’s love is stronger. She does not understand how “You [her mother] carried me, felt me, and you mean to tell me you don’t have no type of remorse for what I went through in life.” It is clear that Delilah went through a lot.

Delilah, as the oldest sibling, recalls when her mother was arrested and she was taken into foster care. She was at a crack house which she describes as having “one little bed” and a “bunch of kids.” The police raided the house in the middle of the night and her mother was arrested. Delilah and her siblings were taken to an agency where they spent the night. The next day they were told that they would be going to someone’s home. She recalls that her first foster mother was a nice lady, but that Delilah’s behavior was so egregious that she was moved to another home. Within a year, Delilah was being raped by one of her foster parent’s sons who she describes as a “grown man.” She recalls instances where she was held at knifepoint and forced to do things against her will. She told her caseworkers who often overlooked her complaints because she was just a “child,” adding to her growing sense of anger. Delilah eventually told her grandmother who confronted the agency. Instead of remedying the problem, the agency cast doubt on Delilah’s claims, eventually leading her grandmother to sue them and prompting the agency to close.

However, Delilah’s troubles were not over when she was removed from the home. She remained in foster care for a few more years and the abuse continued. The longer she spent in foster care, the angrier she became. She recalls putting her grandparents through “hell” when she

visited them and her poor behavior in the foster homes ensured that she was moved time and time again. She felt abandoned, stating she felt as if she did not have parents, just people who “birthed” her and that thought hurt her. During her years in foster care, her parents went in and out of jail, but they never “came back” for her. The first time she remembers meeting them face to face again was when she was 13 or 14 years old. The visit was not as heartwarming as one would hope. Delilah felt as if her parents were acting like teenagers without any responsibility, once again neglecting their children. She also felt her mother was unapologetic. Delilah describes her mother and father as coming from two very different lifestyles. She says her father had a promising future full of scholarships and sports before he became involved with drugs. Her mother came from a family where drug use was prevalent and was already headed down a dark path. Delilah believes that because of this, her mother seemed almost unapologetic about what Delilah endured. Instead of seeing it for the horrific ordeal that it was, her mother more acted like it was a normal part of life.

Despite this, Delilah says she has forgiven both of her parents but chooses to love them from a distance. Her forgiveness came one day after a fight she had with another girl, where the girl was seriously injured. Even though Delilah was annoyed by something the girl did, she realized her actual anger was stemming from something else and that it was taking over her life. Determined to get her life together, she decided to change her ways. In her own words, she “started straightening up, paying attention to school, [and] getting good grades.” Eventually she was released from foster care and went to live with her aunt. Despite the hardship of being separated from her siblings, she continued to work hard and became interested in beauty pageants; competing in one last year. With her smooth, cocoa-colored skin, large bright eyes and bubbly personality, it is easy to picture her on the stage. She also writes and recites poetry to express her

feelings. While she feels comfortable speaking to her aunt and grandma, she needed an outlet that was always available so she chose poetry.

Now 17, Delilah is currently finishing her cosmetology hours so she can obtain her license. After she finishes her hours she hopes to go to school for business and math. This will aid her in her dream to eventually own her own salon. She would like to use her salon as an opportunity for her siblings as well if they should need it. She is open to her siblings coming to work in the salon or pursuing whatever goals they may have for themselves. Her father is set to be released in a year and while she hopes for the best, she is expecting the worst. Delilah believes she has detached from both of her parents. In fact, when asked what advice she would give to a child who was experiencing what she experienced, Delilah stated that she would tell them to “go forward and not look back.” She feels holding onto her parents in the past prevented her from becoming the best version of herself earlier in life. However, now that she is on the right path, Delilah is certain that nothing can get in her way.

Emmanuel: The Athlete

Emmanuel’s two loves are sports and his family. He is an ardent athlete who only tends to elaborate when he is discussing basketball or football. When discussing these topics, the usually quiet and concise young man shows interest and passion. In fact, he credits his love of sports for his academic and behavioral turnaround. After his father was incarcerated when Emmanuel was in third grade, he began to slack off in school. He began getting poor grades, started being disrespectful to teachers and was labeled as having anger issues. In 7th grade, his math teacher, who recognized his love and talent for sports after watching one of his basketball games, had a very practical talk with Emmanuel. The teacher explained to him what kind of grades are necessary to attend a Division I university. He then showed Emmanuel his own grades which

were not high enough to achieve this goal. Emmanuel said that it was then and there that he decided he had to “step his game up” and he has been back on the right path ever since.

When speaking to Emmanuel, it is hard to picture him as angry or disrespectful. He is a polite young man who says please and thank you. His soft-spoken voice is in stark contrast to his physically imposing presence. At 14 years-old, he is well over 6 feet and is already taller than both of his parents; his mother is 6’0 and his father is 6’2. Above average height, he notes proudly, is characteristic of his family and he would like to grow 4-5 more inches to hit a final height of 6’8 or 6’9. His father and mother were both athletes in their younger days and Emmanuel has followed in their footsteps along with his younger brother. He attends high school in the Bronx. He chose his high school based on their sports and academic programs after shadowing an older student. The older student was also an athlete and Emmanuel admired how the young man handled himself in the classroom.

In addition to sports, Emmanuel’s family is also extremely important to him. He lives with his mother and younger brother, who is currently close to the age that Emmanuel was when his father was incarcerated. He sees himself as a father figure to his younger brother. He picks him up from school, takes him to practice, makes sure he is fed, helps him with his homework and talks to him about his grades. He is concerned about his brother’s recent performance in school, noting that his brother is the same age he was when he began to do poorly in school. Emmanuel does not want his little brother to go down the wrong path and regularly encourages him to do the “right thing”. Emmanuel’s mother is his rock. He admires her for being hard working and determined. He wants to be successful so she will not have to work as hard. Emmanuel often talks about “having a man” around when he discusses his family. He is excited for his father to be released so that both he and his younger brother have a man in their life. Emmanuel hopes

that his father will assume some of the responsibilities he currently has concerning his younger brother.

Emmanuel's family is from Honduras and he loves spending time with them when he can. He notes that everyone works so it can be difficult to get them all together. When they do get together, they love to dance. When he refers to his family he is referring to his mother's relatives, as he has limited contact with his father's relatives. He is in contact with some of them, but not regularly. He is also unsure whether his father is in contact with them because it is not something they discuss. His uncle died on Thanksgiving a few years ago and he views this as one of the saddest days of his life. This was another loss of a man in his life, something that Emmanuel places a great value on. He does not bring up his father's incarceration when asked about big events in his life, although he is aware it has had a great effect on him. He attributes his prior anger issues to his father's incarceration. However, he can communicate openly with his father and this helps him with his feelings.

In addition to his father, Emmanuel sees a school counselor who he can talk to about his father and his feelings. He feels like he can discuss anything with her. He also talks to his mother and brother. He admits that in the past he would lie to his friends about his father's whereabouts, worried that they would make fun of him since he does not "have a man" in his life. He no longer feels that his father's incarceration is a secret and is willing to talk about it if asked. He does however seem hesitant to discuss the reason why his father is incarcerated. He will say that he knows why, but does not elaborate. He was present when his father was arrested, watching from a window inside his home. He later asked his mother why his dad was arrested and she gave him an honest answer. That is as much as he cares to discuss the charges that led to his father's incarceration.

Emmanuel has contact with his father on a regular basis. His father calls often and he seemed excited that his dad is now able to call his phone, although he mentioned that since it costs money, his mom must set it up so he can answer. He is appreciative of the consistency with which his father calls. He thought his father would only be in contact sporadically, but that has not been the case. He recently saw his father and was happy to be there despite the visitation process which he describes as “taking forever.” He discusses sports and school with his dad. He mentions that during his visit he was excited for his dad to see how big he is. Emmanuel is becoming a man without his father being there the way they both would like and so opportunities to show his dad signs of this, such as his increasing height, are extremely important to him. His mother and younger brother attended the visit with them, even though his parents are no longer together. In fact, his mother is remarried to a man who is also currently incarcerated. Emmanuel did not make mention of this; his mother did separately. He wishes his parents would reconcile although he says he understands why they do not, stating that his mother is probably making the right choice. Emmanuel often describes things concerning his dad as “emotional.” He indicated that leaving his father after the visit was over was emotional for both him and his brother.

Emmanuel’s biggest fear seems to be that his dad will come home and go back to his “old ways.” His father is scheduled for release in nine months, during which time Emmanuel will have started practicing for upcoming football season. He is looking forward to his father critiquing his game and offering him advice. He says that his mother tries, but she played basketball and not football so he wants to hear what his father thinks. Mostly he says he is excited to have a “man in my life” who can guide him. It seems that for all these years, Emmanuel has been growing strong and working hard to not only set an example for his younger

brother, but also to make his parents, especially his father, proud of who he is and who he is set to become.

Jacqueline: The Social Butterfly

Jacqueline is a vivacious 13-year-old girl who currently attends a charter school in Brooklyn. She keeps her thick brown hair in a bun most of the time and her dark eyes light up when she speaks. She gives the impression that she is bursting with energy and is always ready to share a story. She is aware that some people may even view her as “hyper.” Jacqueline will not describe herself using the word “popular”, but she obviously believes it is true. Instead, she refers to herself as “known,” a status which leads her to have a lot of influence over her peers. Although she says she is not a people person, she serves as a leader in her school building and uses her position to try to encourage others to be more kind to their classmates. She is a self-declared former bully, but states that now she tries to be friends with the kids who do not have too many friends. Her reasons for this vary between altruistic and self-centered, the latter of which is not unexpected in a teenager. She admits that one of the reasons she has chosen to befriend children who are less popular than her is because they may grow up to be someone important and she would not want them to shun her because she previously bullied them. However, she is also acutely aware of the direr consequences of bullying, acknowledging that it has caused some people to take their own lives. Jacqueline regrets her days as a bully and attributes her anger to things that were occurring in her household at the time, such as arguments between her biological parents. This is one of the few issues she does not choose to elaborate on.

She currently lives with her two brothers (one older and one younger), her mother and her stepfather. Jacqueline’s older brother Orlando, also participated in this study. Her biological father is no longer a part of her life. In fact, Jacqueline asserts that she does not love her

biological father at all. Her brother attributes this to the fact that she does not have too many memories of him since she was young when he left and their father was not really there for her prior to that. She refers to her stepfather as “dad” and only denotes the “step” if she feels it is necessary to adequately explain a certain story or situation. Jacqueline is very close with both her immediate and extended family who are mostly located in New York City, Florida or Puerto Rico. She does not quite understand why some of her family chooses to live in Puerto Rico, especially after having lived in the United States. The concept of going from somewhere that has “everything” to somewhere that “doesn’t have anything” is perplexing to her. She has only visited Puerto Rico twice, but goes to Florida more frequently.

Jacqueline is an avid iPhone user. She loves photography and adding “pizazz” to things. She uses her phone on her camera to take pictures, but is hoping to receive a polaroid as a Christmas gift. In the future, she would like to get a “real” camera such as a Canon. She also uses her phone for social media purposes. She is very proud of her SnapChat streaks; a feature that shows how many days you have been talking to the same person daily. At one point, she had a streak of 85 days with her god sister and a streak of over 150 days with her cousin. She also uses her phone to watch Vlogs (video blogs) on YouTube. She describes her style as “vintage” and her desire to add pizazz to things can be seen in her bedroom, where she has strung decorative lights to add a little something special to the area.

Jacqueline’s “dad”¹⁶ was recently released from prison after serving over 20 years. She first met him when she was five or six years old. Initially, she did not realize he was incarcerated. Her mother visited with him for a period before she introduced him to her children. On her first visit, Jacqueline went to visit with her mother separately from her brothers. In fact, each child went

¹⁶ “Dad” is in quotations to refer to Jacqueline’s stepfather. Jacqueline considers him her dad so to differentiate between her stepfather and biological father, quotations were used.

individually so that they could spend time getting to know him. Jacqueline recalls being excited to go because she knew her mother liked him a lot. However, the visit was not the best according to Jacqueline because she got her hand stuck in one of the vending machines. Despite this slight hiccup, she remembers her “dad” being very kind and open on the visit, and telling her explicitly that one day he hoped to be her dad. Although she was excited to meet him and thought he was nice, it did take a while before he completely gained her trust. Her “dad” was able to do this by consistently checking in and taking an interest in her life. Initially, Jacqueline was skeptical about his interest in her, thinking to herself “why are you so interested?”. However, now Jacqueline and her “dad” are extremely close. Even before he came home¹⁷, she said she felt as if she could talk to him about anything and that has not changed now that he has been released.

Although she is very happy that her “dad” is home, Jacqueline does have some practical concerns. Having another person in the house has limited her bathroom time. Something she resents since she enjoys singing in the shower and taking her time in the bathroom. In addition, the rules and expectations have changed a bit since her “dad” is home. She believes that the expectations of her are higher and she is having some difficulty meeting them. This has resulted in her being punished by temporarily losing her phone. However, she states that she has been listening better and hopes to be able to meet the new expectations in place. She is very happy that this has resulted in an increase of presents under the Christmas tree being addressed to her.

Jacqueline has a deep love for her family and friends, including her “dad.” She describes him as genuine, kind-hearted and fun. She worries that if people know that he was incarcerated, they would automatically assume that he is a bad person. Because of this she has only discussed his incarceration with close friends and one teacher. Everyone was supportive. Jacqueline is clear

¹⁷ My first interview with Jacqueline while her “dad” was incarcerated. He was released prior to the second interview. It was a surprise to Jacqueline who was under the impression that his parole was denied.

however that she is not ashamed of her “dad” or his incarceration. She seems a bit disappointed that she has not got to spend as much time doing things with her dad as she envisioned before he came home. This is due to the fact that he is currently going on what she describes as “interviews,” but are in actuality classes to get his construction credentials. She admires her mother’s strength deeply, bringing up the fact that her mom was “basically single mother”, another nod to her absentee biological father. She is impressed that despite all her mother was going through, she still managed to handle things in the household such as bills, homework and making the children happy.

When Jacqueline grows up, she would like to pursue a career in law enforcement. She can see herself working as a detective in the future and finds crime shows interesting. She likes the idea of putting clues together to solve a mystery. This career may also be a nod to her experience with incarceration. When asked what advice she would give a child with an incarcerated parent, she cautioned the child to avoid doing the same thing that got their parent incarcerated. Instead, she advises them to make the choices their parents could have but did not. Being a part of the New York Police Department or FBI would be as opposite from incarceration as one could be. It is possibly a choice that Jacqueline thinks her “dad” could have made, but did not. One that she can use to “make a difference.”

Orlando: The Non-Conformist

Orlando is a freshman at a science based high school in Brooklyn. For a student who absolutely loves animals, both living and dead, it sounds like the perfect environment, but he finds it boring. Orlando has a dog and three snakes at home. One of the snakes, Brownie, is quite large and the other two are much smaller. No one in the household is quite sure what the two smaller snakes should be called, because as Orlando plainly states, “They don’t need names.

They are just there.” This matter of fact response is quite representative of his character. He speaks without much emotion and his thoughts tend to trail off as if he got bored while speaking unless he is describing something mechanical or procedural. He does not speak to simply hear himself talk. His words have the purpose of conveying his point. Otherwise, he deems them unnecessary and will be quiet.

Orlando has a head of long, dark, thick hair that he wears in a single braid. It reaches down the length of his back. In fact, he can date some of the pictures in the house by the length of his hair at the time. Orlando’s thick head of hair is his most noticeable similarity to his sister, Jacqueline. Although they are close, their personalities are very different. A self-described homebody, Orlando enjoys staying home with his pets and playing video games. He has a love of all things related to science and when he is not playing video games or texting, he likes to read scientific articles. Recently, he has been reading articles about whether descriptions of popular dinosaurs are scientifically accurate. While he says not all of his friends share his interests, they do share a sense of humor that binds them. He describes himself and his friends as “really weird” and one of their favorite pastimes is talking “smack” about the “popular kids”. This is an interesting contrast to his younger sister, who does not attend the same school, but seems to delight in her popularity. He has not been the victim of bullying, but still tends to stick to himself and his friends. He does not enjoy seeing other people getting bullied and never joins in because he does not like having “negative relationships with anybody.”

As the oldest of three siblings, Orlando remembers his biological father and still loves him. He has many memories of him, but understands that his biological father did a lot of things to push himself away from the family. His mother has since remarried to a man who was incarcerated for over twenty years and just recently came home to live with the family. Orlando remembers when

his mother first started to visit his “dad¹⁸.” He did not realize that he was incarcerated at first, just that his mother would go away on visits that would take a long time. Eventually his mother took him to meet the man who would become his new “dad.” Orlando does not recall being scared or having any negative feelings, even once he realized his mother’s new boyfriend was incarcerated. Instead, Orlando was excited to see the inside of the prison and meet the person his mother admired. However, the novelty of the visiting situation wore off and eventually Orlando no longer wanted to go. This was not because he had an issue with his mother’s choice in men. It was more so because he feels like it is “a lot of work for a little visit” and the fact that he does not like to leave the house. Still, his new “dad” tried to meet Orlando on his level. When he was incarcerated, he would call multiple times every day. During these times, he would try to talk to Orlando about things that interested him. For example, he would call and ask for clarity about a specific animal.

Orlando is skeptical about the way the educational system is set up. He does not care for school and prefers to teach himself. Although he is obviously very intelligent, he does not see himself going to college, which is something his mother wants him to do. He does not like the number of tests he is required to take in high school, including the regents, and says that the useless information presented to him in school has dampened his love of math. He still has a love of social studies and history and likes to challenge people based on his knowledge. He says he often sees kids wearing shirts with flags on them and he asks them what flag that is because many of them do not know.

Foregoing the idealized middle class trajectory of high school, college, graduate school, job; Orlando would like to travel the country after he graduates. He is more interested in

¹⁸ “Dad” is in parentheses to indicate a reference to his mother’s husband and not his biological father, who is still alive. Orlando refers to both men as his dad.

apprenticeship than formal education. Again, showing a distaste for things he finds frivolous, Orlando does not believe that college will help him with the career path he is interested in. He is in a sophomore regents class for science despite only being a freshman and claims he already knows that information being presented. Ideally, Orlando would like to become involved in paleontology by volunteering to help on digs. He thinks the opportunity for something like this would be greatest in the Dakotas.

It is obvious that Orlando is a very independent child who is comfortable in his own skin and way of thinking. He says does not have a role model or anyone he admires because he “does not need one.” He believes that having a role model would encourage you to “base yourself off somebody else, and you got to be you, obviously.” However, he loves his family and even though he may not consider them role models, he appreciates their presence. When his “dad” came home, his mother surprised Orlando at the bus stop. Orlando, surprisingly began to cry. An unemotional child, his reaction was a shock to everyone, including himself.

Sky: The Invisible One

Sky is the youngest of her siblings. She loves dancing but claims she hates school. She describes her school in Manhattan (which she just recently began attending), as a “good school.” Through her comments it is clear that her assertion that her school is a “good school” is based more on location and other people’s comments than her own experiences there. Because she lives in the Bronx it takes her a long time to reach school and she feels it is too much traveling for someone her age. She used to take the train and the bus, but now she can ride the school bus. The bus was necessary because she was arriving to school late every day, sometimes 10:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. She feels that the work at her new school is too hard for her, stating that it feels like she went from doing elementary school level work to high school level work. Despite this,

Sky only needs help with math class. She is performing well enough in ELA and science, but is currently failing math. She attributes her failing math and her lack of understanding the content to her consistent tardiness. Now that she is riding the school bus and arriving to school on time, she is catching up to some extent. Despite voicing a dislike of school, she has friends at her school and even likes some of the teachers. She thinks her school is crazy because it is full of different races that are “ghetto” and the lighter people act more ghetto than “dark skinned people.” According to Sky, this type of situation deserves a reality show. While Sky is not dark-skinned, her caramel complexion is more similar to her father, but her mother and sister are, so this may be of some importance to her. There has been a lot of critique about how Black women, especially darker skinned Black women are portrayed in the media. Dark-skinned Black women are lacking in movies, television shows and other representations and when they do appear, it is often in a minor role with negative connotations. Versluys (2014) identifies four stereotypes of African American women in movies and television: the mammy, the jezebel, the sapphire, the strong black woman. Sky seems to be referring to the sapphire stereotype “...also known as the angry black woman (ABW) stereotype, [which] depicts an African American woman as a loud, verbally abusive, emasculating matriarch” (Versluys, 2014, p.12). Sky’s assertion that people of all races in her school are ghetto, pushes back against this stereotype and defends the important women in her life.

Sky’s grandmother is currently in the hospital with cancer. She previously lived in the house with Sky and the rest of her family which includes her mother, brother, sister, and cousins. Sky is conflicted about her grandmother’s situation. Her grandmother’s health worries Sky often and she goes back and forth between optimistically hoping for the best and realistically preparing for the worst. Despite being very concerned about her grandmother; she is somewhat resentful of the

strain her grandmother's hospital stay has put on the family. She no longer attends dance, but the reason why is unclear. She believes that her grandmother's illness caused her to get distracted and stopped other members of her family from having the availability to get her to and from dance. However, her family seems comfortable with letting Sky travel by herself, but she is not interested. She seemed annoyed by her family's insistence that they want her to go back to dance and stated, "They want me to go to dance, all right. But I cannot travel everywhere by myself. I'm still a child and they just don't understand that."

