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Mothers Incarcerated, Children in Crisis:

Private Troubles and Public Issues

A DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By
Sharon L. Price

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

Mothers Incarcerated, Children in Crisis:
Private Troubles and Public Issues

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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Abstract

This qualitative study using C. Wright Mills' construct of private troubles and public issues focused on the experience of being a child with a mother incarcerated. I interviewed 17 adults, ranging in age from18 to 60, about their experiences growing up with a mother in jail or prison. Five research participants were in jail awaiting sentencing; one of them had two incarcerated children. I also interviewed professionals who worked on behalf of children with incarcerated mothers. I was a participant observer with 20 girls and their social workers on several visits to a state women's correctional facility. I used interpretive interactionist theory to analyze private troubles and Foucault's concepts of regimes of truth, subjugated knowledge and disciplinary power to analyze public issues.

Data showed the instability of home life prior to a mother's arrest. After the arrest, children moved up to 30 times. With few exceptions, life in foster homes or with relatives was difficult and often abusive. Though participants were ambiguous in feelings for their mothers, their mothers were central in their lives. Few participants, even as adults, recognized the socio-economic conditions of their mother's lives, and so were critical of their mothers. Data showed a lack of a systematic process for identifying and tracking children left behind when mothers are incarcerated; few opportunities for prison visitation; minimal support from schools, social services and inadequate mental health services.

I recommend educational efforts to change the prevailing discourse that disregards and stigmatizes children of incarcerated mothers. Institutions serving children need to recognize and respond to children of incarcerated mothers.

Preface

Although I had been a teacher for 16 years, most of them in an urban public high school, never in all those years had students with parents in prison ever been a topic of concern. We never discussed the issue during my teacher preparation courses nor was it an issue in any ongoing staff development training. In fact, it was a doctoral course in ethics that introduced me to issues about prison conditions, prison expansion, the ratio of money spent for prisons relative to money spent for schools, the racial imbalance in prisons and the increasing number of incarcerations particularly among women because of the 1986 mandatory drug sentencing law. I was dismayed at my ignorance of the imprisonment of 2.4 million citizens. The incarceration rate had increased by 19 percent just since year-end 2000. Since 1995, over 200,000 people had received mandatory sentences of five or ten years (BJS, 2007). According to Glaze and Maruschak (2008), an estimated 1,518,535 of these prison inmates were parents, of which 809,800 had minor children under the age of 18. Begun in 1926 under a mandate from Congress, the National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) program collects statistics on prisoners at midyear and year-end. The Census Bureau serves as the data collection agent for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). BJS depends entirely on the voluntary participation by states' departments of corrections and the Federal Bureau of Prisons for NPS statistical data.

As an African American, I was alarmed at the rate at which African Americans dominated the penal systems. I learned that in the United States, African Americans made up 44 percent of the prison population, while representing only 12 percent of the total U.S. population (BJS, 2004). In this state alone, African Americans made up 52

percent of the prison population while representing only four percent of the State's total population (State Department of Corrections, 2003; BJS, 2004).

Angela Davis, an African American author and feminist activist, examined criminal justice and prison policy within the larger contexts of politics and economics. She described the prison construction boom in the 80's and 90's and the government's use of private industry contracts when voters refused to be taxed to build new prisons. The unintended consequence of prison privatization has been what some academics and prison critics have named the prison industrial complex-- the symbiotic relationship between government and private industry. There are major corporations with global markets that rely heavily on prisons for profit. Davis warned, "To understand the social meaning of the prison today within the social context of a developing prison industrial complex means that punishment must be conceptually severed from its seemingly indissoluble link with crime" (2003, p. 85). Prisons have served as a new source of profit within global markets.

The laying off of industrial workers and the migration of major corporations have left a significant number of communities disenfranchised. The men, women and children of those communities, who are predominantly people of color, have become perfect candidates for prison (Davis, 2003). For Davis the U.S. penal system, like chattel slavery, has become "a system of forced labor that relies on racist ideas and beliefs to justify the relegation of people of African descent to the legal status of property" (2003, p. 25).

I was inspired by and politically aligned with: Davis and her advocacy for a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance;

Marc Mauer, consultant/assistant director of The Sentencing Project, who wrote that we must acknowledge the relatively limited role of incarceration on crime control (1999); Nathaniel Gates, author/critical race theorist, who concluded that our racialized assumptions of criminality nurture the Prison Industrial Complex; Meda Chesney-Lind (1997), a feminist criminologist, who asserted that the war on drugs had become a war on women; Julia Sudbury, author/research chair of Social Justice, Toronto, who recommended moving beyond the micro-level (psychological) analyses of women's imprisonment to engage with ideology focusing on the political economy of prisons (2005); Mary Beth Pfeiffer , an investigative reporter and Soros fellow, who wrote what's really crazy in America is that "the criminal justice system has assumed the care of hundreds of thousands of mentally ill people" (2007, p. xiii); and with many other activists/scholars who advocate a moratorium on mass incarceration and a search for alternatives to imprisoning already vulnerable and disenfranchised American citizens.

Sister of St. Joseph, Rita Steinhagen, who after a six-month imprisonment at Pekin Federal prison for trespassing at the School of the Americas became a fierce advocate for women in prison and for their children, profoundly influenced me. She spoke about how millions of children in the United States were being raised with parents imprisoned (Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), 2005), and how these children were expected to spend the better part of each day trying to concentrate in a classroom. The war on drugs put many parents in prison, and their children became hidden casualties.