At 13 years, old, Sky does not have many memories of her father and feels like she does not know him. This makes their relationship tense. She avoids talking to him if she can when he calls, mostly because she has no clue what they should talk about. She tried to write him a letter for Father's Day one time, but she struggled to decide what to write, gave up and declared she was not into it. She does not have many memories of her father and even though his communication to the household is consistent, it is not enough to build a relationship she does not feel they ever had. She feels like he was not there for her even though her mother tries to tell her stories of things her father used to do for her. In Sky's case, stories are not enough and her disappointment in not having her father around has turned to anger and apathy. She notes that her dad missed her birthday, but says she is used to it because that is just how things are. Even though she expresses that this does not bother her, it is clear that it does. The larger wound however may be that fact that Sky is unaware whether her father cares that he missed her birthday. To her he does not seem sorry or remorseful. She is not even sure he means it when he says happy birthday. Even though it is very likely that Sky's father is in fact upset that he has missed many birthdays, Sky does not feel that he is, and this hurts her. Despite these feelings, Sky would still like them to have a relationship. She believes he is a "good guy" who got caught

up with the wrong friends. When he is released, she would like to do very simple things with him such as talk a walk or go to the park.

Sky's position as the baby of the family puts her in a complex situation. It seems that she feels overlooked often because she is the youngest. She also feels that her family wants her to act older than she is so that they do not have to deal with her. She feels like everyone is too busy for her and that no one in her family sees her. She feels invisible at home. This has led her to turn to other places for validation. She feels like people notice her at school. She has developed a close relationship with some of her friends and even their parents. In her friend's home she feels like she receives attention and people watch over her and protect her. Although she feels like a stranger in her own house, she does have a strong amount of love and appreciation for her grandfather. According to Sky, the rest of the house views him as "crazy," but she thinks he is wise. He gives her advice about what is right and wrong and she wants to follow in his steps. This sense of guidance is something that Sky seems to crave. Although she seems upset with the way her family treats her, she acknowledges that she has everything she needs. She also enjoys talking to them and listening to stories about the past and the way her family used to be. She admits that her dad is funny and that she used to copy his antics to make her friends laugh.

When she gets older Sky has many dreams that she would like to pursue. She would like to finish school and go to college. She would also like to become a dancer and eventually own her own company. It is worth noting that Sky's dreams would put her on a stage in front of an audience. For a girl who feels invisible, having a crowd watch her every move, may be what she envisions as her ultimate goal. Then, no one, including her family would be able to ignore her.

Vanessa: The Humanitarian

Vanessa is a self-described optimistic go-getter. She prides herself on her independence and self-reliance. Her description of herself is no doubt heavily tied to her upbringing. After spending the first four years of her life in a home with her parents who were frequently “under the influence,” Vanessa and her siblings were sent to live foster care. During this time, she suffered both verbal and physical abuse. She was given an Individualized Education Plan and diagnosed as Mentally Retarded (now referred to as Intellectually Disabled) while simultaneously being placed on medication that made her constantly fatigued, disengaged and overweight. Her release from the foster care system was both a relief and a heart break. She was out of the system, but separated from her siblings. Her older sister moved “down south” while her younger brother was adopted. She has another half-brother, who she seems most disconnected from, perhaps because he was “never in the system.” Almost ten years later, the siblings are still separated geographically, but attempt to stay connected as best they can. This is extremely important to Vanessa. For her family is everything.

Vanessa’s mother and father are both substance abusers. Her father is currently incarcerated in Attica. Vanessa speaks to him on the phone and would be open to visiting him, but she does not because of the distance and the amount of money it would cost for her to get there. When he calls, she speaks to her father about her future, something that she has very well laid out plans for, and her independence, something she considers one of her best features. She does not have good memories to share and the thought of him does not seem to elicit any recognizable emotion on her face. At most, it seems to make her uncomfortable. This is evidenced by the fact that her usually powerful voice becomes low and almost unintelligible when she speaks of him and her once insightful responses become quite simple and concise. She does however show concern about his well-being as evidenced by some of her responses. She does not like to know what is

going on in prison because it would make her worry and she already “feels bad” that he is there. She laments that people who come home from prison often do not have support and lack human companionship. She is generalizing, but this statement would include her father. She also recognizes the stigma of being an “inmate.” She states that some people do not want to be around those who have been incarcerated. This is unfortunate she believes because people need camaraderie and human contact. She believes that “humans die faster from being lonely than being sick.” It seems this assertion about loneliness comes from a personal space. It may be another reason why she is so grateful for her family. Vanessa is less likely to speak about her mother. She knows that her mother is not incarcerated anymore, but she is not sure where she is living at this time. That is the most she will say about the subject. She does not describe conversations about her parents as painful, instead stating that she just *does not like* to speak about it. Admitting something is painful would be out of character for Vanessa, who seems to pride herself on her toughness.

Growing up Vanessa was bullied often. She recalls being made fun of for her clothes, her hair and because she did not have any support at home. This came from both kids and teachers. She recalls that teachers would yell at her for not having her homework complete. Eventually, Vanessa was sent to the Judge Rotenberg Center, a residential school in MA, by her strict (the family agrees on this term) grandmother who was at a loss for what to do with a child just coming out of the system. To avoid bullying, Vanessa’s behavior began to worsen. She did what the other kids did to avoid being teased. However, eventually the desire to see her family again caused her to change her behavior. She became a model student, reaching a level 11 out of 12 before leaving the school. Unfortunately, her treatment at this school was similar to what she suffered before. Abuse was rampant and little was done to prevent it or correct it. Vanessa

suffered black eyes and broken arms before being removed by her family. A quick Google search of the JRC gives credence to Vanessa's claims. The center is still in operation despite claims of abuse.

After leaving JRC, Vanessa began attending another residential school in Yonkers. She resides there during the week and returns home to the Bronx on weekends. She needs to pass one more regent to graduate. After graduation, she plans to go to Binghamton University. She chose this school because she can obtain a degree in political science, which she wants to use to become a senator, but also because it is not too far from home. She is aware of the program that allows New York residents to attend college for free if they remain in the state for five years after graduation. She would like to join the Marines after her college graduation and once she has completed her duties there, she would like to attend law school. She reasons that she will have time for this because she cannot become a senator until she is at least 25 years old. Once she becomes a senator, she plans to work on the foster care system, making it easier for family members to get their relatives children and stop them from going into foster care, something that would have made a big difference in her own life.

Vanessa shows trust in only very few people, however she has a lot of empathy. She often tells stories where she has tried to help people, especially those she considers less fortunate. She uses her privileges she earns at school to spend time with her family. She uses her own money to help the homeless. She is upset by poverty and how it can affect someone's future. She notes that some people work extremely hard and still cannot achieve the American Dream. She is also aware of sexism and racism, not only in the news but also in her everyday life. She prides herself on being outspoken after years of bullying, and notes that some people refer to her as aggressive or stern. She claims she does not mean to come across this way, but is instead trying to show that

she is strong in her position and that people cannot speak to her in any way they would like or do anything to her that they would like. It is hard not to connect her statement about people not being able to speak to her in any way they would like or do anything to her they would like, to her years in foster care and residential school where she was abused. Those years of feeling powerless have obviously left a mark on Vanessa.

Vanessa is of average height with brown skin and short cropped black hair. She often wears jeans and a t-shirt and likes to allow the band of her boxer briefs to stick out from the top of her jeans, which is a style often seen in the hip-hop community and urban pop culture. Her aunt commented that Vanessa's grandmother used to try and make her wear dresses which was a source of tension between the two of them. Vanessa's presence is warm and she speaks in a matter of fact manner. She does not smile often, but enjoys joking with her cousins. Vanessa seems to have developed a strong sense of self, which she credits to the epiphany after years of bullying that she needed to stop chasing those who do not like her and start being herself. She is now uncompromising on this fact and is steadfast in her beliefs.

Vanessa has been through situations that may have caused some people to give up yet she continues to persevere. She has been abused, labeled as retarded (now intellectually disabled), and in some respects abandoned by those who were supposed to protect her. Yet, she continues to show strong resolve and no signs of feeling sorry for herself. Instead, she has turned her experience into empathy and a desire to help others. Her favorite experiences in life all center around her family and the best day of her life was one spent with her grandfather at the Empire State Building because she liked being "on top of the world."

Tres: The Man

Tres is only 14 years old, but is prone to staying out all night with his friends. He does not always answer his mother's phone calls or texts and is known for being vague about where he spends most of his time. He claims that he does not come in the house before 10pm on any given night, something his mother confirms. He recounted a story in which he went to a party until 5 am and then fell asleep on the bus with delight as his mother jokes about how she was looking for him to beat him. They both laugh at the time, but it is obvious his mother is concerned about him. He considers his friends his brothers, which may be because he does not have any biological brothers living in his household. Instead, he has two sisters that live with him and an older half-brother that lives down the street. According to Tres, he has 30 friends that meet up regularly at something he calls the "clubhouse." While there they discuss a range of topics including plans, parties, girls and sometimes school. Tres admits that most of the time he is out late, he is coming from "bad places." He does not elaborate what "bad places" means, even when prompted. This is a source of tension between him and his mother, although they still get along quite well.

Tres attends school in the Bronx. He is a freshman and currently has an IEP. He takes some honors courses, but recently his GPA has fallen from 87 to 64. Still, he is certain that the work he is given in school is not challenging enough for him. He finishes it early and it is mostly correct so the teachers instruct him to just "sit" until the end of the period. He will sit in class without doing anything unless he can use the computer. The teachers do not pay much attention to him since his work is complete. Tres found that this is true for a few of his friends as well. During their conversations at the clubhouse, some of his friends have mentioned that they also do not feel challenged in school. His favorite subject is math because "numbers is easy." He does not try to score above a 75 or 80 on any given assignment because that is "on grade level."

Tres used to get bullied in school until he realized his own physical strength in the 5th grade.

After that the bullying stopped and now Tres thinks that most of the people in his school fear him because of the way he looks and his demeanor.

Tres was with his father when he got arrested a few years ago. They were returning from one of his basketball games with Tres' mother. This was exciting for Tres because his dad did not usually make it to his games. He was also happy because his dad had just bought both of them new sneakers so overall Tres was having a great day. When they arrived home, Tres' mother went upstairs to the apartment and Tres went with his dad to the store downstairs to buy some things for the house. Tres said he noticed one of his father's friends come in the store and talk to his dad. Right after that an undercover cop came in and asked Tres' father his name. Tres' father instructed him to go upstairs and tell his mother that "he's going somewhere and it's going to be a long time." He then saw officers grab his father and place him in a car. Tres took his stuff upstairs and told his mother what happened. By the time they got back downstairs Tres' father was already gone. Tres speaks about the incident in a very nonchalant manner, but it is evident that it was a big day in his life. He remembers the exact day that it happened-July 15th, which also happens to be the last time he saw his father.

Tres had a complicated relationship with his father even prior to incarceration. He found his dad "annoying" when he was home. His dad tried to get him to do chores and Tres was not interested in cleaning. Tres also has some resentment toward his father for the way he treated his mother. There were arguments in the household and Tres even remembers seeing his parents get into a physical altercation. He sat there crying with his siblings as they fought and he felt paralyzed, unable to do anything to help his mother. This led him to feel like he did not particularly like his father and to be disrespectful toward him. However, once his father was

incarcerated, Tres decided he could not really hate his father because his father “gave him life.” Tres still has a closer connection with his mother than his father; something he says that makes his father very jealous.

Since his father’s incarceration, Tres feels he has a better understanding of their relationship. He now says he understands why his father was pushing him to do chores and take more responsibility. He believes that his dad knew that his time would come soon, meaning he was about to be arrested, and he wanted to be close to Tres and teach him how to be a man. He now feels he is the man of the house and seems to be conflicted about this responsibility. While he maintains that he wants to keep everything running the same as before his dad left, he also causes problems in the household with some of his behavior. His mother tells his father about his behavior and his father will try to speak to him. Although Tres has a close connection with his mother, he maintains that he does not always know what is going through her mind and what her deepest feelings may be. His father communicates his mother’s feeling to Tres. As Tres describes it, he can “peel off the band aid and he’ll put it back on.” His father will tell him what he is doing wrong, what he is doing right, and how he should proceed until he comes home. He has expressed a strong desire to have a better relationship with his father. He already knows where he would like to take his father when he first comes home. He wants to take him to a place in the Bronx that is close to their house. There they could walk along the water and talk. After that, he hopes they can play a game of basketball.

Tres’ older brother has acted a sort of father figure to him since their father’s incarceration. Tres notes that his brother looks just like his father, but their personalities are very different. His older brother is humbler and level headed than both their father and Tres. Although he lives close by, his brother is often away at college so Tres enjoys talking to him when he can. If Tres’

brother inherited his father's looks, Tres inherited his personality. Full of jokes and bravado, Tres says he thinks about his dad often, but does not worry about him because "he's perfectly capable of handling himself. It's in the genes." Although this comment is about his father, it is representative of Tres too. Even though he is only 14 years old, he believes he is perfectly capable of handling himself because after all, it is in his genes.

Life Prior to Incarceration

Prior to incarceration the story of each child, even siblings, is different. Some children resided with two parents prior to incarceration while others lived in a single parent household or stayed with an extended relative. According to a 2015 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, about half of incarcerated parents reported living with their child at least one month prior to arrest or incarceration. The numbers were higher for mothers (64%) than fathers (47%). In addition, even if the parent did not live in the household, more than half (54%) reported that they provided the primary financial support for their child prior to incarceration. These statistics show how quickly incarceration can change a child's life. For example, if a child lived with their parent prior to incarceration and that parent was providing their primary financial support, that parent's incarceration likely had a significant effect on the child. It would affect not only their emotional health, but also their quality of life and standard of living. If a child was not living with their parent and that parent was not providing financial support, depending on the frequency the child interacted with the parent, the incarceration of that parent may not affect their day to day life in terms of their living situation or standard of living, even though it still may be an emotionally traumatic event. For example, Delilah was already living with her aunt when her father was incarcerated the last time. He was still abusing drugs and did not provide for her day to day care. While her father's incarceration is important to her, it did not affect her daily

life in the way another parent's incarceration may. In contrast, when Vanessa's mother was arrested while Vanessa was with her, she went straight into foster care. Once she was in the system, it took her years to get out. The U.S. Department of Health's report mirrors this reality stating:

When fathers are incarcerated in State prisons, the vast majority of their children (88 percent) reside with their mothers (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). When mothers are incarcerated in State prisons, their children's care settings varied across a wider range of settings, including the other parent, grandparents, and other relatives. Children with mothers who are incarcerated in State prisons are more than five times as likely to reside in a foster home or agency than children with fathers who are incarcerated in State prisons. (2015, p.2)

Of the eight children interviewed, six were currently living with their mother. Two of the eight were living with a family member after previously being in foster care. Children with an incarcerated parent represented about 8% of children who entered foster care in 2013 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Being forced into foster care is associated with its own set of adverse effects. As Wakefield and Wildeman (2014) state, "Entry into the foster care system is harmful for children, even when they experienced significant trauma in their home of origin" (p.69). All of the children in this study had fathers that are currently incarcerated, which is not unusual as 90% of incarcerated parents are fathers and males make up a larger portion of the prison population as a whole (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Despite all the children currently having incarcerated fathers, three of the eight children had experienced maternal incarceration at some point in their lives. As mentioned earlier, as the number of women in prison continues to grow, the number of children with an

incarcerated mother will increase as well. The incarceration of a mother is more likely to be disruptive to a child's daily life as more mothers than fathers provide the day to day care for their children (Elmalak, 2015; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014).

The lives of the children in this study varied prior to parental incarceration. Tres, Sky, and Emmanuel lived in a two-parent household prior to incarceration. While Emmanuel's parents are no longer together, Tres and Sky's parents are still in a relationship. Orlando, Amber, and Jaqueline were already living in single parent households when their parent was incarcerated. Vanessa and Delilah were both living with relatives after previously being in foster care. In the following sections, the children will discuss their life prior to their parents' incarceration up to the arrest.

The Household

It was previously mentioned in this study, that for many children of incarcerated parent, there were challenges in the household prior to incarceration (Bernstein, 2005; Eddy & Reid, 2003; Hairston, 2003, Wakefield & Wildman, 2014). As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) state:

For most children with an incarcerated parent, and particularly children of incarcerated mothers, the incarceration was preceded by other challenges and other ACEs [adverse childhood experiences]. As a result, it can be difficult or impossible to distinguish causality of negative outcomes for children of incarcerated parents. For example, was it the parent's incarceration or the preceding domestic violence, parental unemployment, and substance abuse that led to the negative outcomes? (p.182)

The majority of the children in this study discussed one or more of these situations prior to their parent's incarceration. Tres speaks about witnessing domestic violence stating:

The day I saw my mom and dad fight and my dad was on top of my mom and I was just sitting there and crying, I didn't know what to do. I just watched everything. I felt paralyzed. I wasn't. I was watching everything and everything was slow. I was just despised to see it.

Tres went on to discuss how watching his father physically fight with his mother caused him to have a deep dislike for his father that only dissipated once his father was incarcerated. In the instance that Tres describes, he feels like he failed because he was unable to protect his mother. His use of the word paralyzed is interesting, because it evokes an image of someone who wants to move, but cannot. It is possible that Tres was too afraid of his father to move. In another part of the interview he also described his father doing something to him that made Tres unable to breathe. It is also possible that Tres was too young to be sure what to do. His mother admits to fights between her and Tres' father however, she describes them as more of a reciprocal event than Tres remembers. Emmanuel also indicated that all was not well in his household prior to his father's incarceration because his dad was "cheating" on his mother and "abusive." He indicated that his father's treatment of his mother, like Tres, caused him to have some anger toward his father. Emmanuel states, "I can't lie and I talked to him about it and he said it's okay to feel that way [angry]. I can talk to him anytime. That's why I told you if I feel any way toward him I can talk to him about it." For both of the boys, it seems that any anger toward their fathers has less to do with their incarceration and more to do with their behavior prior to being incarcerated.

Jacqueline's biological father is not incarcerated, but her stepfather is. When her biological parents were still together she recalls "I was upset with all the arguments that were going on in the house and it made me feel like I can go argue with other people." Because her "dad" and mother married while he was in prison, she has only lived in a household together with them

recently. However, she indicates that when her “dad” was incarcerated, her mother and he had a positive relationship that rarely consisted of arguments.

Substance abuse was another issue that many of the children dealt with prior to incarceration. Amber recounted her father spending time with her in a crack house. She states it as if it is a memory, but she was only two when her father was incarcerated. Therefore, it is more likely something someone told her. She also recounted that her dad struggled with alcoholism stating, “My dad has been in jail for like 15. Well, he got 15 years, but he might just be doing thirteen -- before that he was back in forth and in and out. He was an alcoholic.” Delilah also mentioned her father’s drug use. She recalled an experience seeing him on the street prior to his incarceration. She stated:

Last summer I ended up seeing him on the street. That was my first time actually seeing him like, you know, in the drug stage of, you know, in the process -- in the process of using drugs. And there was -- it was like a moment where I felt like a lot -- all he could do was cry and all I could do was cry, you know, because I can't, you know, help you. You got to want help for yourself so it was like -- it was just -- so it was just a -- a moment for me that I never thought I would experience.

Substance abuse problems among incarcerated individuals is very common. A 2018 report from The Brennan Center for Justice found, “Approximately 79% of today’s prisoners suffer from drug addiction or mental illness, and 40% suffer from both. Alternative interventions such as treatment could be more effective sanctions for these individuals [than prison]” (p.8). Delilah finding her father in the street on drugs had to be traumatic, but her response shows both concern and acceptance. Her sadness at seeing him in that situation, and in return her father’s sadness at allowing her to see him in that state shows a connection between the two. Her father’s tears also

may show that he too realizes that he is an endless cycle of addiction. Delilah's realization at age 16 that she could not save her father shows a maturity beyond her years. Unfortunately, his subsequent incarceration which resulted from his drug addiction, will likely do nothing to help him manage his addiction.

In addition to serious issues such as domestic violence and substance abuse, the children also recounted daily experiences with their parents prior to incarceration that most children can relate to. Annoyance over being told to do chores was mentioned by two of the children. Sky stated

My dad was here, he'd tell me to do this, do that, how to do everything. They'd [my parents] call me -- they'd call me for something, but they want me to do something for them. And I get mad and say no.

While many of these issues are alarming, they are not unique to parental incarceration. The Childhood Domestic Violence Association found that 1.5 million children in the U.S. witness domestic violence in their homes each year and that over 40 million adults in the U.S. grew up in a house with domestic violence (2014). A 2017 report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that an average of 8.7 million children under the age of 17 in the United States live with at least one parent who had a substance use disorder (Lipari & Struther). Substance abuse disorders include the recurrent use of drugs and/or alcohol. Regardless of any adverse situations prior to incarceration, all of the children reported having some sort of relationship with their parent prior to incarceration even if they were too young to remember it.

When "It" Happened

Like living situations, the circumstances surrounding the arrest of their parent are different from child to child. For those who are there, watching a parent being arrested is a traumatic

experience. Bernstein (2005) writes, "A national study found that almost 70 percent of children who were present at a parent's arrest watched their parent handcuffed and nearly 30% were confronted with drawn weapons" (p.9). Of the eight children interviewed, only two were present at the time of their parent's arrest for their current incarceration. However, four total had experienced watching a parent being arrested at some point during their life. Two, Jacqueline and Orlando, did not know their "dad" at the time of his arrest. The other children found out about their parent's arrest from a family member, usually their mother. Tres recounted his father's arrest, stating:

We was in the store, but my dad just got-I just came from my basketball game and I just got a new pair of sneakers and he got a new pair of sneakers so I think everything's fine. So we got to the store. My mom goes upstairs- me and my dad had to go buy stuff for the house. One of my dad's friends come in the store- told my dad nah, I've got that...And then an undercover cop comes in the store and he asked for my dad's name. Then my dad told me to go upstairs and tell mommy that he's going somewhere and it's going to be a long time. And then that's when the grabbed him and put him in the car.

Tres remembered that this day began as a good day. He was happy because his father did not usually come to his basketball games, but that day he did. The family was acting as a unit. His mother and father both attended his game and he and his father both had new sneakers. The joy and security of that day quickly vanished when his father was arrested in front of him. Tres still seems to have some guilt about the situation. When discussing his relationship with his father he states, "He wanted to be close to me because he knew his time was going to come [incarceration] and I didn't want him to put his time into me. I didn't want to talk to him, but [now] I realized why he was doing it." Tres realized in hindsight that his dad knew his arrest was imminent and

because of this he wanted to bond with Tres. Tres, now older, seems to wish that he would have allowed his dad to bond with him in a more meaningful way although as mentioned previously there was tension in the household at the time. Tres' story is an example of the emotional labor he is conducting now that his father is incarcerated. He has feelings of guilt about the status of the relationship with his father prior to incarceration. More work about children's reflections about their relationship with their parents prior to incarceration and the emotional work that follows was sought, but very difficult to find. Much of the current research is parent-centered, instead of child-centered.

Emmanuel was also present for his father's arrest, but did not have as much to say about the situation. Emmanuel stated:

I remember my little brother being like really shook and scared and asking my dad where he was going and he went outside. I looked out the window and saw him in handcuffs with the police. It was a lot of stuff in my head. I didn't really know what to do. I was quiet for a long time.

Here Emmanuel states how scared his brother was, but from Emmanuel's reaction it seems as if he was scared as well. His reaction to his father's arrest somewhat mirrors Tres reaction to witnessing domestic violence. He did not know what to do so he did nothing, not even talk. They both felt powerless at the time; unable to protect their parents. I do not know what Emmanuel was like prior to his father's incarceration except for him mentioning that he was a good student. However, the Emmanuel I met is very quiet and reserved. His statement about being "quiet for a long time" makes me wonder if I still saw the effects of his father's arrest; a quiet, reserved Emmanuel.

Vanessa was not present during her father's arrest and instead found out the information from her aunt. She states:

He was AWOL on probation and under the influence of drugs. My aunt woke me up in the middle of the night and told me. I wasn't surprised. I knew it was coming because every time he gets out he does this to himself. He puts it in his conscious that it's too late to be in my life and make a change so he just gives up and it's easier for him in there than out here. It's easier to go back than to stay out here. Once you do something one time, it's easier the next time.

Her statements here hit on several issues. One, while Vanessa said she was not surprised at her father's arrest, her aunt, who is her father's sister, thought it was important enough to wake her up to tell her. Obviously, her aunt thought it would be significant to Vanessa. Vanessa's lack of surprise seems to stem from the fact that she feels her father has given up on trying to change his life and the fact that he has been incarcerated multiple times for drug offenses. Vanessa does not seem to agree and states that her father is putting these negative thoughts in his own mind. She also understands why he went back to jail. Her last two statements seem to be a critique about the lack of supports available to formerly incarcerated individuals and how this leads to recidivism. Her statement is astute. A 2018 press release from the Bureau of Justice indicated that "5 out of 6 state prisoners were arrested within 9 years of their release" (p.1). Reasons for recidivism vary from person to person, but Travis and Waul (2003) describe many of the challenges recently released people face, writing:

Many returning prisoners with substance abuse problems before incarceration may still need treatment. Others face the prospect of homelessness without help from family members and the challenge of finding a stable job to support themselves and their

children. In addition, a criminal record will limit many returning prisoners' access to public assistance and governmental benefits. In most cases, the criminal justice system does not help families plan for and negotiate the process of returning home. (p.22)

Sky, who also was not present for her father's arrest, was left with a feeling of guilt.

Remembering the day it happened, she said:

I didn't see him that day besides the morning before I left to go to school. I don't even say bye when I leave to go to school. I just walk[ed] out the house. I thought he was gonna get out the next day, but he didn't. And after that, I just shook off everything and went outside to play.

She seems to feel guilty that she did not show her father more attention that day. Her youth is evidenced by the fact that she thought her father would be able to return home the following day.

Her statement about shaking everything off seems to be her way of coping with the situation.

Shaking something off is a way to release something, to become unbothered and unaffected.

From the rest of her statements, it is evident that Sky never actually "shook" her father's incarceration off, but that containing her emotions, except for anger, has become a way for her to deal with her feelings. It is indicative of Sky's age at the time that her way to deal with the problems was go to play. While something major had occurred, Sky quickly went back to her daily routine and did something that makes most kids happy-play.

All of the children in the study showcased some sort of emotional work related to their parent's incarceration. Most of them were attempting to manage their feelings to avoid showing their hurt, anger and despair. This emotional management manifested itself in many of them as an overall calm, cool and unaffected demeanor. When this demeanor cracked, it most often results in an expression of anger. It is unclear who the management of emotion was attempting to

benefit, but it more than likely employed to keep the incarcerated parent and caregivers from worrying about them or feeling guilty. It may also be used as a defense mechanism to keep their peers from finding sources of pain. The last assumption stems from the children's comments on school which will be discussed in the next section.

Life During Incarceration

Figured World: School

One of the issues that was consistent across all of the interviews was a negative school experience at some during the child's academic career. While much of the current research points to children of incarcerated parents underperforming in school, most of the children (seven out of eight) in this study indicated that they were doing well in school. However, 100% of the children could pinpoint a negative school experience. In contrast with much of the research however, these children indicated that the negative issue occurred for a period and then passed. It was not a state of permanence, but instead temporary. They learned how to cope and moved forward.

In the figured world of school, bullying became a major identifier. In the interviews, many of the youth brought the topic up unprompted when asked about their school experiences. This is not unusual as the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported:

In 2015, about 21 percent of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied at school during the school year...Higher percentages of Black students (25 percent) and White students (22 percent) than of Hispanic students (17 percent) reported being bullied at school in 2015. The percentage of students who reported being made fun of, called names, or insulted was also higher for Black students (17 percent) and White students (14 percent) than for Hispanic students (9 percent). The percentage of students who reported being the

subject of rumors was higher for Black students (14 percent), White students (13 percent), and Hispanic students (10 percent) than for Asian students (5 percent). (p.1)

Because many of the earlier interviews mentioned bullying, it then became a guiding topic in subsequent interviews. Most of the children identified as either having been bullied in school (most common) or being a bully (less common). It seemed that in the world of schools, children were either victim, bully or bystander and that these labels could be fluid. For example, while Orlando stated that he has not been bullied and does not bully others, he admitted to seeing it and staying out of the way. Orlando was actively working to maintain his bystander status in school, which could quickly turn to victim. In the schools these children attend, bullying was normalized. They did not view it as extraordinary or surprising. It had become a way of life.

It is important to this study to note that the bullying the children experienced was not directly because of their parent's incarceration; no one made direct mention of that specific situation. In Vanessa's case, she was subjected to ridicule because she was poor and did not have support at home. She stated:

I got bullied a lot in middle school, high school and elementary. I wasn't that fortunate, the clothes I wore- I got bullied about that. I didn't have people to help me after school with my homework so I got teased because I'd always ask people at school to help me. They [the teachers] would just yell at me and I would get in trouble. I never tried to tell them.

Vanessa felt ostracized not only by her peers, but also by her teachers. In a space where Vanessa should have felt safe, she was attacked by the people who were supposed to nurture, support and guide her. Caring, competent teachers are important to all children, but they are vital to children who live in poverty. As Delpit (2012) writes:

For children of poverty, good teachers and powerful instruction are imperative. While it is certainly true that inequity, family issues, poverty, crime and so forth all affect poor children's learning opportunities, British educator Peter Mortimore found that the quality of teaching has *six to ten times* as much impact on achievement as all other factors combined...It is the quality of relationship that allows a teacher's push for excellence...many of our children of color don't learn *from* a teacher, as much as *for* a teacher. They don't want to disappoint a teacher who they feel believes in them (p.73& p.86).

Unfortunately for Vanessa, she did not have quality teachers who believed in her. In addition to dealing with the substance abuse of her parents, verbal and physical abuse in foster care and a lack of financial resources to get the things she needed, Vanessa could not find a safe haven in school. This led to a cascade of negative consequences. By her own account, Vanessa became angry and was eventually medicated. The medication caused her to gain weight and become lethargic. She was classified as Mentally Retarded (now Intellectually Disabled) and received an IEP. Her anger issues eventually led her to be sent to a residential school. Many researchers have discussed the overrepresentation of Black children in special education especially in categories such as Intellectual Disability and Emotional disturbance. Laura (2014), writes:

Black students are nearly twice as likely to be labeled 'learning disabled' as White students, almost twice as likely to be labeled 'emotionally disturbed,' and three to four times as likely to be labeled 'mentally retarded.'" Among all disability categories, mental retardation is the most likely to be assigned to Black youth, particularly Black males (Losen & Orfield, 2002; Parrish, 2002)...Certainly, some students do benefit from the resources and accommodations that a disability label provides, but research shows that

many do not (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Slavin, 1989). More specifically, it suggests that special education is often a dumping ground for youth of color, and that Black boys are susceptible to being undereducated-labeled, shunned and treated in ways that create and reinforce a cycle of failure. (pp.19-21)

While I did not conduct an IQ test with Vanessa (nor am I qualified to do so), I found her to be a deeply intelligent, articulate young woman. Speaking to Vanessa and listening to her deep understanding of the world, led me to question how much of her classification reflected her actual abilities, and how much was due to her previous environment. Vanessa was able to eventually assert herself and she no longer gets bullied. She described the end of the bullying by saying:

Things have changed and my personality is different. For some reason, have you ever went to high school and there's just that one person you never try? Yea, I'm that person. I haven't gotten in a fight since 9th grade...I think it's because like being bullied made me always be someone who I wasn't and made me want to hang around people who didn't like me. As I got older I got the picture and I was like why am I chasing around people who are bullying me and trying to hang out with them when they don't even care about me. It got to the point where I just went my separate way and started doing things on my own.

Tres, like Vanessa, was able to overcome his bullying situation. He stated:

But in elementary, I used to get bullied until I started realizing how strong I am for a little kid. In 5th grade, I was always, like, muscular, I always had a body frame that I was strong. I really then noticed that the people that were bullying me were not as strong as

me. So I used to let them push me around and stuff, I used to let them poke me with pencils and take my stuff until 4th grade. When I was 5th grade, when I-- the day before graduation, I beat up some kid and then the other bully. I didn't even get in trouble.

Tres and Vanessa both credit the end of their bullying to discovering a new piece of themselves. They both "toughened" up in sense; Tres through the realization of his own physical strength and his ascent into manhood. For Vanessa, there is a change of self in her words. She was once a girl who sought the validation of others, even people who seemingly did not care for her and treated her poorly. She moves from the group to the individual in this space and realizes that she is enough. Tres' assertion that he did not get in trouble is also interesting. It seems to justify the beating he gave the two bullies. In his mind, if he did not get in trouble, then they must have deserved it. There was a sense of justice in his statement. Both Tres and Vanessa's statements and descriptions of overcoming bullying show the emotional labor they were conducting in their private lives. While most likely feeling upset about the bullying situation, they realized being continually afraid or upset what not what was expected of them. Both sizeable children, they learned to intimidate and present a cool countenance that was acceptable to others.

Jacqueline was the only child in the study who admitted to being a bully, but has since tried to atone for her previous behavior. Jacqueline stated:

There's a lot of bullying in my school and so my school now has this thing where we have bullying sessions every week and me, personally, I don't get bullied. Like I admit that I was a bully once 'cause of the things that was happening at home and I admit that I wasn't the nicest person I could be to other people, but now I'm like helping this one girl out. She's getting bullied a lot at my school 'cause she has like a growing disorder and so she's really short and so I like I help her out with whatever I can do to help her and

like give her friends and stuff 'cause I don't want to sound popular in my school, but I'm known and I feel like if I introduce her to some of my friends then she'll have like a lot more friends.

Jacqueline seemed to be negotiating with what she what she wanted to share about bullying. I brought the topic up because of its prevalence in previous interviews with other youth. She began her statement with a general picture of her school and made it clear that she was not a victim of bullying. She then, in a moment of candor, or a release of guilt, admitted that she was a bully once. She attributes her bullying to the fights going on at home between her mother and biological father. Right after disclosing that she was a bully and justifying her reasons for it, she gives an example of her helping another student who is currently being bullied by utilizing her popularity. Her belief in her own popularity is clear because she believes she has the power to "give" the girl friends. Jacqueline wanted to be honest with me, but she also did not want me, or perhaps whoever would be reading about her, to think she is a bad person. Here she is navigating the complexity of the human experience that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) discuss. They write, "...the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfection" (1997, p.9). Jacqueline is not perfect, but in sharing this flaw, she showed her goodness. She showed herself to be a reflective, caring young woman who is making an honest effort to atone for her mistakes- something many adults struggle with.

In addition to bullying, another theme that presented itself more than once was a lapse in academic performance or behavior. Emmanuel's behavioral and academic issues began shortly after his father was arrested. Emmanuel stated:

I was a good student before my dad went to jail. I wasn't really getting into trouble. I started slacking ever since 4th grade- a year after he was incarcerated, my grades started

going down. It was the first time I had summer school in 4th grade and I really didn't like it. I felt like a really bad student. I just wanted to lay down all summer and get better at sports, but nah I had to go to summer school. I was hanging out with the wrong crowd. I thought it was cool to be disrespectful to the teachers, but I chose to change. I used to have a lot of 60s in my classes and to see my grades now I was really happy. I've really matured.

Emmanuel's comments fit into the larger narrative about poor educational outcomes for children of incarcerated parents. However, what much of the literature does not mention is that Emmanuel's situation was temporary and very closely related to the initial incarceration period. With the proper support, he was able to do well in school. While many people supported him, Emmanuel attributes his change to a single teacher who used his love of sports to convince him to do better. He remembered their encounter, stating:

One day I was in 7th grade and I had a conversation with my math teacher and he showed me the averages I would need to go D-1 and I saw my averages so I was like I have to step my game up. In 8th grade my grades got higher. He saw my basketball game and thought I was pretty good so for him to see my average he was like wow. He said you could be really nice but I had to change my grades. When I saw my average it was at an 84 and I was like 5 points away from going D-1 but I know it's not too late. I know this second semester I have to get up to at least a 90 average.

It is important that although at the time his mother was trying to talk to him about his choices, and his dad was attempting to speak to him from prison, Emmanuel's decision to change came after his conversation with a teacher. His story is an example of the effect a caring teacher can have on a student. Teachers are important characters in the world of school. They serve many

roles; instructor, authority figure, counselor, nurse, and in some cases confidant. The adoration a caring teacher can receive is made clear when Amber stated:

There's like this one teacher at every school. If you disrespect her, the kids are just going to punch you in your throat. That's that teacher. I swear. One of the kids disrespected her one day and my best friend threw a chair at him. I just sat there and said yep, now get out. She's so nice and different. There's no reason why you should disrespect her. If you are, these kids in that school will probably murder you. There's a known fact that they will.

Amber's claim that "it's a known fact" shows that this declaration is something she strongly believes in and that she is a part of this social contract of school. Extremely loyal and protective of those around her, Amber's affection for her teacher is clear. In the world of schools, where many adults are at best not helpful and at worst, harmful, Amber and her peers desire to protect one of the "good ones" makes sense.

It is important to note that most of the youth could only identify one or two adults within their school world who provided support and care. More often than not, the students felt that the role adults played within schools was either ineffective or detrimental. When research and literature seeks to examine the educational outcomes of children with incarcerated parents, it should first examine the effectiveness and attitudes of the staff within the building. As Delpit (2012) states:

When students believe that the teacher cares for them and is concerned about them, they will frequently rise to the expectations set. When students believe that teachers believe in their ability, when they see teachers willing to go the extra mile to meet their academic deficiencies, they are much more likely to try. (p.82)

Unfortunately, the expectations set by many of the teachers the youth in this study discussed

were not high or worth rising to. For many of the youth, they were expected to do the minimum. Another theme that the children discussed related to school was that of lowered expectations. Research has already shown that minority children and children of incarcerated parents, two groups that are often one in the same, experience lowered teacher expectations in school (Dellaire, 2010; Delpit, 2012; Laura, 2014; Wildeman, 2017). As we discussed earlier, Vanessa's unfortunate school trajectory led to her to be labeled and medicated. Tres, a young Black male, admitted that he does not always try his hardest in school and has a habit of failing to turn his work in even when it is complete and in his book bag. He mentioned several times that he felt the work was too easy for him. Tres stated:

I told the school that the work is easy and I showed them the work, I just never turned it in. So like some of the work I was passing my classes, but the classes I'm not passing, I have the work in my bag and I never turned it in. But they [the teachers] know I'm fully capable of doing the work.

It's hard not to view Tres' decision not to turn in his work as passive resistance. Not only does he feel the work is too easy and let the school know this, he also feels like the teachers do not care. Tres described his school experience, stating:

Just, like, when I'm in school, I'll just be doing my work and the teachers, they don't show me attention so I will be on my own doing my work, doing it the way I know how to do it. And then he's like-- I get the essays right so, I'll just be looking at them at them like, what am I supposed to do now? And they'll just be like, "Sit." And I'll just be like, "Okay." And just be sitting there.

Tres assertion that the teacher does not show him attention, is something that he said nonchalantly, but that bothers him nonetheless. If the teacher does not care, why should Tres?

As, Delpit (2012) writes, "...students are quite aware when the instruction they are receiving is subpar. While many are willing to play the game to avoid being challenged, others are distraught at the realization that they are being shortchanged" (p.75). Tres is aware that he is not being challenged, but he plays the game. He does the work, but does not turn it in. It stays in his backpack where it can be used at any time as proof that he is capable, in case anyone says different. Tres also found that his situation was not uncommon. He describes hanging out at the "club house" (a house where his friends gather) and discussing the topic of school. Tres recounted that many people, including one of his close friends, felt that school was no longer challenging for them. Tres stated:

My close friends be telling me that too. One of my main friends that I spend a lot time with now, he be telling me that he feels that classroom got easier to him so, he don't tend to go to school. So, I reach out to him, just go just to do the work, it's easy credit. It's probably just because it's the first marking period. I mean the second marking period, things might get challenging over time. So, we just being going to school see if it's getting challenging. They haven't.

Tres makes a lot of interesting points here. One, that students may stop attending school not because the work was too challenging, but because it was not challenging, or at least, interesting enough. The decision of Tres' friend to stop attending due to boredom is not unique. A 2006 report by Civic Enterprises which was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gate foundation found:

In a survey of nearly 470 dropouts throughout the country, nearly 50 percent said they Left school because their classes were boring and not relevant to their lives or career Aspirations. A majority said schools did not motivate them to work hard, and more than half dropped out with just two years or less to complete their high school education.

(Bridgeland, Dilulio & Burke, p.iii).

Also, it's interesting to see Tres encourage his friend to go to school and do his work, yet fail to turn in his own assignments. However, Tres did seem like he was in doing better in school so he may have decided to take his own advice. He stated:

I'm getting back on track now. Because before I wasn't really depending on school until I failed my classes. So I'm trying to get my GPA back up from 64 to the way I was at first to 87. I told the school the work was too easy and I showed them the work, I just never turned it in. So I was passing some of my classes, but the classes I'm not passing, I have the work in my bag and I never turned it in.

It seems that failing his classes was a wakeup call to Tres. He makes it clear that he is not failing his classes because of an inability to do the work, but instead because of a lack of effort on his part. He is working to remedy his situation and get "back on track," which means he feels like he has been off track or moving in the wrong direction. Unlike Emmanuel, Tres does not seem to have any one person who helped him to decide to make more of an effort in school. His teachers seem uninterested and unresponsive to his needs and Tres returns their attitude. Tres also used the idiom "on track" again when discussing his hopes for his father. He stated, "I hope that whatever he's doing he stops and just needs to get his life back on track...I want to be like him but I just want him to just be home so I could see his face." Tres views incarceration as another way someone's life can go in the wrong direction or in a negative direction. Again, as with himself, Tres does not put the burden on other people to help get his father's life headed in a positive direction. While expressing how much he misses his father and even wishes to emulate him to a certain extent, he made clear that it is his father's responsibility to make a better life.

Like Tres, Amber also found herself unchallenged at school. Amber's school environment is different than Tres; she is bussed daily to a residential school, but she had a similar feeling of not being challenged in school. She stated:

Unless I'm being bribed to do something good and stay in class I'm not there. If I'm being bribed I'm not going to leave. I'm going to be in school, but I'm bribed a lot. It's boring, and I know most of the stuff that they're teaching me. And, most of my classes are in gym right now. I have like three gyms and then three maths. Then, I have lunch period and then one English. People say I have a pretty fun schedule. I don't like gym. I like the halls. I don't know why I don't get credit for walking around the halls.