Students in my high school biology classroom were intrigued that, although I was their teacher, I was also a student, and they often would ask what I was studying. When I began talking about prison statistics, a few students approached me, often hesitantly, to

tell me that they were worried about parents or other relatives currently incarcerated. One day, an African American ninth grader, Cheryl, asked me if it was fair for social services to take her baby brother away from her. My prompting revealed that Cheryl's mother had two warrants against her and was facing a felony conviction. Initially, Cheryl's relatives placed her and her little brother with their grandmother, but social services removed them from their grandmother's home and placed them in two separate foster homes. Cheryl had experienced many conflicts with both teachers and other students, but she said she sought my help because she trusted me. A few weeks later, another African American girl, Jana screamed at me when I simply asked her if she dropped something on the corridor floor. Since her response to my question was rather dramatic, I asked her friend if she knew what was wrong. The friend explained that Jana was nervous about visiting her mother in prison the following day.

I was sad that students I knew had been coping with life and school while their mothers were imprisoned. I was depressed realizing that for the past several years educators like me had been challenged to implement "No Child Left Behind (NCLB)," legislation that, in my view, ignores vulnerable youth. I wanted to rant in every public place to awaken school professionals and also legislators to pay attention to what I was learning. I wanted to promote Angela Davis's ideas. I wanted my doctoral research project to cover it all but had to face my limitations and the reality that I had to narrow my research focus to a specific aspect of this huge issue. Inspired by Cheryl and Jana and other students who talked to me about relatives in prison, I decided to focus on the world close to me, the world of children. I chose to focus on learning more about children left

behind when their mothers were incarcerated and to do that from the perspectives of adults who had been those children.

Once I started my research, I was very nearly overwhelmed with what seemed to me impossible situations adults I interviewed had faced as children. Because I was doing qualitative research, the study evolved in ways I had not planned. I was invited into a prison setting to talk with women awaiting sentencing, some of them mothers of incarcerated children as well as daughters of women who had been incarcerated. I was invited on several occasions to accompany a Girl Scout troop to visit their mothers in a state prison. My concerns connected me with professionals who were advocates for children with parents in prison. I am deeply grateful to each person who talked with me. I hope that my research will add to a larger conversation among people who work directly with children of incarcerated mothers or who advocate for public policy changes addressing the underlying structures that result in these children being left behind.

Chapter 1: Mothers Incarcerated - Children in Crisis

Cassandra, a social worker and leader of Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) invited me to join her and a group of 17-20 girls on their monthly visit to Statesville Prison. After dinner, the mothers, daughters, GSBB leaders and I piled into the art room for a presentation. The guest speaker for the day was a local police officer. After giving a 30-minute talk about policy and internal operations at the prison, Officer Jim asked if there were any questions. Eight-year old Shay perked up in her chair, raised her hand and asked: "When you arrest our mother, what happens to the children?" The officer was taken aback as was I that a little girl was able to articulate a question so critical and so beyond the bureaucracy involved in punishing their mothers. The same question inspired by my high school students with mothers in prison had guided my doctoral research study for the previous four years. This chapter describes the focus of my study and the demographic, historical/social and research context within which it is located. It first looks at demographics.

According to a 2009 report by The Sentencing Project, "as of 2007, an estimated 1.7 million children have a parent in prison. 70% are children of color, and the number of incarcerated mothers has more than doubled (122%) from 29,500 in 1991 to 65,600 in 2007" (Schirmer, Nellis & Mauer, 2009, p.1). Statistics point to a large racial disparity among incarcerated women. Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) showed that the rate of incarceration for African American mothers was 205 per 100,000; for Latina women 60 per 100,000; and for White women 34 per 100,000. African American children are estimated to be nine times more likely and Hispanic children three times

more likely than White children to have a parent in prison (Bouchet, 2008; Boudin, 2007; Golden, 2005; Reed & Reed, 2004; Arditti, 2003; Travis &Waul, 2003; Wright & Seymour, 2000). There is no accurate count but only estimates of the actual number of children with mothers in prison because no one at the local, state or federal level is in charge of keeping track of children at the time of a mother's arrest. In other words, there is no standardized method for collecting data on children of prisoners (Vigne, Davis & Brazzekk, 2008; Miller, 2006; Travis & Waul; 2003; Arditti, 2003; Meyers, 1999). Reliable data on children of prisoners is also limited because of the secrecy and stigma associated with imprisonment (Bockneck & Sandrson, 2008; Valenzuela, 2007; Ross, Khashu & Wamsley, 2004; Vigne, Travis & Waul, 2003; Johnson, 2002).

Children are severely affected when their mothers go to prison (Enos, 2001), but remain in societal shadows as a nearly invisible population (Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Robertson, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003). They receive very little attention because they are not viewed as victims when their parents are incarcerated (Hairston, 2007; Sarri, 2005). Krisberg (2001) of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) revisited two studies conducted 15 years apart. Both studies were entitled, "Why Punish the Children," and focused on the plight of children with incarcerated parents. McGowan and Blumenthal of the NCCD and the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) conducted the first study in 1978, and Bloom and Steinhart of the NCCD conducted the second study, which replicated the first study, in 1993. The second study showed that whereas the rate of male and female incarceration had increased dramatically, children left behind by parents continued to be ignored by social institutions responsible for them. Even though these children's plight was the result of neglect and

not malicious intent, they nevertheless suffered punitive consequences (Krisberg and Temin, NCCD, 2001).

More children are left with no parent in the home when their mothers are incarcerated than when their fathers are incarcerated. While the vast majority of children of male prisoners are living with their mothers, only about a third (37%) of the children of incarcerated women is living with their fathers. Most of these children are living with grandparents or other relatives, while one of every nine (10.9%) women in prison has a child living in foster care (Schirmer Nellis & Maurer, 2009, p.5).

Most scholarly studies describing the experiences of incarcerated mothers do not mention what happens to the children left behind, and when children are the focus of research, most of the data collected has been based on surveys from the perspective of parents, usually a mother, talking about what is happening to her children and her concerns for them (Valenzuela, 2007; Hairston, 2007). Although there have been recent qualitative studies on children of prisoners, only a few studies have dealt with the impact of incarceration specifically from the children's viewpoint in a non-clinical setting (Valenzuela, 2007; Johnson, 2005). For Valenzuela, "what little research has been done rarely considers children as social actors in their own right. Research and the concomitant development of theory, has instead been grounded in positivist methods, based on experimental design, survey research and psychological testing" (2007, p. 4).