There are a lot of ideas within Amber's statement. One, she feels like the work is not challenging and engaging. This probably adds to her desire to leave the class and roam the halls. Next, in an attempt to get Amber to stay in class, the teachers have resorted to bribing her with food. Instead of the instruction being tailored to meet Amber's needs or keep her engaged, she is being rewarded for just being present in the classroom which does not seem to work often. Also, Amber says she has "three gyms" but explicitly states she does not like gym. While it may not be practical or possible for Amber to create her whole school schedule based on her interests (although that would be ideal), it does seem counterproductive to her academic attainment and behavioral goals to have three gym periods when she is not interested in the subject. As Reyes et al. (2012) affirm:

Engagement tends to decline in early adolescence because of the disparity between students' developmental needs and the learning climate available to them (Eccles et al., 1993). In the upper elementary and middle school grades, schools often place more emphasis on competition, individualization, order, and discipline, rather than on

interpersonal relationships, although the latter are crucial to positive youth development (Eccles et al., 1993; Osterman, 2000; Skinner et al., 1990). Disengaged students are more likely to fail and drop out of school, especially when they feel alienated or disconnected from their teachers and peers (Finn, 1989). (p.9)

In both Tres and Amber's school worlds, there is little engagement and involvement. The emphasis is on behavior rather than learning and in an attempt to get children to behave there may be some concessions made by the adults. Amber's need for external motivators (money being an indication why she will not pursue certain jobs) is reinforced in the school setting. She is not willing to "work" without being given something, which may be understandable since the work of school (learning) is not what she is actually being asked to do. Instead she is tasked with making herself invisible; remaining quiet and failing to produce any issues which require adult attention. While many studies on children with incarcerated parents indicate that these children are at risk for a variety of negative outcomes including low academic achievement, most of the children in this study indicated that they were either doing well or were capable of doing well in school. If they were not working up to their full potential, the issues they highlighted were related more to the schools expectations of them instead of issues at home. If a child did have an issue at home that impacted their performance at school, such as when Emmanuel began acting out following his father's incarceration, the behavior was not permanent. However, it is important to note the importance of teacher attitude in his story. Emmanuel was fortunate to have a teacher who took an extra interest in him. If he was met with repeated indifference or prejudice, Emmanuel may have taken much longer to get back on track. As Delpit (2012) states, "If we [teachers] do not recognize the brilliance before us, we cannot help but carry on the stereotypic societal views that these children are somehow damaged goods and that they cannot

be expected to succeed” (p.5). The world of school for the children in this study was for the most part, not a positive space. It was a place where bullying was normalized, many teachers were uncaring or incompetent and students were not supported in the quest to reach their full potential. Instead of highlighting the supposed deficits of children of incarcerated parents in a school setting, future research should heavily analyze the quality of support and instruction available to these students.

Bonding and Parenting While Incarcerated

As discussed previously, the families of children with incarcerated parents are often viewed as broken and troubled prior to the incarceration of a parent. This narrative poses a problem for incarcerated individuals, their loved ones and people who would like to see the prison system reformed. The stigma of incarceration, especially when combined with the stigma of being Black or brown, constructs an image of a person who is, at best undeserving, and at worst, a threat morally, emotionally or physically to those closest to them and society as a whole. Therefore, when advocating for the rights of those incarcerated and their children, it is common to encounter assumptions that the parent does not love their child, the parent is not fit or competent and that the child would be better off without them. However, despite these challenges, many studies have found that contact between a child and their incarcerated parent is beneficial to both parties and that most incarcerated parents are eager to parent to from behind prison walls (Bernstein, 2005; Gaynes & Krupat, 2018; Poehlmann-Tynan, 2016; Travis & Waul, 2003). Children who maintain contact with their incarcerated parent are more likely to feel secure and experience less adverse effects. Parents who are incarcerated also benefit from contact from their loved ones. As Shanahan and Agudelo (2012) state:

Research on people returning from prison shows that family members can be valuable sources of support during incarceration and after release. For example, prison inmates who had more contact with their families and who reported positive relationships overall are less likely to be re-incarcerated (Martinez & Christian, 2009). Families can motivate formerly incarcerated relatives to seek or continue drug treatment or mental health care, and they most frequently provide housing for newly released family members. (p.17)

Of the eight children interviewed, Emmanuel, whose father is incarcerated within New York City limits, has the most contact with his incarcerated parent. Not only does his father call weekly, he also goes for visits with his mother and younger brother on a regular basis. The amount of contact they have was surprising to Emmanuel first. He believed his father would only be able to call occasionally stating:

He always calls to check up on us. I appreciate that cuz I thought he would call once in a while but he checks up on us a lot. Like this morning I think he tried to call my phone because it said somebody is trying to call you from a correctional facility. I don't have a credit card account so I couldn't pay for it. I think my mom has to do it. It's not like you can call from a random number. You have to pay.

These phone calls are very important to Emmanuel and he was excited that his mother told him she would set up his cell phone so his father could call his phone directly instead of going through her phone. In addition to the phone calls, Emmanuel still visits his father with the assistance of his mother, even though the pair are separated. Emmanuel's mothers' willingness to take him to these visits are crucial to him being able to visit. As Travis and Waul (2003) state:

Prisoners' success in maintaining ties with their children also often depends on the quality of their relationship with the children's caregiver...the quality of parent-child interaction among juveniles and adult fathers depends a great deal on their relationship with their children's mother. (p.21)

Although Emmanuel's parents are no longer together, they both have tried to maintain a relationship and it has benefited their children greatly. Emmanuel described his last visit with his father stating:

I went to see him Saturday. It was good to see him. I was glad he got to see how big I got-I'm taller than him now and it was good having conversations with him. Telling him how I'm doing in school. I saw on my mom's face and my little brother's face- my little brother was really happy to see him Then when we left it was a bit emotional. It was hard.

Although Emmanuel admits it was hard leaving his father, he thoroughly enjoyed the visit and he was also pleased to see his brother happy. Visits are also one of the few times Emmanuel is able to experience a complete family, at least in the physical sense. Emmanuel expressed that he wishes his parents would get back together when his father is released even though his mother is remarried, even though he understands why his mother would not want to do this. He stated:

She [his mother] just takes us to visit. They're not really together. I can't lie, my dad really put my mom through a lot. I see why, even though I would want them, but I think my mom's making the right choice. I love my dad. He can be a great man, but he made the wrong decisions in life.

Despite his acknowledgement that his dad “made the wrong decisions in life,” Emmanuel’s father has exceeded the parenting expectations Emmanuel had for him when he was first incarcerated and it is clear that he values their relationship.

Jacqueline and Orlando also had frequent contact with their incarcerated parent which was very much encouraged and sustained by the strong relationship between their mother and their “dad”. Orlando estimates that his “dad” calls his mother three times per day for half an hour each time. During these calls, their “dad” tries to make sure he connects with each child in a unique way. Jacqueline and her “dad” catch up on the latest gossip. Jacqueline appreciates their conversations, stating:

He’ll [my dad] call me on my phone and be like ‘you won’t believe what happened this week’ and I’m like ‘Dad, what’s good?’ I’ll tell him what’s going on and he gives me advice about a lot of things. It’s like I’m going through stages where I’m trying to find out who I am. I tell him about the gossip in my school and I’ll tell him about boys obviously. He gives me really good advice.

Not only do the conversations between Jacqueline and her “dad” keep them connected, they serve as a means for him to parent Jacqueline even though he was not physically present at the time¹⁹. Jacqueline’s “dad” is guiding her and advising her as she attempts to find herself during adolescence, much as parents physically present in the household may do. In fact, although he was incarcerated, Jacqueline’s “dad” displayed a caring and understanding that some children may not even experience with the parents they live with. Her “dad” also took time to speak to Orlando, even though Orlando has much less interest in speaking on the phone. When he did

¹⁹ Jacqueline and Orlando’s “dad” was released in 2018 after serving 20 years in prison.

speak to Orlando, he made sure to gain Orlando's interest by asking about animals and allowing Orlando to demonstrate his expertise.

Orlando and Jacqueline's mother also visited her husband consistently, but because of his location (Upstate New York), the children did not always want to come along. Jacqueline was more easily persuaded to go along than Orlando (who is a self-professed homebody) and she seemed to have an acute understanding of how important visits are to those who are incarcerated. Jacqueline stated:

She [my mom] said you have to see your dad. You know how much he loves seeing you and so I just went because I'm his only- well I'm not technically his daughter cuz he's my stepdad, but I'm the only girl so he loves that cuz he never had a daughter. Just a few moments of my time can make his whole week.

Dolan (2017) writes, "Studies have shown that prisoners who have in-person family visits while in jail are less likely to misbehave while in custody and are less likely to be convicted of crimes after being released." In reality, visits took much more than a few moments of Jacqueline's time, but nonetheless she understood how meaningful the visits were to her "dad." Here too she displayed her goodness and a willingness to put someone else's wishes above her own. While teenagers are often considered selfish and ego-centric, many of the youth interviewed displayed a strong sense of family, community and a willingness to help others.

While Emmanuel, Jacqueline, Orlando were fortunate to be able to have face-to-face contact with their incarcerated parent, most of the children in the story communicated with their incarcerated parent solely through the telephone. Despite the inherent limitation of phone conversations (timed, unable to read body language or physical cues, etc.), the parents used these phone conversations to connect with and parent their children. Tres' father also calls regularly

and uses his time with Tres to try to guide his son. Tres explains his father's parenting style, stating:

Anything I do will go to my dad. So anytime my dad would call he's telling me the bad stuff first. *He'll peel off the Band-Aid and he'll put it back on* [emphasis added]. Or like he'll tell me the good thing first or tell me the bad things after. But when he calls we talk about how my mom is feeling about me. What I'm doing good. What I need to continue on doing forward until he comes home. I take it in because to me the only person clued into my head is my pops.

Tres made a point here that he made many times during his interview—he and his father are alike. This seems to be a source of pride and concern for Tres. He characterizes his father as funny and as mentioned earlier thinks his father is “on²⁰”, but Tres also is displaying some of the behaviors that presumably got his father in trouble (failing classes in school, hanging out late at night, doing “bad things”, etc.). This sentiment has been echoed by other children of incarcerated parents. As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write:

Through visits, children can learn to appreciate that their parents have both strengths and deficiencies, *like all parents* [emphasis in original]. Cecily Carr, whose father was incarcerated for more than twenty years, including most of her childhood, mentions this in the many trainings she facilitates. She says while she loves her father, visits helped her ‘pick up the apple and throw it far from the tree,’ deciding what about her father she wanted to replicate and how she wanted to be different, while also maintaining a lifelong relationship with him. (p.194)

²⁰ Tres assertion that his dad is “on” was given to explain that his dad is still up-to-date with the latest fashions and lingo. It signifies that despite his incarceration, Tres' dad is still cool.

Even though Tres communicates with his father through phone calls instead of visits, he may be using these calls to “pick up the apple and throw it far from the tree” while cementing his relationship with his father. This could be another explanation for Tres’ desire to improve his performance in school.

Despite his earlier mentions of a tense relationship prior to incarceration, Tres now believes his father is the only one who understands how he thinks and what he is experiencing. Tres’ mother reports they have a good relationship, which was evidenced during the interviews as they laughed and shared stories, but he still does not listen to her about certain issues. Due to this, his mother communicates Tres’ misdeeds to his father who then speaks to Tres. Tres analogy of his father’s parenting style to a Band-Aid is also interesting. McCartan (2013) writes, “Us humans, well, we like to Band-Aid everything. We put on Band-Aids to cover up failures, to hide battle scars, to mask heartache. We put on Band-Aids in an attempt to disguise hurt, fear or doubt” (p.1). To rip a Band-Aid off suggests that it is better to do or say something potentially hurtful in a quickly instead of trying to pacify someone and lessen the pain by dragging it out over a long period. Tres’ comparison implies that his father is honest with him about the things Tres needs to improve. However, once his father is honest with Tres, he gives him support and guidance or “puts it [the Band-Aid] back on.” Therefore, Tres’ issues are only exposed briefly and in a safe space.

Like Tres’, Sky, Delilah and Vanessa communicate with their incarcerated parent through phone calls. Vanessa and Sky both indicated that she would like to visit their parents, but they are simply too far away. Vanessa’s father is in Attica which she estimates to be almost eight hours away. When her father calls she concisely indicates that they discuss her “future and being independent.” The lack of face to face visits has been especially hard on Sky who was in

elementary school when her father was incarcerated, because to her he feels like a stranger. This lack of familiarity has led to awkward phone conversations. Sky described their calls, stating:

I really don't talk to him like that. I talk to him like once in a blue moon, but there's really nothing to talk about with him. He just asks me questions and I can't ask him questions. It just don't feel right, so I just don't talk to him. 'Cuz like when I want to say what are you doing, like I know he just sitting there on the phone. He can't really do nothing but sit in his cell, eat and talk to people.

Sky's ability to converse with her father is limited because she believes that all he has to talk about is what is happening in prison (a topic he would actually probably like to avoid), which she imagines consists of eating and sitting in a cell. She has created an imaginary world of prison in her head where she imagines her dad lives. Because she was so young when her father started getting incarcerated (he has been incarcerated more than once during her lifetime), she has trouble imagining him as a full human being outside of a cell. Amber was also young when her father was incarcerated. She, like Sky, considers her father somewhat of a "stranger." Despite this, Amber's father calls regularly and a few years ago she went to visit him. When he calls, Amber gives the phone to her younger sister. Amber stated:

I don't talk to him on the phone. I just did it, like, a couple of times. I had my sister talk to him. My sister doesn't even know him. She hasn't never seen him in her life but, they have some good conversations. Sometimes about how she's doing in school. My dad has never seen my sister, but they have the perfect conversations. It goes really well. She's like that's going to be my new dad.

In referencing her younger sister's relationship with Amber's biological dad, Amber may be highlighting the type of relationship she would like to have with her father in the future. It shows

that her father is capable of parenting and paints him in a parental light. Her sister is free to have a relationship that is free from past disappointments. Amber's sister does not have the same complicated history with or expectations of Amber's father. Despite that, by illustrating her sister's relationship with her father, Amber paints a picture of a man who is a parent.

In addition to phone calls, both Amber and Sky's fathers send them letters and cards. Sky has attempted to write back, but was at a loss for words so she gave up. Amber does not write back, but saves all of correspondence her father has sent her over the years. She also made it clear that she has a feeling her father is going to show up on her doorstep to live when he is released. If her voice and body language were any indication, Amber is open to that happening.

The experiences of the youth in this study align or even surpass current information presented on the topic. While one of the limitations of this study is the small sample size, it is worth highlighting that eight out of eight of the children were contacted by their incarcerated parent in some form within the month prior to their interview. As Glaze and Maruschak (2010) report:

Seventy percent of parents in state prison reported exchanging letters with their children, 53% had spoken with their children over the telephone, and 42% had a personal visit since admission. Mothers were more likely than fathers to report having had any contact with their children. Mothers and fathers were equally likely to report having had personal visits with their children. A higher percentage of parents in federal prison reported contact with their children. In federal prison, 85% reported telephone contact, 84% had exchanged letters, and 55% reported having had personal visits. (p.6)

The findings of this study also support findings that mail and phone calls are the most likely way for incarcerated parents to communicate with their children. As, Travis and Waul (2003) highlight:

Given that the majority of state prisoners (60 percent) are held in facilities more than 100 miles from their homes, it is not surprising that most fathers (57 percent) also reported never receiving a person visit from their children after admission. (p.21).

Distance is just one of the obstacles these children encounter when trying to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent.

Obstacles to Staying Connected

In the previous section, it was established that most children of incarcerated parents want to have a relationship with their parent and that most incarcerated parents are interested in parenting their child despite the limitations. For those children in this study who did not visit their parents, their inability or unwillingness to do so, was not attributed to feelings of anger or resentment toward their incarcerated parent, but instead to structural and systemic barriers that make maintaining a relationship quite difficult. For example, for the five youth in this study who did not visit their incarcerated parent, all would be willing to do so if the parent was in closer proximity to them. As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write:

A child's right to speak with, see, and touch his or her parent is dependent on access to jails or prisons. . . . If a parent is sentenced to prison (for sentences that are more than one year), distance is almost always a barrier. Prisons are largely located in distant, rural areas, constructed to provide jobs for the people who live nearby. The sites are typically more than a hundred miles from the cities where most families live, and a fair distance from public transportation. Unfortunately, in most states, proximity to children and family is still not considered in correctional prison assignment and transfer policies. (p.191)

The distance between these children's homes and their incarcerated parent are often what hindered face to face visits. While there are new initiatives such as telecommunication visits, which operate like Facetime or Skype, it should be noted that these visits usually require the families to go to a certain location at a certain time and that they are being used to replace, not supplement, in person visits. That is, many prisons that employ tele-visits have eliminated face-to-face altogether (Gaynes & Krupat, 2018). While tele-visits could be a great alternative to in-person visits when a family is unable to be physically present, the importance of a child in parent to be in the same physical space- to hug, kiss, and touch their parent, should not be underestimated. It is also important to note that tele-visits are not without cost. There has been much made recently about incarcerated individuals receiving "free" tablets that allow them to email, video chat, and download music among other things. However, the services available to the incarcerated user are not without a fee and are often only available at an extreme markup. For example, Riley (2018) writes about tablet charges at an Ohio prison, stating:

The access comes with a hefty price tag. At Marion, each email Snitzky sends costs 30 cents, and video visits cost nearly \$10 for 30 minutes—services that are free for non-incarcerated internet users through services like Google and Skype. In some facilities, a simple game like solitaire that would be free on a phone costs up to \$7.99, and movie rentals and purchases range from \$2 to \$25. These rates are on the cheaper end of the market; in other states, such as Indiana, JPay's main competitor, GTL, charges 38 cents for an email, up to \$7.99 for 48-hour movie rentals, and \$24.99 for a monthly music subscription. Even premium versions of streaming services Spotify and Apple Music only cost \$9.99 a month for those on the outside, and those plans grant access to millions more songs than what GTL offers. (p.1)

As we know, considering the small amount of money incarcerated individuals earn if they work during incarceration, most of the financing for games, music and movies on the tablet comes from loved ones. This places an additional burden on the loved ones of incarcerated individuals who are willing to go above and beyond to make their loved one happy, but are more than likely facing financial challenges of their own.

Even if proximity is not an issue, there are other situations that make visiting uncomfortable for a child. Tres' whose father was previously incarcerated (a trend among the youth interviewed) described his distaste for visits. He recalled instances from his father's previous incarceration when he was able to visit, stating:

When I was first there [on a visit] I didn't like it because the security guards just look at me for some reason. I was tall for a little kid. When I used to come they would think I was older and I was young. I used to feel like they were picking on me. Like the way they were staring at me because of my skin, I don't know. I'm not racist, but I don't know just the way they was talking to me seemed like they was trying to be threatening or something. And then I was just not paying attention to it because it's a prison and I just wanted to see my pops.

Tres' statement is a powerful statement to the adultification of young Black people. As Henning (2014) states:

Black boys are more likely to be treated as adults much earlier than other youth and less likely than white boys to receive the benefits and special considerations of youth. In the context of policing, these perceptions mean that black boys are more likely to be stopped and arrested for normal adolescent behavior, more likely to be harassed and

assaulted for typical adolescent transgressions and more likely to be perceived as culpable and deserving of punishment. (p.62)

Tres was able to pick up on the feelings of the officers and the fact that they perceived him as a threat. It is interesting that he qualifies his statement about the guards possibly staring at him because of his skin color by signifying that he himself is not racist. Tres' assertion that race is not a determining factor in how he treats people ("I'm not racist"), is indicative that he knows it is a factor for how many people treat others. In a world where many people counter discussions about the inherent injustice of racism by accusing people of being racist themselves, Tres' statement is not surprising but it is troubling. There is a growing body of literature that finds that even among those supposedly support equality, such as white feminists, there is a glaring willingness and desire to avoid conversations about race and racism. Therefore, Black people, who do not wish to reinforce the stereotype of angry and volatile, have been taught to avoid the topic or else face the consequences of losing the white hand they have been extended. Tres' had the innate feeling that he was profiled by the guards and his gut feeling is supported by research. As a tall, Black youth, it is very possible that some of the guards viewed him in a negative light; a threat or a criminal. However, in order to express his feelings, Tres' wanted to clarify that he was not racist, therefore implying but not explicitly stating that the guards are. Tres was not focused on other people's skin color at the time of his visit, but he was acutely aware of others focusing on his own skin color, a feeling many people of color know well. Either way, Tres was treated in a manner that made him feel disrespected and uncomfortable as he was just trying to see his "pops." Jacqueline echoed Tres' sentiments about the guards at the facilities. She stated:

There was a lot of rude COs in his original jail and they'll give you really dirty looks and they'll look at you like you're the one that's in the jail and they can treat you the way you

treat them [the people incarcerated] and that's why I've begged my mom not to take me cuz I don't like it.

The children's perceptions of the correctional officers in the facility is supported by anecdotal evidence from other children of incarcerated parents. As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write:

Visits are hard to navigate, are expensive, and may involve long waits invasive searches, *rude prison staff* [emphasis added] crowded visiting rooms, and difficult conversations.

And yet most people who are able to visit find it more satisfying than the alternative of not visiting. (p.192)

Amber has also felt uncomfortable during visits. Although she no longer visits since moving in with her mother, Amber did visit her father a few times when she lived upstate. Amber stated:

The prison I hate it... I just don't like to be in there. I can't wear short sleeved shirts.

We can't do nothing. I just don't like to visit him. I visited him, and the time before that when he was in the county jail upstate. I visited multiple times, but I don't remember that much. Like, I remember going to the toys, and I'd slide down on the bench. There was a glass and then I'd talk to him through that. I was around like seven and five.

When I was eleven and I went with my grandma. My other grandma, my dad -- his mom.

I came with her and she said you can't wear that. Child, go back to the car and get a sweater. I had, like, a dress on and the straps were that big [demonstrates with her finger]. He said I had to get a sweater. So, I had to go back.

In this narrative, Amber names a few reasons she does not like visits. She was bored and not allowed any physical contact with her father. Jacqueline supports Amber's feeling of boredom stating:

I really like going to see him, but it just reaches a limit, a time limit where I don't want to be here no more. I feel uncomfortable. I can't do a lot of things like I want to go home.

Sometimes the guard will be close and they don't let you do any activities like I'm in step and hip hop and I like to show my dad what I'm learning and they don't let you do that.

You have to sit down and that's it.