Research Focus and Approach

I chose to do a qualitative research study on the experiences of children whose mothers were incarcerated. I approached this research project as an educator wanting to understand more deeply the experiences of children with mothers incarcerated. I

intended to use those new understandings to improve my own practice, share with colleagues, and, finally, to advocate for these children so often invisible in a school population.

I wanted to research the point of view of children, now adults, by asking them to look retrospectively at what happened to them and how they made sense of what happened to them growing up with their mothers in jail or prison during some period of their childhood. How did adults whose mothers were in jail or prison when they were children describe their interpretations of people and events in their lives? What was their experience with institutions in which they were involved, such as schools? What experiences stood out most for them? How did they remember their understandings and feelings about what was happening to them? How did they remember their very sense of self being affected by mother's imprisonment?

My intention was to focus on the challenges that participants faced after their mothers' incarceration, but surprisingly, the data led me in a different direction. Participants consistently referred to relationships with their mothers leading up to her incarceration, during her incarceration and after her release. The mothers remained omnipresent in their childhood memories.

My study procedures evolved beyond interviewing only adult children of incarcerated mothers to interviewing professionals working on behalf of children with mothers in prison. The methodology chapter explains in detail how I obtained the population sample and conducted the study. I used sociologist, C. Wright Mills' (1959) construct of how private troubles point to public issues. My study focused on the private troubles of

children left behind when their mothers went to prison and pointed to questions about the public policies and practices in which those troubles were embedded.

Interpretive interactionism was a useful theory for analyzing private troubles and was the primary framework for data interpretation. “The focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects” (Denzin, 2001, p. 34). Because of the power dynamics I saw evidenced in what happened to children and mothers, I also drew on Foucault’s theory of power and used his concepts of discourse, regimes of truth, disciplinary power, subjugated knowledge and governmentality. I referred to applications of Foucault’s theory by feminist researchers (Campbell, 2000; Zerai and Banks, 2002; Golden, 2005).

I designed this study within the context of existing demographics and historical/social constructs of women’s incarceration. I also placed the study within the context of research on the risk factors and effects— psychological, social, economic and academic-- for a child with incarcerated parents, as well as the effects of foster/kinship care and prison visitation with an incarcerated mother. The next sections of this chapter present the literature in which this study is contextualized. The chapter concludes with an argument for the uniqueness of my study as it fits with other research on children with incarcerated mothers.

Historical/Social Constructs of Women’s Imprisonment

It is impossible to separate the impact incarceration has on children from the systemic issues that have led to the massive incarceration of women. The plight of children is linked to the plight of their mothers. The larger society’s treatment of women historically has had a direct impact on current conditions of mothers and their children; the issues

facing mothers and their children today must be considered within the historical context of policies toward women offenders (Davis, 2003; Harm, 1992).

When prisons began to emerge in the late eighteenth century as a form of punishment, they were largely populated by men regarded as deviant. Women deviants were considered insane and relegated to mental institutions. Nancy Harm (1992) argued that the eugenics movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries identified women as the transmitters of feeble-mindedness, and, by their sexual promiscuity, the source of social problems. Public policy determined that women (mainly immigrants) be subjected to sterilization and committed to reformatories. In essence, deviant men were punished for criminal acts while deviant women were punished for immoral acts. Current U.S. policy continues to impose similar forms of social control on women (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, 1994; Davis, 2003).

Davis noted that the commitment of women to mental institutions whenever there were behavior problems only applied to White women (2003). Until the Abolition of Slavery (13th Amendment), the vast majority of African American women, as slaves, were brutally disciplined for so-called immoral behavior but also for behavior that would have been considered normal had they been free. Even today, pregnant female prisoners come to local hospitals in shackles, echoing the treatment of pregnant slave mothers who were shackled (Bernstein, 2005).

For Bloom, Chesney-Lind, (1994), the problem of women's criminality is part of a much larger, more complex set of social systems. "Women's criminality" or "female criminality" was coined during the second-wave of the feminist movement in the 60s and 70s as a reaction against the gender distortions and mystifications of female deviants in

traditional criminology. The criminality of women reflects the conditions of their lives and their attempts to struggle with survival. In a male-dominated society that tolerates race, class and gender inequality, the criminalization of women is reflected in the way women are treated in larger society. (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, 1994)

According to some feminist criminologists, motherhood, like sexuality, plays a critical role in women's subordination. Martha Fineman refers to "motherhood as a colonized concept – an event physically practiced and experienced by women, but occupied and defined and given consent and value by the core values of patriarchal ideology" (1995, p. 125). For Fineman, society exerts structural and ideological pressures on women to become mothers, but only when the child is attached to a legal father. Therefore legal rules reward women's maternal roles while punishing conduct that conflicts with mothering. For example, unwed mothers are stigmatized, and the criminalization of abortion forces the normalization of motherhood. A mother who abandons her child can face criminal charges whereas a father who abandons his child can escape criminal charges as long as he leaves the child with the mother – regardless of the harm that decision may cause the child (1991). Fineman's view is consistent with Davis' argument that treatment of incarcerated women is indicative of the way society treats women in general (Davis, 2003). Criminal law's treatment of female offenders reflects society's image of all women as mothers or potential mothers rather than as individuals (Roberts, 1995).

Race and class interact with gender in determining the prison sentence of a mother. Because the legal system considers women of color, working class/poor women, and single parents as not fitting the concept of an "ideal mother," those women receive

harsher treatment and are more likely to be confined to custodial prisons (Davis, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Roberts, 1995). Feminist studies suggest that this logic may be an additional reason for the racial imbalance among female inmates – legal systems often deem poor minority mothers unfit to parent (Rafter & Heidensohn, 1995). For Golden (2005), the increased incarceration of women of color is part of a multi-layered process of recolonization that serves the interest of elite managers of a globalized economy. Zerai and Banks used an analytic lens of intersectionality (interlocking race, gender and class inequalities) to show how "dehumanizing discourse has been used in the media and academia to reinforce users' social location of stigmatized poor women of color on the bottom rungs of social hierarchy, undeserving of the resources generated by American society" (Zerai, Banks, 2002, p. 41). Public discourse that constructs social meaning and United States policy agenda reinforces this subjugated social location. As an example, middle class White women's drug use is "explained" as relating to career-related stress, whereas poor Black women's drug use is "described" as selling food stamps to buy drugs (2002).

The fourfold surge in women's incarceration since the 1986 enactment of mandatory drug sentencing (BJS,2007) does not reflect a shift in the nature of women's behavior, but simply a shift in sentencing practices, specifically against nonviolent drug offenders. Prior to 1995, most women were arrested for minor property crimes. Between 1995 and 2004, female incarceration rates increased 53 percent because of mandatory drug sentencing and because criteria for drug offenses had tightened (BJS 2004). Over 39 percent of these women were convicted for simple possession. Only five grams of crack cocaine, an inexpensive stimulant, resulted in a five-year mandatory sentence; whereas

prior to 2010 it took five hundred grams of pure cocaine, an extremely expensive stimulant, to get the same five year mandatory sentence.

Instead of being a policy of last resort, imprisonment has become the first-order response for a wide range of women offenders, who have been disproportionately swept up in the mandatory drug-sentencing trend (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, 1994). The globalization of economic markets, the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy, the dismantling of Aid to Families of Dependant Children (AFDC), and the prison construction boom, in conjunction with mandatory drug sentencing, have all contributed to the doubling of the incarceration rate of women (Davis, 2003). This incarceration rate has left a larger number of already impoverished mothers and their children financially devastated, with a disproportionate number of African American women outpacing White mothers nationally (Levy-Pounds, 2006).

In 2005, Martiga Lohn of the Associated Press reported that women had become the fastest growing segment of the U. S. prison population. She credited this trend to women's growing involvement in drug crimes and to longer sentencing practices. She reported that at that time (2005) between 66 and 90 percent of incarcerated women in this state were mothers, two-thirds of whom had children under the age of 18. She also reported that a State Correctional Facility for Women sent its pregnant inmates to a local hospital to give birth, and then returned the inmates to the prison without their children. Some mothers lost all of their parental rights while they were serving time. Lohn wrote, "Ask an inmate about her child and tears follow" (2005, p. 2). Whereas imprisoned men are mostly concerned with loss of public status, women are concerned with what is happening to the children (Morton & Williams, 1998; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978).

More than twenty-two years after the establishment of mandatory sentencing and mass imprisonment of mothers, children with imprisoned mothers have gone virtually ignored (Valenzuela, 2007; Poehlmann, 2005). Children of female offenders have become America's forgotten children and sustained causalities in the war on drugs, with poor children of color at the forefront (Levy-Pounds, 2006). In the words of Renny Golden (2005), children of incarcerated mothers "carry the disciplinary wounds of a carceral network, a network of power that shapes everyone's life; whether they become homeless, hospitalized for preventable illness, clients of jail, detention or zero tolerance expulsion programs, runaways from sexual or physical abuse or whether they are institutionalized in the child welfare system" (p. xxiv). Foucault considers a carceral network (carceral archipelago) as the expansion of disciplinary control from the penal system outward toward lager society. For Foucault, "in penal justice, the prison transformed the punitive procedure into a penitentiary technique; the carceral archipelago transported this technique from the penal institution to the entire social body" (1977, p.298).

Research on Risk Factors for Children of Incarcerated Parents/Mothers

A child who has a parent absent due to incarceration may suffer greater challenges than a child with a parent absent for other reasons because of the added social stigma (Hairston, 2007). Other research also showed that children with mothers in prison have the highest risk factors of all the high-risk children in this country (Valenzuela, 2007; Jarvis, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003; Cunningham, 2004; Meyers, 1999). These children experience poverty, multiple moves, shifting caregivers, school problems, pre-incarceration instability, trauma and grief due to separation from the mothers (Johnston,

1995, Viboch, 2005). They also have internal problems of fear, withdrawal, depression and emotional disturbances and external problems of acting out in anger, fighting, lying, stealing and substance abuse (Meyers, 1999, Travis & Waul, 2003; Hairston, 2007).

An Oklahoma demographic study showed that children who lived solely with their mother prior to her incarceration suffered the greatest percentage of behavior problems after she left. Any problems they had before she left only intensified. Those included increased school problems, problems with caregivers, drug/alcohol abuse and running away particularly of children ages 12-18 (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). Oklahoma has the nation's highest female incarceration rate ... first in per capita incarceration of females - 129 per 100,000 female residents. The national per capita rate of female incarceration is 68 per 100,000 female residents.

According to LaVigne (2008) it is difficult to pinpoint long-term behavior problems on a parent’s incarceration because that is just one risk factor within a larger context of substance abuse, violence and uncertainty in the home. According to Wright and Seymour (2000) it is exceptional for a family to experience incarceration in the absence of other difficulties. Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) hypothesized that even in struggling families; parental incarceration will most often compound rather than mitigate preexisting family problems.

Wagner (2006) of the Workforce Investment CT (WIA), which delivers services to the neediest families, defined characteristics unique to children with parents in prison.

> Children of incarcerated parents face many problems typical to at-risk youth like lack of positive role models, poverty, poor school performance; however, children of incarcerated parents face a unique set of challenges: five to six times more likely than their peers to be incarcerated themselves; more likely to abuse substances and engage in antisocial behavior; likely to drop out of school, run away, become homeless, suffer from a negative self-image, fear, anxiety, resentment and sadness; high levels

> of truancy, physical aggression and disruptive behavior; traumatized by separation; stigmatized by shame of having a parent in prison. (p.2)

Studies referring to the removal of a parent through incarceration as a child's loss of social capital, pinpointed three prominent ways imprisonment affects that social capital: (1) strains of economic deprivation; (2) loss of parental socialization through role modeling, support and supervision; and (3) stigma and shame of societal labeling (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999; Golden, 2005).