One of the most alarming reasons that Amber does not like visits, are the restrictions on her attire. Amber's inability to wear short sleeves or a dress with wide straps, supposedly because of those who are incarcerated may become excited when seeing an adolescent girl's shoulders, is not uncommon. The policing of women's bodies is rampant. Recently, Serena Williams was told she was banned from wearing her black spandex cat suit, which she credited with helping resolve her issues with blood clots after the birth of her daughter, by the President of French Tennis Federation, Bernard Giudicelli. Giudicelli maintains his decision was made because "one must respect the game and place" (McLaughlin, 2018). Serena has endured numerous attacks on her body throughout her career. Giudicelli's comments and the other criticisms of Serena have been deemed by many to be "misogynoir." The term Misogynoir was created by "queer black feminist scholar and Northeastern University professor Moya Bailey...in 2010 [to] describe the specific way racism and misogyny combine to oppress black women" (Solis, 2016). Amber, as a Black female, may have experienced her own form of misogynoir when visiting her father. While it is only a possibility that race played a role in the criticism of Amber's attire, what is definitive is that the Bureau of Prisons has a dress code that targets females. The following is a sample dress code from the Bureau of Prisons website.

Wear clothing that is appropriate for a large gathering of men, women, and young children. Wearing inappropriate clothing (such as provocative or revealing clothes) may result in your being denied visitation.

The following clothing items are generally not permitted but please consult the visiting policy for the specific facility as to what attire and items are permitted in the visiting room: revealing shorts, halter tops, bathing suit, see-through garments of any type, crop top, low-cut blouses or dresses, leotards, spandex, miniskirts, backless tops, hats or caps, sleeveless garments, skirts two inches or more above the knee, dresses or skirts with a high-cut split in the back, front, or side, clothing that looks like inmate clothing (khaki or green military-type clothing). (Bureau of Prisons, 2018)

Of the sixteen items listed, twelve seem specifically geared toward female visitors. Also, the definition of inappropriate given here is provocative or revealing. Provocative means arousing sexual desire or interest, especially deliberately. To think that eleven-year-old Amber was attempting to dress provocatively by wearing a sun dress with thick straps while visiting her father feeds into a larger discussion about the sexualizing of young females, especially women of color, and rape culture, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, the fact that the level of uncomfortableness and annoyance that Amber felt because of this sexualizing, is within the realm of this dissertation. I have experienced this sexualizing as well when I was asked to remove my underwire bra during a visit and instead wear a sports bra. The sports bra pressed my breasts inward, making them less noticeable.

The bureaucracy of detention facilities is also a deterrent for visits. Emmanuel describes the process, stating:

I hate it. Going inside, them taking forever to do paperwork. It just takes forever to take one picture because now there's this thing you have to take a picture when you visit your loved one and it takes long. Take off your shoes, go through the scanner, get a package, go see your loved one. This jail made a new policy [picture taking]. I think it's dumb.

Orlando echoes Emmanuel's feelings, saying "I don't really care for going up there [the jail]. All that work to see him [my dad] for a little bit. I like staying home to myself." Again, the children are not expressing frustration at their parent, but instead at the systems in place that seem to make seeing their parent as difficult as possible.

The visits themselves also take an emotional toll on the children. Many of the children admitted that leaving the visits made them emotional. For each child, that emotion looked different. Tres' found he left visits feeling different emotions. He stated:

When I used to go to the gates and stuff like that I would see mad [a lot of] prisoners who were sitting down talking to their families and people crying and it just used to be so aggravating and sad at the same time because you're going through the same thing. You feel their pain but like you don't want to hear people cry. Like you don't want to hear none of what's going on.

Tres' disdain for the crying at visits may be due to the overall de-humanization of family connections. Things that are meant to be intimate are now public. Kisses, tears, hugs and conversations are monitored and policed. Amber found that seeing her father incarcerated made her feel "weird". She stated, "I just don't like it in there. It's just -- it's just weird. It's weird looking at him in there. I'm like well, it's not like he's coming home with me. He's going to go back there when we're done." Although she did not name it, she seems to be feeling a combination of sadness and powerlessness. She is unable to take her father with her when she

leaves. For Amber, who displayed a tendency during interviews to be straight forward and practical, her unwillingness to play make-believe seems to fit her character. To her a visit where she sits with her father has small talk may not seem real to her. After all, when she leaves, he will still be there.

In addition to the obstacles that visits pose, there are some practical considerations. The loved ones of those who are incarcerated must go on living their daily lives. The children have school, extracurricular activities and a desire to spend time with their friends. Due to this, phone calls from their parent are sometimes missed which can lead to feelings of guilt. As Tres states, "When I miss his call I think dang, he probably wanted to tell me something important and I think about it-he's going to call again. I'm going to hear his voice again." Tres' assertion that he will hear his father's voice again is telling. For many kids with physically present parents, they do not think of hearing their parent's voice as a privilege. The fact Tres has to tell himself that he will hear his dad's voice again shows that he thinks there is a possibility that he could not. This may stem from the fact that Tres' dad was taken so abruptly in front of Tres. When questioned about the last time he saw his father, Tres stated:

I think it was like July 15, the day of what happened. Well I haven't visited him. But my mom is arranging a day for me to visit because I would like to see how he is like – see how he looks. Like does he look different or anything?

Tres did not realize July 15th would be the last time he saw his father and because of this he may feel some anxiety when he misses his father's calls. The anxiety and guilt he feels about his missing father's calls are an example of some of the emotion work that children of incarcerated parents have to do that others do not.

Tres also gave some insight into how visits could be improved. He stated:

“The way I would change things if I was the top gun officer- I would tell everyone they don’t have to be checked. They don’t have to be searched. Nothing. They just got to go in, give their identification. They get their own separate rooms. They get to touch each other. There’s a room and it’s locked for 30 minutes. A bathroom in there, everything. They get to have a conversation. Then they knock on the door one more time to tell them they’ve got 30 more minutes and then when 60 minutes is up, you’ve got to leave. That’s it.

In Tres’ ideal visit, families would get privacy. People and their bodies would be respected and affection and conversation would flow freely. While Tres’ vision has not been realized there have been some reforms to help incarcerated parents maintain their bond with their children. Tres and the other children in this study, wanted those who are incarcerated and their loved ones to be treated with dignity and respect. Recently Mayor Bill DeBlasio signed a bill into law that eliminated charges for calls from NYC jails. The Osborne Association is also working with a few New York State Senators to pass bills that support proximity of incarcerated individuals in NYC. State-wide movements supported by organizations, such as The Osborne Association (New York), Project WHAT! (California) and many others are doing an incredible amount to support individuals who are incarcerated and their families. However, many of the organizations focus on State Prisons, which means that families with a loved one incarcerated in Federal Prison often miss the rewards of these movements.

The Parentified Child

Children with an incarcerated parent have often had to address many emotionally heavy issues and are frequently privy to information that may have been kept from other children due to the circumstances. Parents often try to keep “adult” issues (financial problems, marital problems,

substance abuse problems, etc.) from the ears of their children, worried that the burden will be too much for their young minds, bodies and spirits. Caregivers sometimes attempt to do this with incarceration and instead of telling the child their parent is incarcerated, they will create a story about college, vacation, work or some other circumstance that has taken their parent away for a significant period. This can cause a variety of issues. One, the child's belief in this story is very much dependent on their age. The older the child gets, the less likely they are to believe the story, especially if they are still in contact with their parent. This is evidenced by Orlando's realization that his "dad" was not wining and dining his mother at a fancy restaurant. Two, it requires both the caregiver and incarcerated parent to lie to the child, which when discovered, can cause feelings of resentment and betrayal. Three, it hinders the child's ability to visit as obviously a jail is not college, work or vacation and even if the child believes it is, this could possibly cause negative feelings toward these things in the future depending on their experience. Four, it denies the child the ability to find a community of children and families who are experiencing parental incarceration as well. This is the reason why recent research suggests that with parental incarceration, honesty is the best policy. (Bernstein, 2005; Gaynes & Krupat, 2018; Zehr & Amstutz, 2011) As Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2001) explain:

What is the impact of this "conspiracy of silence" or deception on children? In light of the literature on children's coping (Ayers, Sandler, West, & Roosa, 1996; Compas, 1987), which suggests that uncertainty and lack of information undermines children's ability to cope, it is not surprising that children who are uninformed about their parent's incarceration are more anxious and fearful (Johnson, 1995). Although the situation of a parent lost through death is more extreme, some of the insights gained from this literature concerning ways of helping children cope with loss is instructive. As Nolen-Hoeksema

and Larson (1999) argue, children need honest, factual information, and they need to have their experience validated. Providing children with reliable, dependable information allows them to begin to make sense of their situation and begin the dual processes of grieving the loss of their parent and coping with their new life circumstances. On the other hand, silence about the parental incarceration often results not from a deliberate attempt to deceive the children but from an effort to avoid other complications. As Johnson (1995, p. 74) notes "There may be a very good reason for such a forced silence; family jobs, welfare payments, child custody, and even housing may be jeopardized when others become aware of the parents' whereabouts. However, children of prisoners are more likely to have negative reactions to the experience when they cannot talk about it." (p.1)

While it is very important for children of incarcerated parents to be provided with honest information, this does have some effects. One of the largest effects is that the child may become parentified, if that did not already happen prior to incarceration. As Engelhardt (2012) explains, "In simpler terms, the adult essentially adopts the dependent position in the parent-child relationship, and in turn the child is expected to fulfill what are typically considered to be adult responsibilities" (p.45). There are two kinds of parentification; instrumental and emotional. Instrumental refers to the child taking on the functional responsibilities in the household such as cooking or shopping. In the presence of the positive relationship with a parent, instrumental parentification, is not necessarily harmful, as long as the tasks are age-appropriate. The second type of parentification, emotional parentification, "requires the child to fulfill specific emotional and/or psychological needs of a parent and is more often destructive for child development than instrumental parentification (Hooper, 2007a) [citation in original] (Engelhardt, 2012, p.47).

Many of the children in this interview described instances of instrumental and to a lesser extent, emotional, parentification.

Conforming to gender norms, Tres' and Emmanuel both had the feeling that they should be the man of the house; meaning they should fill in for their missing father. Tres stated:

Well because my dad isn't here so I have to be more like the man of the house because he isn't here to watch over us. So I've got to do things that he would do. So when he comes back, it wouldn't have been like anything changed. I think it's because I'm the only boy and I give it to myself because I'm the only boy.

In his father's absence and with his father's encouragement, Tres' believes he should take on the role of man of the house. How he chooses to do this is interesting. To Tres' being the man of the house means protecting his mother and sisters and making sure the family is intact when his father returns. However, Tres' has some habits that undermine his position as "man of the house" including frequently staying out late and causing his mother additional stress. Nonetheless, Tres' has taken on the role both because it was given to him by his father and because he gave it to himself as the only male in the house.

Emmanuel has taken on more functional duties in the household that his father might normally be responsible for. For example, he oversees helping his younger brother with his homework, getting him to and from practices at times, and making sure he is fed after school. Emmanuel also is very interested in his younger brother's schooling in a way most teenage boys may not be. He stated:

What threw me off is a day after his [little brother's] birthday, the school called and said he had a zero in math. My mom was pretty disappointed and I was disappointed too...He doesn't do his homework and that made a flashback of me. He was there when

my mom used to scream at me because I did bad and she knew I could do better. I talked to him and asked if he could make up his assignments so his grade could get way higher. Parent teacher conferences for him is this week so I was trying to make him do a little bit of work.

Emmanuel's assertion that he was "disappointed" sounds like more of a parent than a sibling.

Emmanuel openly acknowledges that his relationship with his brother is more father-son than brothers, stating "It's really emotional having to be a father figure to my little brother."

Emmanuel uses the word "emotional" to describe heavy events in his life, including his father's incarceration. His desire to be a good role model and source of security for his brother at a time when he still needs that himself as well evidently weighs on him. One of his wishes for his father's release is for his father to take over his parenting responsibilities.

Sky also described her families desire to take on more responsibility within the household and was actively resisting, determined to hold on to her childhood status. She stated:

They [my family] want me to do something, but I need help. I can't do everything by myself. They want me to go back to dance. I cannot travel everywhere by myself. I'm still a child. And they just don't understand that. They say that I'm old enough that I could go and travel -- I got a couple more years to go...so I cannot do everything by myself.

With a grandmother in the hospital with cancer, an incarcerated father and two older siblings who are justifiably interested in their own lives, Sky feels she is being pushed to grow up in some ways before she would like to. Her desire to have someone travel with her may too be an indication that she would like to spend more time with her family. She also lamented that "everyone is always busy." It is important to note that the extra physical responsibilities that

these children carry out in the household is not exclusive to children of incarcerated parents. Many children from poor or working-class backgrounds assist their parents and take on adult responsibilities within the household.

There were also examples of emotional parentification. This mostly consisted of the children being worried about their parent or feeling like they should do certain things to keep the parent happy because of their current situation. In the case of children with incarcerated parents, the child is doing extra emotional work because they are concerned for their parents safety and well-being.

Jacqueline previously described going to see her stepfather almost weekly even though she was bored and felt disrespected by the guards because a moment of her time can make her stepfather's whole week. She put herself in an uncomfortable situation to make someone else happy. In addition, Jacqueline stated, "We keep him [her dad] updated with what's happening with him and just to like say hi so that he doesn't feel lonely." The worry that her stepfather may be lonely encourages Jacqueline to keep in contact. Vanessa and Sky also worried about their respective fathers. Vanessa dealt with this worry by avoiding discussing what happens in jail stating, "I feel bad for my dad because he's in jail but I would feel even worse knowing what he's going through." Sky asserted that she already knows what can happen in jail and this scares her. She stated:

Sometimes I get scared about what happens in jail. Because last time my dad was in jail, he had a stroke and I was scared when I found out. I thought something had happened to him, but he was good. And people getting stabbed in jail and killed in jail. I'm just scared. Sky's dad had a health issue that could have killed him while he was in jail. In addition, Sky is worried about the violence she has heard about while people are incarcerated. The thought of

losing their fathers and never seeing them again, is a heavy burden that probably occurs to Vanessa and Sky on a regular, whether they would like it to or not. The goodness of these children is evidenced by the consideration and concern they show toward their family, especially their incarcerated parent. It is important for those who wish to support children of incarcerated parents, that the child is may be carrying extra responsibilities and it is important to listen to and affirm their experiences.

Resistance and Resiliency

Support

The old adage *it takes a village* is true for raising any child, but is especially true for children of incarcerated parents. Forced and enforced separation has already left children with incarcerated parents without the physical presence of one of their most important support systems. Therefore, building a strong network to support and help guide children of incarcerated parents is extremely important. As Hairston (2003) states:

Family members rely primarily on each other, rather than formal organizations to maintain family connections and address children's and adult family members' problems related to parental incarceration...Families engage in a process of role change and adaptability simply known as pitching in and helping out. Some relatives pitch in by taking full or major responsibility for something the prisoner used to do. (p.275)

An example of this would be Vanessa's aunt who is her guardian and also acts as a confidant. Vanessa described this relationship, stating, "[I trust] my aunt because we have our sidebars and talk in private and she don't tell your business." Vanessa is appreciative of her aunt's discretion and willingness to take the time to speak to her. For Emmanuel, his father acts as a confidant from behind bars. He stated, "I feel like if I'm emotional, he [my dad] even said it, he said just

tell him and he'll understand, but even if he wasn't to say that, I feel like I would still tell him how I feel because it does hurt a lot.” Emmanuel’s father has made an effort to get Emmanuel to speak to him about the emotions he feels due to his father’s incarceration. In addition to his father, Emmanuel also has a support system in school. He trusts the school counselor very much and speaks to her regularly. When he revealed to her that his father was incarcerated, he stated, “She [my school counselor] was surprised. She didn't think I would tell her everything that's been going on and she really understood and after we had a conversation about it she told me I could talk to her about anything. I feel like I can.” Having a few adults that he can speak to has really helped Emmanuel process his feelings about his father’s incarceration and because of this Emmanuel indicates that he is a lot less angry than he used to be.

Jacqueline also has an adult at school that she feels supports her unconditionally. She stated:

I only told one teacher because I see her like a mother to me and I’m really close to her. I just felt comfortable speaking to her about it cuz I remember she was like what are you doing over the weekend? I was like I’m going to go see my dad all the way upstate. She’s like your dad doesn’t live with you? And I felt like she would have thought my mom or dad are divorced or something so I was like ‘No, he’s incarcerated.’ She said she had someone in her family in jail too so I just felt comfortable talking to her about it.

Her statement that she views the teacher as a “mother” figure shows that the teacher has gained Jacqueline’s trust. Even though she trusted the teacher, Jacqueline still hesitated before fully explaining the situation. When she finally did disclose her situation, Jacqueline was surprised and relieved to find that her teacher had an incarcerated family member. Their conversation shows an exchange of trust and vulnerability that is so crucial to the teacher-student relationship.

It also demonstrates how schools can be spaces of respect, mutuality and community. Sky too indicated that she was able to find support from one teacher in her building. She stated:

When you don't feel comfortable, some teachers make you stay in the class and sit there and other teachers let you go for a walk and stuff like that. But I never got like a chance to talk to my teacher. Like if I asked, the teacher would say wait a minute and they would never talk to me. There's only like one teacher I feel comfortable with and I can tell her what's going on with me.

Sky's assessment of the teachers in her school is telling. She feels there is only one that takes the time to talk to her and is concerned enough to listen to Sky discuss what is happening with her. Instead, other the teachers seem insensitive to Sky's feelings. While they may not know exactly what she is going through, she has expressed a willingness and desire to speak to them. Just as Jacqueline's teacher made inquiries into her life and showed concern, Sky's teachers may learn more about her if they ask.

Another source of support for many of the children interviewed was their friends. Some of their friends were a part of the community of those affected by incarceration, while others were not. Either way, they provided an invaluable sense of belonging and an understanding ear.

Vanessa has a friend whose father is also incarcerated. She stated, "I just have one friend [with an incarcerated parent]. She just visited [her father] like 3 weeks ago. He's closer than mines I believe. We talk about it." Tres also has a friend whose father is incarcerated. He speaks to his friend about their fathers' situations. Tres stated:

My everyday man [Tres' friend], he going through the same thing as me [parental incarceration]. His dad was in his life. And he [my friend] took a visit to see him and

after that he just told me about his dad. How his dad did this stuff in prison and then we were just talking about each other's dads.

Having a friend that is experiencing that is also dealing with the effects of incarceration provides an outlet. For youth who may feel uncomfortable speaking to their family members about certain issues and may feel that their friends without incarcerated parents would not understand, these friendships within their community are invaluable. For friends outside of the community, their access to the information may come with a warning. Jacqueline stated:

I told some of my friends [about my dad's incarceration] but I'm like you have to promise you won't tell anyone and I'll make a big thing like you can't tell anyone I don't know. They're [my friends] supportive. They were like if you ever need someone to talk to.

While Jacqueline found her friends to be supportive, she also made them promise to keep her stepfather's incarceration a secret. While she felt comfortable with her friends, she was still worried about the stigma of incarceration and what other people may think. This desire to keep incarceration a secret can lead to missed opportunities for support and community. Jacqueline described a situation where she saw a girl from school while visiting her stepfather. She stated:

You know what's crazy? I've actually seen one of my friends in the prison seeing one of their family members I was like wait, what are you doing here? She was like oh, my god, hi, what are you doing here? We were just – we knew of each other. I was just like you look familiar and she's like I know you, we're in the same class. I'm like oh, you're what? Oh, hi. She was like I'm seeing my grandpa. I'm like I'm seeing my dad and she's like for real? I'm like, yeah. And it happened that they knew each other too.

For these girls who went to the same school and who were friendly, they could have been a great

support to one another, not only emotionally but also in a practical sense. Perhaps their families could have car pooled. Even if it was simply another person to talk to that understands, it is obvious that keeping incarceration a secret limits the amount of support a child receives.

Whether it comes from family, school or friends, having a supportive community is imperative to the emotional well-being of children with incarcerated parents.

Identity

For some of the children in this study, there was a marked difference between other people's perceptions of them and how they identified themselves. Some of the children embraced other people's perceptions, at least enough to use them to their advantage, while others actively rejected them. For example, Vanessa had a reputation for being tough. She stated:

I'm told I come off a little aggressive...I've been told that I come off stern. I don't mean to be stern, I'm just solid with my attitude because I don't want anyone to feel like they can just say or do anything to me and it's okay and it's not so I just make it known.

Due to her reputation, Vanessa, a child who used to be bullied, asserts that now people "know better than to try" her. This means that people will not even attempt to antagonize Vanessa because they are aware that she will fight them. However, when asked to describe herself, Vanessa did not choose to describe herself as a fighter. She instead said:

[I'm] optimistic, go-getter and independent. No matter what happens in the day I always tell myself that something is going to change it and I'll be okay. That's what makes me optimistic- I always see the greater outcomes and I'm not afraid to go and speak for what I want so that's what makes me a go-getter and independent because I rely on my own. I get myself interviews. I get myself jobs.

Vanessa's self-description shows strength and toughness in a different way than others believe. She is unwilling to let the things she has experienced hold her back; she will stand up for what she believes in and she can take care of herself. It is also a nod to her personality that Vanessa's has used to difficult experiences in her life to shape a positive outlook. Because she has been through so much she knows that she will survive no matter what and that bad days are ultimately followed by good ones.

Tres also did little to discredit people's perceptions of him. Another child who used to be bullied, Tres stated:

I think everyone at school is scared of me. My face is scary. I be looking scary. Because of the way I walk and my face is—my structure. I'll just be walking by myself and I don't really chill with people. They see me by myself in the corner, in the back of the lunchroom.

Tres alluded to the fact numerous times, throughout his interviews, that his appearance is intimidating to others. As a tall, muscular, Black male, Tres has become aware of the fact that others often view him as a threat. When describing himself, Tres said, "I'm a master of disguise—I'm not going to say a con artist or finesse artist, but I'm slick... My head is different." His master of disguise comment, only that implies he is able change himself depending on the situation. His comment about being slick or being able to "finesse," implies that he usually does this for his own personal gain. Tres' ability to change himself depending on the situation was not always a skill he possessed. He recounted:

I was showing my emotions as a kid, I didn't know so people used to do stuff to me and I used to show emotion and think about it. I used to think I was a girl. I just stopped doing it and I just think showing emotions is being a girl. So I don't. I feel them but like I don't

show like I feel anything. I just look regular. I could show you happiness and be sad. I could show you sadness and be happy. It's crazy.