Several researchers concluded that whereas it is clear that the effects on a child whose mother is incarcerated are multiple and overlap with what happened to the child prior to the incarceration, more scholarly research on this group of children is needed to better understand how the effects of parental incarceration differ from other types of parental absence (Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003; Wright and Seymour, 2000).

The following sections attempt to sort research literature on the effects on children of parental incarceration, particularly a mother's incarceration, into broad categories of psychological effects, economic effects, social effects, and academic effects.

Effects on Children

Psychological effects

A recent study (using results from other studies with representative samples) provided evidence of an independent, causal relationship between parental incarceration and its associated emotional and behavioral outcomes (Murray & Farrington, 2007). After controlling for other risk factors, three of five studies demonstrated an independent effect of parental incarceration on a child's antisocial behavior. And two studies showed an

independent effect of parental imprisonment on a child's mental health, drug use, school failure and unemployment.

Several recent qualitative studies have been concerned with the psychological impact of children with parents in prison (Jarvis, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Johnson, 2005, Travis & Waul, 2003). A *Child Development* [psychological] study, which included 54 children, ages two and a half to seven and a half years, whose mothers were incarcerated, revealed that secure attachment relationships might be associated with resilience in high-risk children (Poehlmann, 2005). These secure relationships were more likely when (1) children lived in a stable care-giving environment during their mother's incarceration; (2) children reacted to the separation with sadness rather than anger; and (3) children were older.

The psychological impact on a child at the time of a mother's arrest depended on the age of the child, whether the child was living with mom prior to arrest, and whether the child was present at the time of arrest. Valenzuela's study showed that children living with their mothers prior to incarceration were at a higher risk of suffering psychological trauma if living in a volatile household with substance abuse (2007). A child's most common and immediate reaction to their parent's arrest is shock and confusion; followed by fear, anger or denial (Hairston, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2005; Viboch, 2005).

According to Hairston (2007), researchers who question whether incarceration specifically impacts children behaviorally overlook a number of factors that are unique to separation by incarceration, citing a lack of control over a child's ability to communicate with parents and the social stigma associated with incarceration. Most of the research on the emotional well being of the children of incarcerated parents is based on small

descriptive studies using data obtained from their incarcerated parents. Hairston asserted, "the research studies do not compare children's behaviors at different points in time or their behavior with children whose parents are not in prison" (2007, p.17).

In one small qualitative study, African American girls had unacknowledged emotional and psychological needs, unmet physical and health needs and in addition limited financial, social and emotional resources (Johnson, 2005). However, the researcher explained this study was limited to a small sample using recruitment strategies based on convenience, criterion and strategic sampling and could not be generalized to the greater population of African American adolescents.

Studies that described the childhood of female prisoners predicted that children of prisoners are more likely to become prisoners themselves (Poehlmann, 2005). But there has been no concrete evidence to support the predictability of children of prisoners becoming prisoners themselves (Hairston, 2005). For Renny Golden, it is not possible to measure the force and unpredictability of the human spirit. External factors like familial support and rehabilitation programs can break the cycle of trauma and victimization (Golden, 2005; Hairston, 2005).

Economic effects

Financial loss and material hardship have the most devastating economic impact on children of incarcerated parents, most of whom lived in poverty prior to their incarceration. These children experienced greater financial hardship than any other children (Bouchet, 2008; La Vigne et al; 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Johnson, 2005).

A Quaker study (Robertson, 2007) found that "many prisoners' families are economically (and socially) vulnerable and marginalized even before imprisonment with high rates of unemployment, low-wage jobs and dependency on external (often state) support" (2007, p. 37). The institutionalized nature of gender and racial oppression means that many women of color who become incarcerated have not been afforded opportunities to pursue social, economic, and personal well being (Levy-Pounds, 2006; Zerai & Banks, 2002; Johnson, 2003). Hairston (2007) reported that "financial problems are greatest where the imprisoned family member carried out responsible parenting roles and for families who seek to help the prisoner, provide care of his or her children and maintain parent-child relationship" (p. 14).

A 2008 demographic study in a rural county in North Carolina found that children of incarcerated parents were 80 percent more likely to live in a household that experienced economic strain, even after controlling for the parent's substance abuse, mental health, education and race (La Vigne et al, 2008). Although local demographic studies cannot be generalized to entire populations, many such studies agree that financial strain is the most severe economic hardship for already vulnerable families (La Vigne et al; 2008; Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Johnson, 2005; Golden, 2005; Travis & Waul, 2003).

Jarvis (2007) using a stress process model found that children dealing with parental imprisonment tended to encounter economic consequences, a primary stressor as well as face residential relocation, a secondary stressor. Johnson's 2005 study of six adolescent African American girls with incarcerated parents found that of the four basic needs' groups - material, emotional/psychological, safety and opportunity - the material need for

food, shelter and clothing surfaced most often as the girls' primary concern. Children of incarcerated parents are directly affected by the family's financial status, and though they may not be able to comprehend the changes, they feel the changes. They may no longer be able to afford school clothes, supplies or extracurricular activities or even accept a parent's collect calls (Hairston, 2007).

Social effects

Social stigma and shame have the biggest social impact on children who must cope with a parent in prison. Unlike the loss of a parent for reasons other than incarceration, a child who loses a parent to incarceration faces many social burdens and a considerable amount of stigmatization. When stigma surrounds children, they are often times denied the necessary support and social outlets of other grieving children. This may result in children exhibiting internalizing and externalizing behavior (La Vigne et al. 2008). A 2006 Viboch study determined that children of incarcerated parents might suffer an extensive grieving process as a result of parental separation known as ambiguous loss (cited in Levy-Pounds, 2006). Ambiguous loss is a term coined by Pauline Boss to describe a loss where there is no validation or clarification of the loss and thus a lack of knowing whether the lost person is irretrievably lost or coming back again (Boss, 2006). "In cases of hospitalization, incarceration, foster care, adoption and even desertion, I recommend telling the children and teenagers about the ambiguity of the missing person's status and then helping them to find meaning as best they can depending on their age" (Boss, p.86). Children remain in the shadows when families, fearing negative consequences, are reluctant to reveal a mother's imprisonment even to close friends (La Vigne et al; 2008; Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Johnson, 2005;

Golden, 2005; Travis & Waul, 2003). In addition to personal social stigma, children of incarcerated parents suffer from institutionalized stigma. Public policies make it difficult for such families to get housing, jobs or financial support. Many studies report widespread stories of families of prisoners and their children being subjected to overt and subtle discrimination (Bouchet, 2008). For Golden, "social stigma deflects public attention away from gendered racial oppression" and expendability and justifies punitive policies (2005, p. xxiii). Punitive polices affect children and their families long after the parent has been released from prison (Hairston, 2007).

Children living with their mothers at the time of arrest not only face greater social obstacles and financial hardship than those living with fathers, but must also endure conflicting messages; like the tension between wanting to be mothered while being forced to take on the mothering role (Valenzuela, 2007). Regardless of the nature of a child's response to social stigmatization, it represents one of the most damaging results and heaviest burdens of parental incarceration, affecting the child long after a parent's release (La Vigne, 2008).

Academic effects

Many studies reported school problems as a major issue concerning school-aged children of incarcerated parents. Most of the studies addressing school performance used survey or interview data gathered from the perspectives of incarcerated mothers. In interviews with 58 mothers, Hairston identified bad grades, truancy, suspensions, and poor behavior as the major cause of school performance problems (2007). Data gathered on 166 school children revealed that 70 percent showed poor academic performance and over 50 percent exhibited classroom behavior problems (Travis & Waul, 2003).

Ambiguous loss (Boss, 2006) may manifest itself in unruly behavior at school, lack of attentiveness during instruction and may even escalate into episodes of violent behavior (Viboch cited in Levy-Pounds, 2006).

These children's efforts to cope with the routines and demands of everyday school life are compounded by a family life devastated with substance abuse, violence, and eventually incarceration (Bouchet, 2008; Valenzuela, 2007, Johnson, 2005). Poor academic performance has been defined as a risk factor for children with parents in prison; especially if there is a lack of stability in the home (Hairston, 2007).

Recent research also indicated that behavioral problems and truancy are the major causes of poor academic performance in schools. Two quantitative studies (Cho, 2006; Ortiz, 2006) researched the academic performance of children of incarcerated parents and the teachers' perceptions of children of incarcerated parents respectively. The Cho study examined educational outcomes of elementary aged children using standardized test scores and retention rates as variables and found no direct correlation between a mother's incarceration and test scores or retention rates. The Ortiz (2006) study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (surveys and focus groups) to determine if administrative staff and teaching staff could identify which students were children of incarcerated parents and then to acknowledge their perceptions of this group of children. While the respondents in the study believed that it was important to identify these children, most of them could not. While most respondents felt that children of incarcerated parents could be successful, they agreed that more support was necessary to make that happen.

Viboch (2006) concluded that schools were ill equipped to handle the growing needs of children of incarcerated parents. Many children who are acting out grief for their losses "find themselves the focus of school disciplinary systems and the juvenile justice systems" (Viboch, 2006, p.3; Levy-Pounds, 2006, p.21).

Child Placement: Foster Care

Approximately 10 percent of children with incarcerated mothers and two percent of children with incarcerated fathers are in foster care (Bouchet, 2008). When a father is incarcerated, over 90 percent of the children remain in the home with the mother; but when a mother is incarcerated only 30 to 37 percent remain with the father (Schirmer, Nellis & Mauer, 2009; Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Johnson, 2005).

Several studies indicated that child placement is determined by several risk factors, with the highest number of risks resulting in foster care placement. These risk factors not only determine where a child will be placed, but also how likely the child will survive the incarceration period. The risk factors are low parent education, parental substance use, mental or emotional problems, low socioeconomic status, parental history of physical or sexual abuse, past parental incarceration, and a parent's own history of being in foster care. The greater the number of risk factors, the higher the probability that a child will be placed in foster care and not with a relative (Johnson & Waldfogel, 2002; Ziebert, 2006; La Vigne et al. 2008). Some studies contend that a stable and nurturing foster family can bolster the resilience of children to ameliorate the negative impacts (Harden, 1998; Krisberg & Temin, 2001).

After a parent's arrest, decisions about child placement require immediate attention allowing little or no time for appropriate legal, psychological, social, and financial

considerations (Neito, 2002; cited in La Vigne et al., 2008). Since African American women are disproportionately poor and are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, their children are involved in the foster care system at a disproportionate rate, a rate, more than double their percentage in the population. According to the Women in Prison Project (2008), 60 percent of incarcerated women lack a high school diploma and only 44 percent could read above an eighth grade level. Poor women of color lacking the education or legal representation needed to comply with state guidelines often suffered permanent loss of custody (Levy-Pounds, 2006).