Earlier in his life, Tres was not a master of disguise. His display of emotions and reflectiveness violated what he came to see as unacceptable for a male. How did Tres determine that he should hide his feelings? As Hochschild (2003) writes, "How do we recognize a feeling rule? We do so by inspecting how we assess our feelings, how other people assess our emotional display, and by sanctions issuing from ourselves and from them" (p.57). As a male, Tres and his family, particularly his father, felt that he should not be prone to showing so much emotion when he was upset. This is not unique to Tres' family. Often when young boys cry, they are told by well-meaning parents that "Boys don't cry" or to "man up", with the implication being that tears are for girls, stereotyped often as the weaker, more emotional sex. When Tres' displayed emotion as a child, he quickly learned that he was deviated from a feeling rule. He was expressing more emotion than allowed for a male child. Still, Tres' admits that he still has feelings, he has just learned how to manage them so that they are undetectable.

Sky, also does not show her feelings, but as a female, not showing enough emotion is a deviation from the feeling rules. Sky was assigned a school counselor to help her with some of the anger issues she was experiencing. However, when Sky failed to open up to the counselor in a way the counselor found appropriate, she stopped coming to pick Sky up. Sky recalled:

I spoke to her. Like she really had not been picking me up and I was in that school for a while. She would only pick me up like on Wednesdays or Fridays, but those Wednesdays and Fridays been passing by. She seemed to think that I was fine and so she stopped picking me up, but I wasn't.

Sky unknowingly violated a feeling rule about grief. As Hochschild (2003) writes, "We can

offend against a feeling rule when we grieve *too much* or *too little*, when we overmanage or undermanage grief” (p.64, emphasis in original). Because Sky was not showing the outward signs of grief the counselor believed that Sky did not need her services. Sky readily admitted = during the interview that she was not actually fine during this time, however she did not say this to her counselor.

When describing herself, Sky pushed back against what she feels people expect her to be. Sky considers herself to inhabitant of the world of “the streets,” but is clear that she does not view herself as the stereotypical street girl. She stated:

I’m not like everybody in the in the streets. Like those girls in the streets, I’m not loud.

I’m just crazy, but I’m not that crazy or loud. Like screaming and hollering and just going around looking crazy -- walking around looking crazy and just acting a fool just to make a show outside. I’m not that type of girl. Like I’m quiet. Like when I’m around some people that I don’t know yet, I’m shy. And then when I get comfortable, I just be me.

Sky’s statement about herself is a critique of what people expect from women of color, especially urban women of color who live in low-income neighborhoods. In Sky’s mind, she is expected to be “ghetto.” She is expected to be loud and attention-seeking, just like the “Sapphire” character discussed previously. For Sky, who mentioned that the lighter [white] people at her school were often more “ghetto” than darker skinned people, Sky is aware of the stereotypes and what is expected of her, but she rejects them.

Amber also rejected some of the labels placed upon her. However, these labels are not racial or class stereotypes; they are classifications and diagnoses. Amber stated:

It was ADHD they diagnosed me with, because I was like eleven. Obviously, everybody is hyper at eleven. Bipolar can’t be diagnosed now, because I’m thirteen and that’s what

normal people do at thirteen. It's called Disruptive Mood Disorder. So, you can't diagnose me with that either. ODD, I do have that. I still am too young for you to diagnose me, because that's normal. I know a lot of kids that can't sit down for a long period of time, because I'm bored. That's why they have recess, because you sit in the freakin classroom all day on a hard chair.

Amber's candor and insight is evident. She accepts that she has Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), which is characterized by persistent argumentative and defiant behavior toward authority figures. However, she does not accept the other classifications, bipolar disorder and Attention Hyperactivity Disorder because Amber believes the characteristics are similar to age-appropriate behavior. Merten, Cwik, Margraf, Schneider (2017) lend validity to Amber's thoughts, stating:

Teachers viewed videotapes of child actors engaging in normal behavior, behavior typically seen in ADHD or oppositional defiant disorder [36, 37]. Teacher ratings of hyperactivity were higher for child actors who showed oppositional behavior than for those showing 'normal' behavior. Independent raters rated the two videotapes equally concerning hyperactivity, pointing to a halo effect. The halo effect is a cognitive bias where factors that seem important for a decision influence all other information taken into consideration in the decision-making process. (p.7)

According to this study, Amber's diagnosis of ODD and history of behavioral difficulties put her at risk for being overdiagnosed. Amber's acceptance of some labels and rejection of others, shows that she is being reflective about her own needs and not simply accepting what other people tell her. She is identifying who she is on her terms and in many ways, she considers herself just to be an average teenager.

Like all people, children of incarcerated parents are complex beings who are capable of being

many contradictory things. The children in this study had an acute sense of what the outside world thought and expected of them. In order to manage these perceptions, various tactics were employed. If the perception was useful for them (i.e. Tres' intimidation factor and the absence of bullying) they allowed it to continue. Others like, Amber and Sky, clearly rejected what they viewed as the false narrative. Whether they accepted the perceptions or not, all of the children were on the path of self-discovery and working on their identities, much as most adolescents are during this time.

Stigma

As stated earlier, children with incarcerated parents are considered "wise ones" in terms of stigma because of the intimate relationship they have with the stigmatized person (their incarcerated parent). In order to manage their stigma, Goffman (1963) suggested the children could embrace their stigma by associating with others like them or they could try to eradicate their stigma by severing their relationship with the stigmatized individual, therefore keeping the stigma somewhat invisible. There is also another option, that most children of incarcerated parents seem to utilize that borrows from both of Goffman's theories. It consists of maintaining the relationship and keeping the situation invisible, unless they are free to embrace it in the presence of trusted individuals including a community of individuals who are also dealing with the effects of incarceration.

Many researchers have documented the stigma that children the loved of ones of incarcerated individuals face (Gaynes & Krupat, 2018; Seymour & Hairston, 2001, Travis & Waul, 2003; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2014). This stigma can cause families to treat the incarceration as a secret. The secrecy can place an additional burden on the children of those who are incarcerated,

limiting their access to a supportive community and denying them invaluable outlets to express themselves.

None of the children interviewed chose to completely sever their relationship with their parent in order to manage the stigma and maintain their identity. Amber did however, choose to acknowledge and refute the importance of the stigma in a community of others who have experienced incarceration. She stated:

Sometimes we'll have discussions [in school] about like our fathers and stuff, and I was like mine's in jail. I really don't care. I can tell people...Because most of their fathers are in jail...There's not really that many kids that have fathers in their life. Either they ran off, or they're doing time.

Because Amber knows so many other children without a physically present father, either due to incarceration or simply non-involvement, she does not view incarceration as something to be ashamed of. She does not hide her father's incarceration if the topic presents itself because to Amber it is normal and the people around her will understand. While most of the children interviewed were not as candid as Amber concerning incarceration, they are willing to discuss it. Emmanuel first tried to manage the stigma of his father's incarceration by making keeping it invisible. He decided to hide his father's incarceration from fear he would be "judged." He stated:

My friends used to walk up to me and say 'I never see your dad. Where is he? I used to lie and say 'oh my parents are divorced' and try and change the subject. They would judge me. I think they would try to take advantage or they'd make fun and say 'oh you don't have a man in your life.

Emmanuel no longer lies about his father's incarceration to people who ask, although he also does not provide the information voluntarily. His decision to be more open comes from sessions with his counselor, his mother's involvement in The Osborne Association and a growing confidence in himself. While he does not have any friends that he knows of with an incarcerated parent, he does have a friend whose father recently died. The link between the two is noteworthy. While death and incarceration are not the same, Emmanuel's connection between the two, demonstrates that there is a special understanding between the friends that they both know what it is like to lose a parent in some way.

Sky chose to manage the stigma by separating her father from the other people incarcerated in his facility. She stated:

Everybody just think people in prison, they just bad. Like they say like my dad is a bad guy, but he's really not. He didn't do nothing wrong. He just himself.

Sometimes when I go to a visit, I just don't feel comfortable like with everybody sitting there. Like I don't trust these people. Anything could happen. They are there for a reason, they did something bad. I just don't like bad people. I mean, some people -- some people might be in there by accident, got something switched up. But I don't know their story. So to me, all them is just bad.

While she admits that she "doesn't know their story," Sky has accepted the stigma that people who are incarcerated are all bad, dangerous and guilty. However, she does not apply this stigma to her father because he "didn't do anything wrong." By othering the other incarcerated individuals, Sky disassociated her father from the stigma that comes with incarceration and therefore freed herself from some of it as well. Her father is not bad and neither is she.

Vanessa discussed the effects that the stigma surrounding incarceration can have on someone's life. She stated:

If they [people who are incarcerated] come out into the real world with no type of help, then they're on their own and that's usually how it is. Not in my family but I've experienced from other families. They don't want their kids around that type of stuff and people need, to survive, people need companionship and other people, it don't matter who they are. People die fast from being lonely than from being sick so it's probably hard to survive in the real world without companionship or people to guide you along the way.

Vanessa's experience has showed her that stigma of incarceration causes people to avoid those people who were previously incarcerated. While she uses general terms such as "people" this statement could apply to her father. Vanessa worries about her father and his reentry into the world. She knows that many people will not be kind to him because of the stigma associated with incarceration. Her comments about not having help and lack of companionship echo studies that have been done on recidivism. As Hairston (2003) writes:

Studies using theoretical perspectives, which focus on the positive roles and functions that families serve as opposed to the problems they experience, indicate that families are important to prisoners and the achievement of major social goals, including the prevention of recidivism and delinquency. (p.260)

Family connections are not only beneficial to those who are incarcerated and societal goals, they are important to children of incarcerated parents as well. Being in foster care and experiencing familial separation gives Vanessa first-hand experience about what it feels like to be isolated and alone. Moving into her aunt's house and strengthening the ties with her extended family has provided Vanessa with the support and companionship she needed.

While most of the children interviewed in this study are comfortable speaking to at least one person outside of their family about parental incarceration and their own personal experience, that does not mean they are not aware stigma exists. Jacqueline made her friends promise they would not tell anyone else when she shared her experience with them. Her mother did not tell her or her brother that their “dad” was incarcerated prior to taking them to meet him. Both instances show a concern about what others may think.

All of the youth in this study are somehow associated with an organization that services the families of those who are incarcerated. Due to the fact that they are part of a community that openly acknowledges incarceration, they may be more willing to discuss parental incarceration and less likely to keep it a secret. Other children who do not have the support, community and knowledge that these programs provide, may still feel very concerned about how others perceive them based on their parent’s incarceration.

The Future

Much of the current research, as discussed in the literature review, casts serious doubt on the futures of children of incarcerated parents. As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write:

And while the increased risks associated with parental incarceration are primarily associated with children’s health and *not* [emphasis in original] with delinquency, future criminality, or incarceration, many are unfortunately quick to make that assumption and treat children of the incarcerated as ‘criminals in waiting. (p.183)

However, the young people who participated in this study have lofty goals and seem to be aware of how dire the consequences of becoming involved in the justice system can be. This is most likely from their personal experience, as they have seen how deeply it has affected their parent’s lives. The future of children with incarcerated parents is unique.

Aspirations

Like most adolescents, children of incarcerated parents, have dreams for their future. As they inch toward adulthood their dreams become more concrete. Vanessa, who is 17, and one semester away from graduation, has a clear picture of how she would like her next few years to unfold. She stated:

I want to go to college at Binghamton because they have the degree I need and it's away from home and it's not too far from home. After the political science [degree] I want to become a senator but after I get my political science I want to go into the Marines because if I go in after college I'll have higher ranking so I get more money and then after the Marines maybe law school because I have to be 25 to be a senator anyway.

Her desire to be away from home” but “not too far from home” simultaneously shows a normal teenage desire to assert their independence, and while highlighting Vanessa’s deep love for her extended family with whom she resides. While the 25-year-old age minimum refers to being elected a Representative in Congress,²¹ her ability to quote the age limits for elected officials in New York state, shows that Vanessa has researched the topic. Her decision to enter the Marines shows an understanding of how politics works as candidate’s who have served in the military often use this fact to bolster their campaign. It is also a practical financial decision considering the cost of college. This type of maturity and forethought is not shocking from a young woman who has lived the harsh realities of being poor in this country. Vanessa’s desire to be a senator stems from her own personal experience and observations she has made about the world. She stated:

²¹ The age minimum for a New York State Senator for the New York State Assembly is 18 years old and the age minimum to be a US senator from New York is 30 years old (New York State Board of Elections, 2018).

Hearing all the things people go through and poverty. It's hard out here so I want to try and make a change. Poverty stops people from achieving the American Dream.

Everyone's American Dream is different. People can have two jobs and still can't feed their kids and stuff like that because of poverty...It's hard because if you're poor you don't have the right money to go to school and get the right education to get a proper job so it just leaves them struggling and barely making it with no government help.

Vanessa knows first-hand what it is like to live in poverty. As discussed earlier, she was bullied for not having nice things. In addition, she has watched her grandparents and aunt work very hard but still struggle to provide. Before becoming a senator, Vanessa would like to take some time for herself stating, "I always wanted to move to Paris. I don't think I would actually want to move anywhere but before I become a senator that one year to myself, I'd like to explore the world."

Like Vanessa, Amber wants to work with the government in some capacity. She stated:

I want to be a forensic anthropologist...I want to graduate high school. I want to get my Regent's Diploma. Then I have to go to college and get my college degree. Then, I have to go get my Master's degree. I don't want to do work for no police department, because I'm not going to be broke. I want to work for the government and I might help them [the police] out for just a small fee.

Amber seems to have done the research for the educational requirements for the career she wants. Her main concern seems to be financial security which is something that she commented on frequently. Jacqueline would also like to have a career related to law enforcement. She stated, "I really like the FBI and detective stuff so I want to be a detective when I get older cuz I like to help people with criminal rights." Her desire to help people with "criminal rights" may stem

from her experience with the justice system. Her “dad” was arrested when he was 19 years old and remained in jail until he was 47 years old.

Both Emmanuel and Tres expressed a desire to play basketball as a career. Emmanuel currently plays both basketball and football. His football team won the National Championship for the 2017 season. Emmanuel knows eventually he will have to choose one sport over the other and stated, “I think it’s going to be hard because I’m going to get an offer for football and an offer for basketball but I’m going to think and talk it out. I’m going to have a discussion with my mom cuz its going to kind of hard to make the decision and commit to it.” Regardless of which sport he chooses, Emmanuel plans to go to the University of Connecticut because he feels “that's where a lot of athletes shine.” Tres’ seems less sure about his athletic career, but hopes to give it a shot. He stated:

If I become a D league player and I get a two-year contract to play in the league under the NBA and I get discovered and go to the NBA, I would probably take my chance or play my years in the D league and then go overseas. I could find something to land back on like vet, lawyer or a fireman. I’d like that.

While Tres’ fallback plans (veterinarian, lawyer, or fireman) require varying levels of education, it is clear that he is thinking ahead. He may benefit from some career guidance; something that he does not seem to be getting at school.

Delilah and Sky both aspire to be entrepreneurs. Sky stated, “I see my life like me going to finishing school, getting a job and probably actually becoming a dancer that I wanted to become...focus on things and college and my studies and then start my own company probably.” Sky’s desire to dance was a recurrent theme in her interviews. Delilah hoped to use her company to help secure the future of her and her siblings. She stated:

If -- okay, and where I see myself in the next five years potentially if things go right, I feel like I'll be saying if I got it, my brothers and sisters got it, you know. I want to get on the grind and, you know, get my own stuff or whatever. And I offer my brothers and sisters, you know, to come stay with me if they want to. You know, come make money with me if you want to.... So like I said I see myself in five years with a nice little apartment or house, my own new salon, and, you know, working on my music as far as, you know, getting out there with my music and my spoken word and everything.

Delilah's desire to take care of her younger siblings shows not only her goodness, but her role as the parentified child. Even though she is still technically a child, because her parents have not been present throughout her life, she has taken on the role of parental figure. Each of the children interviewed in this study have goals and aspirations for the future, most of which have been carefully researched. Only two of the eight children did not plan to go to college, but still had career goals.

Parent Plans

Many of the children interviewed were eagerly anticipating their parents' release from prison. They were actively making plans about what they would like to do with their formerly incarcerated parent and most were very simple things that someone with access to their parents might take for granted. For example, Both Tres and Emmanuel want to play sports with their fathers. Emmanuel stated:

He's [my dad] a basketball player. He can show me the game and help me learn it more. I also want him to be there for my little brother. Right now my little brother is playing so he could take him to football practice...He wants to come to my game. He can tell me

what I did wrong. I mean my mom tells me what I did wrong sometimes but she played basketball. She didn't play football.

Sports are obviously a huge connection for Emmanuel and his father who is a former athlete. When discussing his dad's days as an athlete, Emmanuel states, "I know he went to Monroe High School and played basketball there. I know he was an athlete and he starting slacking. He started going down the wrong path." This is another example of the earlier discussion of throwing the apple far from the tree. Emmanuel is similar to his dad in some ways, but he is making a decision about how similar he wants to be. He does not plan to follow the exact path his father took. In addition, Emmanuel's desire for his father to take his brother to practice shows a desire for his father to bond with his brother, who just recently started having issues in school, and for his father to take some of the parenting responsibilities that Emmanuel shares with his mother. Tres wants to play football with his father instead of basketball. Football for Tres seems to be a segue into conversation with his father. He states:

I just want to have a conversation with him. How is it there [in prison]? Thinking about all of us, not being there with us. See how he's doing. Is he okay? I want to show him the water because it's a nice setting. Just to talk about things that hasn't been talked about a lot in a long time because I haven't been able to see him.

Even though Tres' father calls daily, he still feels that part of their relationship is missing. He is concerned for this father wondering if he's okay. When his father is released, Tres seems to want to improve the relationship they currently have and perhaps speak to his father about things he is not comfortable saying over the phone or in front of his family.

Jacqueline and Orlando both had plans for their "dad's" release. When he was incarcerated he and Jacqueline dreamed of all the places they'd like to go. She stated, "We came up with a lot

of plans. We want to go to Hawaii, Bahamas, but I know we're not really going to go there. I want to go roller-skating." Orlando also had a very simple wish for his "dad's" release. Orlando was open to doing whatever his "dad" wanted to do because "It'll just be nice to go out with him and be with him. Fishing. I'd enjoy that. I don't do anything specific. It'd be nice to do things with him period." In a similar vein, Sky simply wanted to spend some time with her dad. She stated she "would like for us to like go to the movies or take a walk outside and eat ice cream, stuff like that."

Vanessa had a more muted response to her father's release. Possibly because he has a history of substance abuse, Vanessa is avoiding getting her hopes up. As mentioned earlier, she was not surprised when he was arrested this time and while she is most likely hoping for the best, history has taught her to expect the worst. At the time of the interviews, Vanessa's father was scheduled to be released in a little over the year, but Vanessa was not optimistic stating, "Anything could happen. I wouldn't be here. I'd be in college." While she is distancing herself from the situation, Vanessa showed a desire to have a relationship with her father in other statements.

The children's plans for their parents upon their release mainly consisted of spending uninterrupted, quality time together- something they have been denied. While most of the children interviewed have weekly contact with their parent in some form, they still desired to be in physical contact with their parent and do normal things parent-child things together. Popular parenting wisdom says that one of the most valuable gifts a parent can give their child is the gift of time and these children support that notion.

Family

Staying Connected

Despite the broken families' narrative, all of the children interviewed for this study had a strong network of family members, both immediate and extended, who supported them. For these children, who have already been separated from one family member through parental incarceration, family was one of the most important aspects in their life. Their families provided many things for these children; joy, experience, and a safe space for these children to be themselves. The families were not perfect, as no family is, but the children love their families unconditionally. Tres described this feeling by saying "My favorite thing about us [my family] is that we all going to stick together no matter how many arguments we get into. We all become friends like the very next 20 minutes, 10 minutes." Delilah seconds that idea that although arguments occur, she still loves her brothers and sisters very much. She stated:

And so when we get together, already like there's going to be an argument. There's always an argument. But at the end of the day I love my brother. I love my sister. I love my brothers and my sisters and I wouldn't do anything to harm them, you know.

When the families are not arguing, especially as families with multiple children tend to do, the children described several things they like to do with their family. Vanessa described the road trips she takes with her family stating:

I like the road trips. We've been to South Carolina, Chicago, Detroit, different places. When we go on these trips we argue, but we just argue and let it behind us cuz we just trying to get where we going and have a good time. It's just a different feel. A different environment. We all just come together and have fun.

Vanessa's trips with her family seem to be very important to her and give her a chance to remove herself from the day-to-day experiences in her life. They provide an area of escape.

Amber loves to trick-or-treat with her family. She delights in her family's scheme which

sends them trick-or-treating in upper class to get better candy and money. She states:

Halloween, that's totally evil, illegal. We get candy and we go to rich neighborhoods and we go there first and get all of our candy, go to a party, come back, and they're out of candy. Then we get money. We just change costumes with, like, our other family member, or something like that. And, one will start on the other side of the block, and then we'll start on the other, so they don't recognize us, because, it's a big, big group. Then they'll give us money. So, we have a stack of money and candy.

Again, Amber mentioned money which comes up frequently in her interviews, but during this particular narrative she seemed most excited about her family's ability to work together to pull a fast one on the unsuspecting people handing out candy. She also mentioned that her family likes to bar-b-que and go to amusement parks such as Six Flags together. She describes her family as "ghetto" but says she means it in a good way to explain that they are "loud and crazy." Emmanuel, whose family is from Honduras, is very close with his mother and younger brother, but enjoys seeing his extended family as often as possible. When his extended family gets together, Emmanuel says they "all [the family] like to dance. When we are all together we just dance and we like to eat. That will never change. We all just get along and joke around. It could be any dance. We just dance." There is something very freeing in Emmanuel's statement that "We just dance." It is similar to Vanessa's statement about "A different feel." The time these children spend with their family seems to free them from the day-to-day stresses of life. Much as adults are told to find their "happy places" and practice "self-care," these children seem to be at peace when they are spending time with their families.