Historically, the foster care system was designed to provide short-term, temporary care to displaced children. The foster care system had two goals: (1) to reunite parents and children and (2) to create some kind of permanency for the children. But with mandatory minimum sentencing, mothers are incarcerated more frequently, for longer periods of time, and with little opportunity for early release. Since foster care was not designed for long-term care, some children were left languishing in foster care for years, with many children drifting from foster home to foster home. In most cases, the mother-child bond was completely lost (Shireman, 2003).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) designed to resolve the "foster care drift" problem set uniform national standards for ensuring children in government supervised foster care safe permanent homes with a short period of time. Child Welfare could terminate parental rights if a child had been in foster care 15 out of 22 months. The unintended consequence of ASFA is a highly restrictive system that further punishes incarcerated mothers and their children. Seven years is the mean time served by incarcerated parents (Bernstein, 2005). Prior to the enactment of ASFA, parents had 24

months or longer to fulfill the requirements necessary to be reunited with their children; but since its enactment, women are racing against the clock to meet ASFA guidelines. Any mother serving a sentence longer than 15 months with a child in foster care will most likely have her parental rights terminated under ASFA (Levy-Pounds, 2006). Some mothers have been declared unfit just by virtue of their conviction. Reuniting with their child depended on their ability to prove their fitness (although no legislative body has ever really defined what constitutes fitness). In most cases, if a mother is to retain her parental rights, she must abide by a court-ordered case plan that includes parenting classes, drug treatment, and job training (Golden, 2005). The most crucial decision regarding a child's future and welfare is made at hearings while the mother is incarcerated. Since the mother is unable to attend, her ability to participate in case planning for the child is severely constrained. Sometimes incarcerated mothers are not even notified of the hearing (Halperin & Harris, 2004; McGowan & Blumenthal, 1978). As a result, the foster care population has now grown at a rate that mirrors that of the prison system, doubling over the past two decades (Bernstein, 2005). Bernstein sees the criminal justice system and the welfare system as being intertwined – "two ballooning bureaucracies that feed and fuel each other" (2005, p.144).

According to Katherine Gabel and Denise Johnston, MD (1995), "Given the reality that approximately half of all incarcerated females have an immediate family member who has been incarcerated, and that the goal of agency services is to reunite the child with a parent who is an offender, such guidelines are unduly restrictive and increase the number of children of women prisoners who enter foster care with strangers" (p. 146).

Social welfare and correctional systems need to implement specific policies that address the needs of incarcerated mothers and their children and develop a system to track these families (Halperin & Harris, 2004). If a child is able to build a strong relationship with the caregiver, whether a family member or foster caregiver, that child will better be able to negotiate their parent's incarceration and ease the trauma and negative effects of the incarceration (Bouchet, 2009; La Vigne, 2008)

Child Placement: Kinship Care

Krisberg asserted that though there were claims that children are better off being placed with a relative than being placed with strangers (Krisberg, 2001), there has been little or no screening to determine the fitness of the relative caregivers (Krisberg et al, 2001). Studies involving families of incarcerated mothers found that most of the children were young, poor, minority, and dependent on others to provide care and nurturing (Hairston, 2007; Levy-Pounds, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Sherman, 1991; Henriques, 1981; Danzy & Jackson, 1997; Kauffman, 2001; Wilhelmus, 1998; McGowan, Blumenthal, 1993).

A national overview of living arrangements for children of incarcerated mothers found that 50 to 54 percent of the children were living with their grandmothers. According to Golden, nothing prepares a grandparent for the effects of trauma carried by the children. When the burden of sole caregiver falls on the grandparents, they are confronted with the task of redefining their roles (2005). Grandparents can no longer be "doting grandparents"; they must become disciplinarians. Both the children and their grandparents must make physical as well as financial adjustments to their relationships (Dressel, Porterfield, Barnhill, 2004). The financial loss is greatest for those families

trying to keep the incarcerated parent as a family member. This is because they incur costs of maintaining the household (food and clothing), costs of transporting children to and from prison, and healthcare costs (Hairston & Adams, 2001). Financial problems are exacerbated by the fact that most grandparents are elderly, have their own health problems and are not equipped to take on new childcare responsibilities (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993, Hairston, 2001).

U. S. demographic studies reported that financial difficulties are the primary problems when grandparents take on the responsibility of raising the children of incarcerated mothers (Hairston, 2001; Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). Twenty-seven percent of children who live with their grandparents due to parental incarceration are living in poverty. This is because any benefits a mother may have been receiving prior to her arrest cannot be transferred to grandparents. Even if the grandparents are eligible to receive welfare benefits, those do not include the extra cost of raising children. Not only do relatives – especially grandparents, face financial hardships, they also lack the legal advocacy to navigate through the complex web of welfare regulations (Krisberg, (NCCD), 2001; Levy-Pounds, 2006; Hairston cited in CW360, 2008).

Since people of color comprise approximately 68 percent of maternal incarcerations, it should come as no surprise that the burden of kinship care falls heaviest on the African American community (Wilhelmus, 1998). African American grandparents are four times more likely to become primary caregivers for children with incarcerated mothers as their White counterparts and two times more likely than Latino grandparents (U. S. Census Bureau, 1991). However, it should also be noted that the African American community views care giving as a collective responsibility. It is one of the strengths and long-

standing traditions in African culture (Danzy & Jackson, 1997). African American families view kinship care as an act of family preservation (Danzy & Jackson). Some changes to improve the lives of children with incarcerated mothers and those who care for them could come with the implementation of The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act *(H.R 6893/ P. L. 110-35)* passed by Congress and signed by President Bush in Fall, 2008. The bill provides for extending support services to relative care; promoting permanent families for children in foster care (through incentives); increasing support of Indian tribes; keeping siblings together and extending federal support to youth to age 21 (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2009)

Maintaining Contact through Visitation

Shortly after a mother's arrest, her children not only suffer from the shock of losing a parent, but also with the frustration of coping with uncertain existence. Because they must navigate among multiple caregivers, they have difficulty forming attachments; so, maintaining a connection with their mothers is critical (Krisberg, Temin, 2001). The children also experience bitterness, confusion, and a loss of safety and belonging. Most devastating, they lose their public status – they are harassed by other children. Psychologists conclude that the mother-child bond should not be lost (Golden, 2005).

Although it is imperative that children know what has happened to them, many children because of the social stigma surrounding incarceration, were told that their mothers were out of town or away at work. Some caregivers told the child that the parent had died and later recanted (McGowan and Blumenthal, 1992). Studies showed that when caregivers have been deceptive about the mother's incarceration, children imagine

the worst resulting in more traumatic stress for the child (Hairston, 2007; Johnson, 2005; Travis et al. 2003).