Jacqueline also indicated a closeness with her family that was built on a foundation of honesty stating:

I'm really close with my family. If they have something to say, they'll say it. They will be like 'this happened today, it was bad but then this happened.' They're just my family.

I have no choice but to love them and appreciate them.

Much like Tres appreciated his father's ability to "rip the Ban-aid off", Jacqueline knows her family will be honest with her if it is in her best interest, even when it hurts. Her brother, Orlando, agreed stating, "They don't sugarcoat things." Sky also felt that her family supported her, but in a different way. She stated:

Even though my brother and my sister don't like me, but they still take care of me. When my sister found out -- when my sister found out that I got into a fight, she came downstairs -- came downtown to protect, to help me and so did my brother. Everybody did. My brother and his friends came because they was gonna fight for me. Like my brother friends is like my brothers too. All I just need is them. I have everybody I need. My dad is just a dad and I just feel like he's just a friend, a neighbor that lives across the street that we talk most of the times, but not all the time.

It is worth mentioning that in her statement about her family, Sky makes a point to exclude her father. She is clear to point out that she does not need him and that he is more of an acquaintance than a family member. As discussed previously, Sky was very young when her father was incarcerated and is struggling to figure out the relationship between her father and herself in addition to her role in the family as a whole. Nonetheless, she feels supported by her siblings and knows that if she was in trouble, they would be there for her.

Like Sky, Delilah appreciates her family's willingness to be there for her even when times are tough. She stated:

If something goes left [something goes really wrong] -- that's something that I say for my grandma and grandpa and my auntie and all of them, even my crazy Uncle Rufus. It's like if there's a problem or something, you know, they're willing to help and always find a solution whether that's financially, whether that's somebody that needs to get beat up, or whether, you know something -- something -- no, for real like I -- I love my -- I love my family. They're -- they're riders [someone who stands up for what they believe in or goes to great lengths for the people they care about]. They're loyal. Loyalty is key and they're loyal. No matter how bad I was when I was young. I put my grandpa and grandma through a lot, you know. But no matter how bad I was, they were always there for me. I can honestly say that.

Delilah has a strained relationship with both her parents, mainly based on their substance abuse problems and not because of incarceration. Despite this, she still has a strong relationship with her extended family, especially her father's parents and sisters. She credits them with loving her even when she put them through "hell" and giving her a safe space to express herself. Her family also encouraged her to pursue her poetry which she uses as an additional outlet. She described this process stating:

I felt like I could talk to my auntie and grandma, you know. But mind you, you know we didn't get to see them like that and we used didn't get to talk to them like that. So what I did was I found poetry as my outlet to vent. So that's how I became a poet. I spoke a word of poetry. I was thinking of writing. So that became my outlet. I didn't really even pay attention to my gift in writing until, you know, I started saying it. And then when I started saying it, I was like, you know, let me see if I can write. My writing became poems and spoken word or whatever. So that was like my outlet for me, you know, when

I couldn't actually be face to face with a person. And it's good to find ways to talk to, you know, talk to your inner self without having to actually talk to somebody because you know people are not always going to be there, you know. I love my auntie and my grandpa, all of them, but God forbid, but like what if one day they're not there who am I going to talk to. You get what I'm saying?

While she is willing to depend on her family, Delilah knows that there are going to be some situations where she can only depend on herself. The experience of being the oldest sibling while dealing with parental substance abuse, parental incarceration and living in foster care has given her a strong sense of self-reliance. As independent as Delilah and most of the children interviewed are, all of them indicated a strong attachment to their family members. Instead of reinforcing a narrative of “broken families,” future research may want to focus on the success and strengths of these families, who are a vital part supporting children with an incarcerated parent.

The Importance of Moms

A theme that emerged repeatedly was the importance of mothers in the lives of these children. It goes without saying that for most people the relationship with their mother is one of the most significant in their lives and vice versa. As Tsabary (2010) affirms:

Both parents undergo a transformation in their identity during the years of raising children. However, for women the parenting journey holds an especially emotional and spiritual significance because we house this growing child within our body for the first nine months of its existence. These months of gestation render the mother-child bond particularly unique in its intensity, leading to a complex relationship that’s highly symbiotic and profoundly personal. (pp.118-119).

The intensity and profoundness of the mother-child relationship was evidenced in the children's comments. With most of the moms effectively acting as single parents whether they were in a relationship or not, their children conveyed a great deal of admiration and respect for them.

Emmanuel described his mother, saying:

My mom's a hard-working parent. She works really hard for us. She makes sure we have food on the table and a roof over our head. I really appreciate my mom for really going out there and working hard for us.

His appreciation for his mother's hard work and dedication has encouraged Emmanuel to be focused and goal oriented. He stated:

I see my mom working really hard. Working just so we can be alright. What makes me go hard is that because my dad is incarcerated and my mom has to work really hard so what I say to myself is continue to be in the gym, continue to do your work in the classroom and just get better. When I get better I can succeed and help my mom out instead of her working all the time.

Even though Tres' said his father is the only one who can reach him, his affection is very much oriented toward his mother. He has an understanding and appreciation for how hard it must be for his mother to raise him while his father is incarcerated. Tres stated:

I look up to my mom because she's doing it by herself and I respect her for that because my dad's not here and she was doing it for a while, for like 12 years now and I just got to give it to her. That's the woman, my mom, my only mom and that's the only one I'm going to have.

Jacqueline's comments align with Emmanuel and Tres. She has a great admiration for her mother and her strength. Jacqueline stated:

I admire my mom because before she met my dad and when she was going through a divorce, she still had the time to talk to us about school and help us with our homework and make dinner. She was a single parent basically, and she still managed to pay the bills, to make us happy, and I just look up to her for that cuz she stood strong.

Even Sky, who voiced her displeasure with her family throughout the interviews (mostly due to being treated unfairly since she is the “baby” of the family), took a moment to acknowledge the efforts of her mother stating, “I have my mom and I get anything I need. Like sometimes my mom don’t have money, but she still find a way to give me money, to feed me, to get something. I’m good.” The mothers were venerated by their children for showing strength and a willingness to sacrifice for their children.

Sometimes the importance of mothers was highlighted by their absence. Delilah, whose mother suffered from substance abuse and was incarcerated previously, highlighted the importance of mothers when she discussed the differing levels of anger she has toward her mother and father.

Delilah stated:

My grandmother and grandfather was, you know, trying to fight a case to get us. So I'm like okay, why my mom and daddy isn't, you know, trying to get me. You know, I'm going through all of this at the age of 5 and age of 8, you know, raped and stuff. And I always felt like I was abandoned as far as, you know, a mother having a child. I feel like a mother's love is stronger. A father's love should be strong as well which both -- both are strong. Love is strong, but I feel like a mother should be more strong due to the fact that I was, you know, I was in your stomach for nine months. You carried me, felt me, and you mean to tell me you don't have no type of remorse to what I went through in life?

In Delilah's statement she shifts from general ("a mother's love") to personal ("I was in your stomach."). Her statement goes from speaking to all mothers to her mother. Delilah is referencing the same emotional and spiritual connection that Tsabary spoke of in her writing. Delilah too, feels that housing a body within your own for 40 weeks should promote a special kind of relationship. For Delilah, it does seem that she felt it on her side, but unlike the bonds Tsabary writes about, it was not symbiotic for Delilah and her mother. While it is impossible to know Delilah's mother's feelings and substance abuse can prompt people to act in variety of negative ways, Delilah nonetheless feels abandoned by her mother. Delilah did however have an example someone being a good mother even though it gave her mixed feelings. Delilah described this situation saying:

When I would visit my auntie on the weekends when they came and got us from my foster mom's house or whatever. And to see my auntie, you know, love on her kids so much and everything like that, it made me feel like that's what a mother is supposed to do. Why isn't my mother doing it, you know? So like I said in certain areas it hurt me. It made me feel like, you know, I didn't have parents. I just had people that birthed me and -- that's it. And I feel, like-- why do people like that have children if they're not going to take care of them, you know?

Delilah's aunt acted as sort of a surrogate mother to her and Delilah was describing times when her aunt provided her with support. Nonetheless, seeing her aunt mother her children caused Delilah to feel the hurt of missing her own mother even more.

Whether through their presence or absence, mothers were very prominent in the lives of all the children interviewed. This is most likely true of all children, but it seems especially prominent with children of incarcerated parents. As Gaynes, Krupat and Lincroft (2011) state, "When

one parent becomes incarcerated, the remaining parent becomes even more critical in the child's life. In the great majority of cases, it is the father who goes to prison while the mother remains to care for the child (p.43). Because for most of these children, one parent is missing in such a significant way, the sacrifice of their mothers becomes even more visible. Unlike divorced parents or the partner of a deployed parent, the partners (or former partners) of incarcerated parents cannot receive financial assistance from their co-parent. Unlike the divorced parents, partners of incarcerated parents cannot share the financial, emotional and mental burdens that come with being a parent. While as Tsabary states, "To parent perfectly is a mirage. There is no ideal parent and no ideal child" (xv), this difficult situation has allowed the children to see the goodness and strength in their mothers in new ways. It is important to note that while this study is child-centered, the idealized space of motherhood can be a heavy load for mothers to bear, especially those who are incarcerated. Concerning maternal love, Luttrell (2003) writes:

It is a love so ideal that it cannot be fully realized by any *real* [emphasis in original] mother (or person). And if this reality is set aside, if mothers are seen as omnipotent, fearsome, and/or perfect, then the possibility for experiencing mutuality in the relationship is cut off...the cultural script for maternal-child relationship seems underdeveloped, cast in oversimplified and idealized terms- the perfect mother and the 'special baby.' (p.99)

While it is evident that the children in this study love and in most cases revere their mothers, no mother is "perfect." It is especially difficult for incarcerated mothers to strive this idealized version for motherhood since their access to their child is limited. However, these children seemed to appreciate their mothers, not because they were perfect, but

because their strength and sacrifice was evident.

My Story, My Terms

Amber's Narrative

She [her father's mother] says I'm going to come get you, but I never pack, because I already know that she's not going to be there. Like, she gets your hopes up and then she's never there. Then she'll call two days later and says I'm sorry. I'll pick you up today. So, you're like well, I'm not packing. So, if you come, I'll have my things. Her best friend, which I call my aunt. We have a really good relationship. I go see my aunt. It's not my aunt, but I call her my aunt. I call her Aunt Virginia, but she's not really related to me.

Amber referred to her father's mother as simply being "alive." Her response seemed short and to the point, which is characteristic of Amber. However, the acknowledgment that her grandmother was simply "alive," was interesting since she had previously mentioned going to see her father with her grandmother. When questioned about their relationship, Amber gave a concrete example of her grandmother's unreliability. While Amber's response about her grandmother simply being "alive" seemed very nonchalant, her description above, suggests disappointment and hurt. She mentions that her grandmother "gets her hopes up" and then is "never there." The fact that Amber's grandmother was the only person who took her to see her father adds a new level to this disappointment. When Amber was supposed to go with her grandmother, she was expecting not only to spend time with her grandmother, but also her father. As stated previously, maintaining contact with an incarcerated parent is extremely important except in the most extreme cases (sexual abuse, for example). While phone calls and letters are one way to stay in contact, the importance of face to face visits cannot be underestimated. Amber's grandmother's

failure to follow through on her promises robbed Amber of her chance to be in the presence of her father. Amber, has learned to adapt. She states that she no longer packs her things when her grandmother makes these promises, but still is willing to go despite being continually disappointed. Amber still has a desire to be connected to her father and his family despite their lack of familiarity with one another. When it comes to children of incarcerated parents, people often make value judgments about the relationship between the incarcerated parent and child. However, what is clear from Amber's story is that children of incarcerated parents do not place these same value judgments on their relationship with their parent. Amber's father struggled with substance abuse and has been incarcerated since she was two. She admits that he feels like a stranger in some ways. Yet, he is still her father. She still wants to have a relationship with him and his family. Never one to feel sorry for herself, Amber quickly changed the subject from her difficult relationship with her grandmother to her positive relationship with her grandmother's best friend. She is one of two people that Amber mentioned as an "aunt" during her interviews despite not being biologically related to them. Amber who is missing certain family members, has adopted some of her own. Her relationship with her grandmother's best friend is interesting. By establishing a relationship with her and calling her "aunt", Amber is still a part of her father's family in some way. By replacing her relationship with her grandmother with her grandmother's best friend, Amber remains in the peripheral of the family. The support of her "aunt" provides part of the network that is so important to children of incarcerated parents.

Delilah's Narrative

I think the place where I forgave them when I realized -- it was actually one day after school I got into a fight and I had to fight a girl or whatever. And I literally -- the girl I busted her head on the toilet and everything of that sort. The girl -- she was -- yeah, she

was talking smack don't get me wrong. She was talking smack and she deserved to get beat up. But I realize what I was thinking about was not her when I was fighting her. I was not fighting that girl because of what she did. The anger I had inside me was not for her. It was for my mom and dad. So I realize, you know, if you don't let -- I looked at myself in the mirror and like I was angry everything. And I just looked myself in my mirror and I was like D- if you don't straighten up, you're going to end up hurting someone. Because, you know, yeah, people deserve to be slapped when they deserve to be slapped, but you know dang well that beat up was not for that girl -- it wasn't for her. It was -- you were trying to -- I felt a little like when they showed the video and everything and then I -- I didn't feel bad, but I felt like wrong because, you know, I wasn't thinking about that girl when I was hurting her. So it was like -- I felt like D-you've got to forgive -- you've got to forgive because you're going to end up hating people for no reason, you know. And so I was like -- I looked at myself in the mirror and I was like you just got to do better. You got to do better if you don't want end up like them you've got to straight up. So I started straightening up, paying attention to school, getting good grades.

Delilah's narrative is one of pain and self-awareness. As mentioned in many previous studies, children of incarcerated parents are often deemed at risk for many adverse childhood outcomes. In addition to parental incarceration, Delilah's experience with poverty, parental substance abuse, sexual abuse and the foster care system also made her more susceptible to adverse childhood outcomes and Delilah did experience some of these "outcomes." She was angry. Her grades suffered. She got in trouble at school. However, the word "outcomes" is somewhat misleading. Outcome is synonymous with end result, conclusion and end product. However, the issues that Delilah experienced were not her conclusion or end result. Instead they were a

temporary chapter in the book of her life. Delilah's story is complex. The physical altercation, while unsettling in its severity, is not uncommon for teenagers. While not placing herself completely in the wrong (after all the girl was "talking smack"), Delilah acknowledges that her response and the intensity of her reaction had little to do with the girl and more to do with the pain she felt inside. Her assessment that the anger was not for the girl, but instead for her parents, is telling. She was inflicting the pain she felt from her parent's substance abuse and abandonment on the young woman she was fighting. The physical altercation allowed her to self-assess and reflect on the pain she had been holding onto for many years. This self-assessment left Delilah with two choices. She could continue down the road she was on, one she feared would cause her to "really hurt someone" and end up like her parents, or she could choose to be different or "straighten up." Similar to Tres' previous statement about "getting back on track," Delilah rallied herself to make a change. After looking in "the mirror," another nod to the fact that she had to face her feelings and what she had been hiding, Delilah decided that the key to progress was forgiveness. She had to forgive her parents for the pain they caused her so she did not hurt herself or others. Delilah's story shows that while children of incarcerated parents may be impacted negatively in some ways due to their situation, these are more likely to be temporary adverse reactions than outcomes. They are often short-term and with support can be alleviated. Delilah, like many children with incarcerated parents, showed the resiliency, maturity and determination to write a new narrative for her life, one that is different than the one that was expected of her.

Emmanuel's Narrative

There's usually a huge line when there's visits. They have to take the picture and go on the line, go through the scan, take off the sneakers and when a person tried to get a

package to their loved ones, they take one thing at a time and write that down forever. I think they should just be a little faster. I feel like they do it on purpose to keep families from seeing their loved ones. I'm not sure [why]. A lot me right now is trying to understand why.

Emmanuel's narrative began as he was discussing things which he felt could be improved during his visits with his father. It started with what seemed to be a list of complaints about the bureaucracy of the event; the long lines, and the procedures. These things, while irritating, did not seem very personal. However, in the middle of his story, his complaints seem to transition from general annoyances to a deeper, personal reflection on the obstacles incarcerated individuals and their loved ones' face. Emmanuel's assertion that the employees at the facility make things difficult for those who are visiting on purpose to keep families apart supports a growing set of anecdotal narratives. He is rejecting the idea that this is just simply how things are. As stated earlier, the failure to encourage and support the relationships of incarcerated individuals and their loved ones, especially their children, stems from a belief that these parents are unfit, uncaring, or unworthy. Emmanuel experienced this first hand. He is struggling with finding the reason why the people who work at the facility where his father is incarcerated would intentionally discourage people from visiting. His declaration that "a lot of me right now is trying to figure out why" seems to go beyond just the long lines and seeming insensitivity of the employees at the facility. It seems Emmanuel is starting to realize that there are larger issues that surround mass incarceration. His story is exemplary of the meaning making and reflective process that many children of incarcerated parents engage in. It refutes the idea that children of incarcerated parents are not mature enough to participate in the conversation about mass incarceration and prison reform.

Jacqueline's Narrative

Being a light-skinned Latina this one time we were going downstairs and there was this real dark-skinned girl. She told me 'you have to be on the white people line.' I was like 'For real? What are you talking about?' I wasn't trying to go off on her because I knew I would get in trouble so I was just like 'No, I'm not White. I'm mixed. Well I'm not mixed. I'm Spanish.' I just stood there. I didn't know how to react really.

While Jacqueline's narrative was not related to incarceration or family, it was exemplary of the issues that are prominent in her life. Jacqueline is in many ways what most would consider a typical teenage girl. She enjoys Snap Chat and spending time with her friends. She has hobbies (photography) and likes her room decorated in a particular way. Most of all, she is attempting to discover her own identity. Her story illustrates that complexity with which race is viewed and how that plays a role in how others view us and how we view ourselves. Her story came about from a discussion on racism. Jacqueline self-identifies as a light-skinned Latina and her experience with what she deemed racism (someone calling her white) came from another person of color. Her description of the girl as "real dark-skinned" gives the listener the imagery necessary to understand why in Jacqueline's mind the girl would call her white. The girl's statement that Jacqueline needed to be on the "white people line" bothered Jacqueline so much that she wanted to "go off" or yell at the girl, but did not do so because she did not want to get in trouble. While Jacqueline rejected being white and obviously views herself as a person of color, she also contrasts herself with the "real dark-skinned" girl who was presumably Black. Jacqueline then makes an interesting statement, stating, "I'm mixed" and then quickly correcting herself saying, "I'm not mixed, I'm Spanish." Jacqueline's departure from "mixed" to "Spanish" has many layers. "Mixed" is a term often used by people in the United States who are biracial or

multi-racial. The number of multi-racial or mixed children has tripled since the 1980s. In 2015, 14% of infants in the U.S. were multi-racial or multi-ethnic and this number is only expected to increase (Livingston, 2017). Jacqueline is most likely of mixed race. A recent study found that the average Puerto Rican (where Jacqueline's parents are from) "carries 12% Native American, 65% West Eurasian (Mediterranean, Northern European and/or Middle Eastern) and 20% Sub-Saharan African DNA (Vilar, 2014, p.1). In addition, there is a movement among Latinx people to embrace and reclaim their African heritage. With colorism and racism prominent in Latin American countries as well as the U.S., this movement is revolutionary as celebrities such as Zoe Saldana and Amara La Negra champion the term Afro-Latinx. Jacqueline did not use this term, but her statements seem to be in line with what it means to be an Afro-Latinx. She rejects the idea of whiteness by stating "I'm mixed" but finds this description lacking as it does not highlight her culture ("I'm Spanish"). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with issues of race, colorism and self-identification in the Latinx community, Jacqueline's desire, frustration and struggle to identify herself, is representative of the youth experience. It also highlights another important characteristic of children with incarcerated parents. While incarceration is a part of their lives, it is not their whole life. Their day-to-day experiences, wants and concerns are still very much in line with their peers. Therefore, when children of incarcerated parents are discussed and written about, incarceration should not be treated as their entire identity.

Orlando's Narrative

My mom didn't tell me he was in jail; she would just say it was a long visit so the way I perceived it based on what she would say is that they would go to a restaurant and then one time my mom had told me the wait took forever so I was imagining the wait in line to get that table. And then one day my mom finally brought me to see him. There was still

just seeing each other just as friends so I'm going and I see her pull up into a prison, I'm like, where are we? I thought we were going to one of these fancy restaurants. And then everything came to me like oh, this is --okay. She didn't tell me, I had to learn myself that this was not a nice restaurant.

Orlando's narrative is a powerful example of the power of stigma. He knew his mother was involved with a new man and that she seemed happy, but he did not know that his future "dad" was incarcerated until his mother took him on a visit. Prior to this visit, Orlando imagined his mother and her new boyfriend on fancy dates at a nice restaurant. When his mother mentioned the "long wait," Orlando assumed that she was waiting for a table. Eventually as the relationship progressed, Orlando's mother decided it was time for her children to meet her future husband. She decided to take each child separately, so that they would have one on one time with her boyfriend, without their siblings' interference. Orlando, as the oldest, was scheduled to go first. Still, his mother did not prepare him for what he was about to encounter. Orlando still thought he was on the way to a fancy restaurant during the drive and he did not come to the realization that he was not, until they pulled up at the prison. Orlando's mother's decision to keep their "dad's" incarceration from her children is most likely rooted in the stigma of incarceration. She likely did not want to children to think he was a "bad" guy and refuse to visit him. It could also stem from the fact that she thought the children may share this information with other family members before she was prepared to do so. Despite their mother's reservations, all the children were accepting of her decision and developed a relationship with her partner. Secrecy is often employed to manage stigma, but secrecy also limits the amount of support an individual can receive and cuts them off from information and a community both of which are vital to supporting the child of an incarcerated parent.

Sky's Narrative

He really didn't do nothing wrong. It's just that people get him in trouble. I don't feel like my dad is a bad person. He's a good guy. My dad never killed nobody, nothing. He never harmed nobody unless they touched him first and that's how we are. If somebody touch us first, we gonna fight back. But my dad never did no murder, no nothing. So my dad is not a bad guy. Everybody else in there is to me, 'cause I don't know what they did. They could have killed and robbed in there, God forbid, something coulda happened.

In Sky's narrative, she attempts to manage the stigma surrounding incarceration by separating her father from the "bad" guys. In Sky's view her father's incarceration was not due to his actions, but instead to other people who "got him in trouble." He is not the villain of the story. He is not guilty and is therefore underserving of the stigma attached to his incarceration, which for Sky seems to mean that people think her father is a "bad guy." Despite her ability to view her father as a person and question his actual guilt, Sky has difficulty doing this with other people in her father's situation. She does view the other people in jail as "bad guys" because while she is unaware of what crime they allegedly committed, it could be murder or robbery. Sky's distinction between her dad the other people in prison and their crimes, allows her to other him. He is not the same as those bad people in Sky's eyes. The distinction between types of crimes and the worthiness of an individual is not something Sky created in her head. Violent and non-violent offenders is common in the rhetoric surrounding prison reform. A lot of the focus on rights for those who are incarcerated centers on non-violent offenders who are more palatable to the public than those who have committed violent crimes. However, this distinction can be counterproductive to the fight for prison reform. As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) state:

Advocates for decarceration need to be careful: claiming that criminal justice reforms will result in fewer people in prison but that those incarcerated will be the ‘worst of the worst’ demonizes incarcerated parents and their families more than they are now. The criminal justice system creates these distinctions and reinforces them. A campaign that humanizes parents and all people involved in the justice system is a key component of decarceration, but it must be very careful not to create classes of unworthy people based on their crime. (p.181)

Sky’s statement that her father never “killed anybody” is indicative of the kind of system Gaynes and Krupat mention. Sky’s father may be incarcerated, but in her view at least he did not commit a violent crime; at least he is not the “worst of the worst.” However, it should be noted that even the “worst of the worst” can still be attentive parents. The 2008 Netflix documentary *Interview with a Serial Killer* focused on Arthur Shawcross, aka the Genesee River Killer. Shawcross, who died in 2008, murdered at least 14 people, two of whom were children. Despite this, when his adult daughter found out that Shawcross was her father later in her life, she still sought to have a relationship with him, even coming to visit him and bringing her children with her. While it may be hard for many to fathom why this woman would establish a relationship with her father during his incarceration for multiple murders, it is most likely quite simple. He was her father and she was entitled to have that relationship with him if she chose to do so. Sky’s story showcases the fact that stigma does not just come from people outside the incarceration community, it can come within. Much as society has created a system where people of color accept stereotypes about other people of color, the loved ones of incarcerated individuals often subscribe to the negative connotations about incarcerated individuals while excluding their loved one. In order to make progress, the stigma of incarceration has to be confronted and refuted, both inside and outside of

the community. As Gaynes and Krupat (2018) write:

While the most efficient way to reduce the number of children directly affected by parental incarceration and parental arrest is to arrest, detain and incarcerate fewer individuals, that approach alone will not be effective in shifting the paradigm of punishment. It will not reduce the demonization of the parents who remain incarcerated, continuing to serve extremely long sentences, and the shaming of the children and families whose loved ones have been characterized as ‘the worst of the worst.’ A more human and rehabilitative approach to justice (not ‘criminal’ justice) would also consider the pathways to crime and the growing body of research revealing that those who have committed acts of violence were often victims of crime first, and it would need to confront racism and anti-poor sentiments as among the intricate and fertile roots of our current punitive stance. (p.181)

It is also worth noting that in Sky’s narrative she said “that’s how we are” referring to her dad and her family. In previous statements, Sky had excluded her father from the family, stating that he was more like a neighbor or stranger. However, in her story about her father’s goodness, she brings him back into the fold of the family. The family does not bother people unless they are bothered, but they will stand up for themselves. This is obviously important to Sky. She brought up the same concept when discussing her brother and sister protecting her from getting jumped. Sky’s inclusion of her father and her attempt to paint him in a positive light shows that even when she says different, he holds a special place in her heart.

Tres’ Narrative

My friend is making, like he was trying to make food. He left some oil on the pot and he put the cover on it and you’re not supposed to cover oil. It was light of day and

we're in a room chilling - I was like what's that smell? Then my man said something's burning. We've got to get up out of there. We open the door you can see red smoke. We cover our nose and our steps and then the house is on fire like really there's smoke up everywhere. And then came from back in the house and opened the windows and I was just standing there and the cop just going to drive past us and looking at us from all corners. He just kept u-turning, u-turning, u-turning. Oh my god whatever. And then the cop come back and started staring at us. He looks out the window and rolls it down and stares. Then he rolls up the window and then he u-turned one more time and didn't u-turn again...because the color of my skin and just because the way I look because some people will tend to see me like an adult or I look like I'm gang affiliated. So like I think it's more likely for me to get stopped than a lot of people because the way I look or the way I act or move. Just like my appearance of and all of that stuff.

Tres' experience speaks to much of the research mentioned previously that discusses the overpolicing and criminalization of Black bodies. His narrative begins with a very mundane and normal occurrence; cooking. When the food began to smoke, the boys left the house to get some air. A police officer, noticing the group of boys, begins to harass them, making his presence known by repeatedly driving back and forth and attempting to intimidate them with stares. While this situation ended without a physical altercation or any arrests, Tres' experience is still troubling. He knows that because of the color of his skin, many people have preconceived notions about who he is and what he does. When the police officers see Tres and his friends gathered in a group outside, they assume that they are in a gang or otherwise engaged in some type of illegal behavior. This presumption of guilt is attached to Tres throughout his day, simply

because of his appearance. He is already a part of the carceral continuum. Tres recognizes this and it must be troubling for him. As the child of an incarcerated parent, one who has indicated that he does not want to go to prison and has other plans for his future, it must be daunting for Tres to navigate the world knowing that simply being himself puts him at risk for arrest. Many of the studies that propose a link from parental incarceration to future criminality fail to truly acknowledge the experiences of youth of color in this country. Tres' chances of having an encounter with law enforcement have less to do with the fact that his father is incarcerated and more to do with policing that makes doing certain activities while Black, a crime. When acknowledging the disproportionality of the incarcerated population, many researchers will discuss how race plays a large role in the way people are policed, tried and sentenced. However, many researchers have failed to apply these findings to children of those who are incarcerated, many of whom are children of color. They too are at risk in the racially tinged justice system of the United States, not because of their parents alleged crimes or adverse childhood outcomes, but because being a person of color in the U.S., especially a Black person, has been associated with criminality throughout much of this country's history.

Vanessa's Narrative

I want to make a system better than ACS...I feel like it would be more great for the kids [to go with their family instead of foster care] because a lot of kids grow up seeing other kids with their family and it makes them sad because they think 'oh how come my parents aren't here to do this for me? I'm not good enough?' I'm saying this because of how I think. I see my aunt be able to do things with her kids and it doesn't make me angry but I get sad because it's like I never asked for none of this...People shouldn't have to, you know what happened to me when I was younger and my grandparents had to wait to go

to court and stuff like that. I feel like it shouldn't be like that because as long as they have family they should be able to go to their family.

Vanessa's narrative is an excellent example of how the personal experiences of children with incarcerated parents can be used to make better policies and how these experiences shape life choices in a positive manner. While the narrative begins as a discussion about Vanessa's future career plans (senator) and what she would do as a senator (reform ACS-The Administration of Children's Services), it quickly becomes evident that Vanessa's career choice is based on her life experiences. Vanessa spent almost 10 years in foster care before she was able to live with her extended family. Her question, "I'm not good enough?" is at first attributed to how other children in foster care may feel, but Vanessa quickly states that this was her own thinking as well. While rejecting that notion, it is clear that Vanessa is still struggling with feelings of worthiness. Her time in foster care, away from her family, left Vanessa feeling unwanted. Even despite being with her extended family now, Vanessa still has feelings of envy toward her aunt's children who are able to do things with their mother. Her statement about not "asking for any of this" speaks to the feeling of powerlessness that many of the other children described at some point during their interviews. They did not choose this lifestyle or situation, yet in many ways there is little they can do to change it. Because of that feeling, Vanessa has picked a career path that will allow her to help others from feeling so powerless. When she is a senator she aims to work to reform the ACS system to make sure that children do not have to be separated from their families longer than necessary. Vanessa's narrative is an excellent example of the resilience and goodness that children of incarcerated parents possess. She is taking a situation that caused her great pain to do something positive and help others.

Conclusion

The narratives of each child are unique and at the same time quite universal. While many of their stories somehow relate to incarceration, most of them truly center on making meaning of the world they navigate. Like most young people, these youths are attempting to identify who they are as person, including how they see themselves and how others see them as well. This search for self-awareness often includes the important people in their life- their friends and family. Having an incarcerated parent does not stop the young people from engaging in this work. On the contrary, it provides a distinct set of experiences and perspectives that allows children of incarcerated parents to see the world and themselves in a way many others their age may not. Far from being tales of woe, these stories highlight the strengths of these children. They show their maturity, resilience, intelligence and determination; points that are often missing in research. As a researcher, I did not have to go searching for these things. I did not have to prompt, prod or manipulate. These things are there, if someone is willing to listen and take notice.

The Push Forward

Findings

While the small size of this study eliminates it from being statistically significant, it does provide valuable insights into the lives of children of incarcerated parents. During the literature review, various fallacies about children with incarcerated parents were introduced. In this section, those fallacies will be countered with “truths.”

The Truth of Competence: Many people including caregivers, educators and researchers avoid discussing incarceration with children because they do not feel the children are mature enough to handle the topic. There is a belief that the topic is too heavy for children. Using a critical childhoods framework, this study found that the youth who participated were not only able to

discuss their parent's incarceration, but they did so with insightfulness and intelligence. They were able to make meaning of their own lives while providing commentary about weighty topics such as poverty, racism, sexism and the carceral apparatus. They were able to lead conversations into these areas and support their responses with anecdotal evidence.

The Truth of Goodness: With so much occurring in their lives, including coping with the daily experience of parental incarceration, many would assume that the youth in this study would be too consumed with their own life to worry about others. However, the children in this study used their life experiences to create and support kindness, consideration and compassion within themselves. Vanessa uses her money to help the homeless. Delilah wants to start a business to be able to support her siblings. Emmanuel wants to become a star athlete so that his mother does not have to work so hard. He also spends his free time outside of practice acting as a father figure to his younger brother. Jacqueline spent her weekends visiting her "dad" despite being uncomfortable because it meant so much to him. These are just a few of the times when these children were able to put the needs of others above their own. For many of them, their reaction to experiencing hardships was to do whatever was in their power to make sure other people did not have to experience the same thing.

The Truth of Families: Much of the current literature presents the families of children of incarcerated parents as families in crisis. This is not completely false based on an outsider perspective. Many of the children mentioned that they had witnessed domestic violence, substance abuse, and other less than ideal situations. However, to the children, their families were not broken. They may not have been perfect (no families are), but the children were proud to be a part of their families. With the incarceration of their parent, family became even more important, especially mothers and extended relatives. Vanessa and Delilah, the two children

involved in the foster care system, had extended families who loved them and fought for them. In addition, all of the children had incarcerated parents who were attempting to parent from behind bars in the best way they could. Wherever there were fractures present in the family unit, there was someone stepping up to keep the family united. Instead of painting these families as broken, it is worthwhile to highlight how these families are holding it together despite the obstacles and hardships incarceration presents.

The Truth of the Unique Universal: In many ways, children of incarcerated parents are like other children. They are concerned with friendships, school drama, social media, future plans and other issues that occupy the minds of youth. The participants in this study had friends and engaged in traditional activities such as basketball, football, dance, and spending time with friends. However, their unique life experiences have shaped them in certain definitive ways. Like many children from poor or working class families, they are used to handling more responsibilities in the household or being parentified. However, very unique to them is the ability, strength and resilience to live day-to-day life without the empathy and support that other children who lost a parent receive.

The Truth of Stigma: All of the children in this study recognized that incarceration is viewed as a negative thing and that there is a stigma that surrounds it. At times, some even pondered how others would judge them if they knew that their parent was incarcerated. However, the “shame” was not something that lived inside of the youth. Instead, it resided outside of their bodies in a society that often does not care about those who are incarcerated or their loved ones. To counter this, the youth had a keen sense of discretion. They were able to discriminate between who was worthy of knowing more about them and who was not. Yes, the youth realized stigma exists, but the shame lies with society, and not them.

Implications

The above findings provide some implications for people who are in contact with children of incarcerated parents including caregivers, educators and researchers. First, children of incarcerated parents should be treated in an honest, considerate manner. Their ability to engage in developmentally appropriate conversation about their incarcerated parent should be assumed. When speaking to children of incarcerated parents, humanizing language that respects the child and their parent should be used. Next, children of incarcerated parents should be viewed as complex individuals. No two stories or situations are exactly the same. There are many variables that determine how a child will be affected by parental incarceration. While it is likely that incarceration plays a large role in the child's life, they have other experiences to share. Many of the most challenging things the children experienced, such as bullying, were not directly related to parental incarceration. A lot of their happiest times, such as football games, were not directly related either. So while parental incarceration is a very large event, these children have much more to contribute. Also, many of the youth in this study were self-aware and reflective. They were not asking me or anyone else to provide them with answers. However, they were looking for someone who was genuinely interested in listening. People who interact with children of incarcerated parents should not fear an inability to provide all the answers or an inability to relate directly. Instead, they should focus on learning to provide a safe space and inclusive culture, where youth feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. In addition, the children think of bullying as a normal school experience. It also seemed to be a normal school experience for the children to feel unsupported and undertaught by school faculty. Much of the current literature highlights the possibility that these children will perform poorly in school, mostly placing the blame on parental incarceration. However, the youth in this study created a figured world of school that

consisted of teasing, low expectations and a lack of support. We cannot expect any students, including children of incarcerated parents, to prosper in such an environment. Finally, most people recognize that parental incarceration is not a wonderful experience for anyone involved, but painting portraits of these children as fragile, depressed, unintelligent, future criminals is not the way to incite others to action. As Emani Davis reminded the government, these are not children at risk, these are children of promise. It is up to us, the practitioners, policy makers and researchers to present their promise to the world.

The Push Forward

There are many organizations that are currently working toward showing the promise of these children to the world. *The Osborne Association*, which is based in New York City, provides support to families with an incarcerated member in various areas including visiting and reentry. They are also involved in advocacy work that often includes those directly impacted, including youth. Project What! is a California based organization that serves youth ages 13-19 through youth led advocacy, research and programming. *We Got Us Now* is a national platform founded by Ebony Underwood, the adult child of an incarcerated parent. Through social media campaigns, informational social events and advocacy, *We Got Us Now* hopes to educate people across the country about the lives of young people with an incarcerated parent. *Echoes of Incarceration* is a documentary initiative that produces films about incarceration. The documentaries are produced by youth directly impacted by incarceration and serve to empower and train other youth. Other organizations such as *Hour Children* and *Children of Promise* also serve children of incarcerated parents and are helping to counter the currently narrative.

Conclusion

The biggest contribution of this study to the current literature is that it is child-centered. The stories, opinions and needs of children with incarcerated parents cannot be ignored in the larger struggle for prison abolition or reform. Those who fail to unite the movement for the rights of these children with the movement for the rights of incarcerated individuals are missing an important space for activism and change. Many of the issues that affect prisoners also affect their children. This includes placement since proximity has a large effect on the amount of visits or whether they occur at all. It also includes the sentencing, which affects not only those who are incarcerated, but also those who rely on them for care, such as their children. In addition, issues of access, safety, and respect are also of importance to both the well-being and future prospects of the parent and child. The fight for the rights of incarcerated children is inherently linked to the fight for the rights of their incarcerated parent and vice versa.

Literature that exposes the wrongs of the criminal justice system is of unparalleled importance. While the incarceration rate is showing signs of decline (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014), the U.S. still holds the unenviable title of the world's premier incarcerator. While the correctional population decreased slightly in 2016, the overarching presence of the prison boom, industrial complex and pipeline need to remain ever present in the consciousness of the citizens of the United States. The prison industrial complex affects not only those currently incarcerated, but also those children who could become incarcerated. Davis (2003) states, "The term 'prison industrial complex' was introduced by activists and scholars to contest prevailing beliefs that increased levels of crime were the root cause of mounting prison populations" (p.84). If Davis and other researchers such as Wilson-Gilmore (2007) are correct, and prisons have a vested interest in keeping their beds full, this is an issue not only for those who are currently imprisoned, but also those who are at risk of being imprisoned in the future, namely children.

However, let's be clear; while all children are at risk, being a poor, Black or brown youth (as many children of incarcerated parents are), signifies an even greater risk, not because these children are inherently criminals, but because they are criminalized by a racist set of institutions almost from birth.

Much of the current research on children with incarcerated parents are quantitative studies that attempt to find trends and norms within these children. While it can be helpful to gather facts about children with incarcerated parents, such as the number of children who currently have an incarcerated parent or the proximity of incarcerated parents to their child, attempts to generalize this population often fail to highlight the complexity of incarceration and the human beings affected by it, while simultaneously reinforcing the stigma attached to it. Future research in this area should be conducted in collaboration with the children of incarcerated parents and allow them to speak to the issues they feel are most pressing in their lives.

Children with incarcerated parents remain a group in a unique space. They are connected to one of the most discussed issues in the country, mass incarceration, but have been neglected during the conversation. As Eddy and Reid (2003) state, "...the children of incarcerated parents historically have been an invisible population, most likely because the judicial and adult corrections systems have viewed inmates as neither deserving nor desiring contact with their children" (p.232). As the United States maintains its enormous prison population, the collateral damage of mass incarceration needs to be examined. Children of incarcerated parents continue their daily lives despite a situation that can range from uncomfortable to completely devastating, depending on the circumstances. Despite this, they are rarely heard about, unless it is a researcher describing the way parental incarceration has caused these children to be susceptible to a number of evils. They are almost never heard from in their own words. This study was

needed to provide a counter to current studies that search for the negative, while neglecting the positive. A holistic portrait of children with incarcerated parents is necessary so the voices of those who have been forgotten or overlooked can be heard.

The incarceration rate and the systems that fuel it, including the PIC and the carceral continuum, do not appear to be facing extinction anytime soon. Therefore, more and more children will be faced with the issue of parental incarceration. If they continue to be stigmatized and pathologized, they face serious challenges, especially in the figured world of schools. The United States prides itself on the image that our children are our future. Numerous programs have been created at the government level to push our children to achieve more. However, all the funding and manpower put into these programs become useless if they fail to recognize, hear and understand the issues that are affecting the youth of this country. Parental incarceration is no small topic and these children are no small group. It is time that the lived experiences and voices of children with incarcerated parents are examined and listened to so that they may teach the world about their strengths, needs, hopes and desires.

Appendix A

- Over the past four decades, 16 percent of children were born to poor parents.
 - Minority children are less economically secure than white children; 40 percent of black newborns are poor, compared with 10 percent of white newborns.
- Over the past four decades, nearly half (49 percent) of children born to poor parents were poor for at least half their childhoods, and there has been little improvement over time.
 - Black children are worse off, and the magnitude of their disadvantage has persisted over time. Roughly one in every three poor white newborns is persistently poor, while two in every three poor black newborns are persistently poor.
- Beyond poverty status at birth, parents' educational attainment at the time of the child's birth is a key factor related to childhood poverty persistence for both white and black children. Family employment status at the child's birth also plays a role for black children.
- Compared with people never poor as a child, those poor for half their childhoods are nearly 90 percent more likely to enter their 20s without completing high school and are four times more likely to have a teen premarital birth (controlling for race, parents' education at birth, family characteristics, and other factors).
- Children who are poor early in life—birth to age 2—are 30 percent less likely to complete high school than children who are first poor later in childhood (controlling for poverty duration and other factors). Timing of poverty is not related to teen premarital childbearing.

- Children in families that move for negative reasons (e.g., housing unit coming down, being evicted, parents divorcing, saving money) are less likely to complete high school by age 20 than children that do not move or that move for neutral or positive reasons” (McKernan, S. & Ratcliffe, C., 2012, p.2)

Appendix B- Interview Questions (Children)

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about your family.
- Can you tell me about some important things/big events that have happened in your life?
- What is your favorite thing about your family?
- How often do you speak/see to your mom/dad (Parent who is jail or prison)? What do you talk about when you see/talk to them?
- Why do you think people go to jail or prison?
- Do you know why your parent went to jail/prison?
- Can you tell me how you found out your parent was in jail or prison? How did you feel when you found out?
- Do your friends/teachers/relatives know that your parent is in prison? (Ask for further explanation about who knows and who doesn't and why)
- How would you describe your mom/dad (Parent who is in jail or prison)? What are they like?
- Can you name an adult you trust? Why do you trust them?
- Who is someone you admire? Why?
- Can you describe yourself in three words? Please tell me why you chose those words.
- How do you think your parents/teachers/friends would describe you?

- What advice would you give to a child whose parent was recently incarcerated?

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