Research overwhelmingly stressed the importance of a child maintaining contact with their parent during incarceration ((Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Robertson, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003; Boudin, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Golden, 2005; Arditti, 2003; Wright & Seymour, 2000; Ziebert, 2006). Studies showed that visits could decrease the level of anxiety, stress and uncertainty for a child (Hairston, 2007; Ziebert, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Travis et al. 2003). Maintaining the parent-child bond is critical to the child's healthy emotional and cognitive competence (Golden, 2005 Bowlby, 1953; Ainsworth, 1973; Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit, 1973; Krisberg & Temin, 2001). Valenzuela found that many children were able to witness their mothers' sobriety for the first time during their prison visits. Even children who had experienced a lifetime of their mother's substance abuse and recidivism described their visit as positive and their mothers as loving (2007).

The physical possibility for children visiting a parent in prison is limited by distance. Over 60% of parents in state facilities are located over 100 miles away from their children's home. Over 43% of those imprisoned in federal facilities are over 500 miles away (Krisberg and Temin, 2001). Visitation possibilities are also limited by practices among social workers and prison officials. Even when caregivers made efforts to accommodate children's prison visits, prison policies and practices did not create an environment that reflected the needs of the children and their families and often undermined meaningful communication between the parents and children (Hairston, 2007). According to the NCCD, social workers were rarely encouraged to facilitate

prison visits and those social welfare staff that did try to keep families connected were subjected to humiliating treatment by corrections officials (Guzman et al. 2008). A survey of 70 countries revealed that the United States was one of only three countries that separated young children from their incarcerated parent. Liberia and Suriname come in a close second (Kauffman, 2001).

A bureaucracy that makes child-parent visitation difficult was not always the case in the United States. In the 1950s, U. S. prisons had nurseries where inmates could nurture their children from seven weeks to two years, depending on the institution. But by 1998, due to federal budget cuts and the dramatic increase of incarcerated mothers, the number of "prison orphans" soared (Harper & Harris, 2004).

The recent rapid increase of 'prison orphans' has prompted correctional administrators to reevaluate how they deal with incarcerated mothers and their children (Kauffman, 2001). Many correctional institutions have developed on-site children centers. At least ten states allow overnight visits for children and their mothers. The correctional institution for women in Nebraska allows children to spend up to five nights with their mothers. Unit supervisors for residential parenting centers in correctional institutions across the country have become very passionate about the program and its effects on the mothers, their children, and the correctional facility as a whole. Correctional administrators can see first hand what happens to mothers as well as their children when the mother-child bond is lost.

Where My Study Fits

My research on children of incarcerated mothers is similar to that of research reported in the previous section in its focus on what happens to the children of incarcerated

mothers. It is only similar methodologically to the five qualitative studies. All the other studies I have reviewed used quantitative methods.

The five qualitative studies were published after 2004, the year I formulated my qualitative research design (Boudin, 2007; Jarvis, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Castillo, 2006; Johnson, 2005). The design of my study has elements in common with these qualitative projects particularly in its concern with subjectivity-- allowing participants to describe their experiences and the meanings those experiences had for them. “Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.7). Like those studies, my study did not test a hypothesis and did not ask for participants’ responses to pre-determined variables, though data on variables reported in other quantitative studies arose spontaneously as participants talked about their experiences.

Jarvis’s master’s thesis done in a controlled setting of nonprofit organizations involved interviews with 11 mothers or family caregivers about the major stressors children of incarcerated parents face. Two of the qualitative studies obtained data directly from children in controlled settings. The Valenzuela (2007) study included participants in a prison family support program in which the researcher was already involved. “Qualitative methodology proved useful for examining the children’s perspectives of their life experiences with a mother, sister or aunt in prison” (Valenzuela, 2007, p. 58). Valenzuela used grounded theory to analyze those perspectives. (“In this type of qualitative research, theory emerges, or is ‘grounded’ in the data” (Merriam, 1998)).

In Johnson's study (2005) of six African American adolescent girls, the researcher had previously established relationships with the girls and their families when she was director of a program called HCW. Castillo's qualitative interviews on the spirituality of children with mothers in prison, though not conducted in a controlled setting was in a semi-clinical setting using a small sample size of eight children (2006). Boudin (2007) interviewed eight young adults (18-22) who had in their teens participated in a prison rap group that the researcher, as a prison inmate, had facilitated for teens visiting their mothers, her fellow inmates. My study was not done in a clinical setting or with a controlled group. My research has the retrospective feature in common with Boudin, but differs in that it was not done with a controlled group that had once been together in a clinical setting.

My study has some unique features. It is not based as are the majority of studies on views of parents or caregivers about a child's experiences but rather on the views of the ones who had had the experience; it also takes a long view, a retrospective view of adults remembering childhood. Researchers agree that a longitudinal study is needed to fully understand the full impact of incarceration on children (Travis & Waul, 2003; Valenzuela, 2007; Guzman, Krisberg & Tsukida 2008). My study, though not longitudinal, has the feature of adults recalling childhood experiences spanning several to many years. The adults in my study told of experiences that stood out as they looked back at what happened for them when their mothers were incarcerated either intermittently or for a several year period. While my study yielded findings similar to what a longitudinal study would produce, there are major differences. A longitudinal study that followed a child through several years would reveal details I assume an adult

looking back at a period of life would have forgotten or if not forgotten, would decide were too sensitive or painful to share with another, particularly a researcher. By recording events as they were happening in a child's life, a longitudinal study would provide data in a child's language not possible in a retrospective study.

Most studies I reviewed, whether quantitative or qualitative, gathered data from the perspective of the parents and caregivers. When studies concerning children are conducted from the perspective of a parent, the research is limited by the fact that it is a parent's perception of what is happening to that child. According to Myers (2006) children and their parents or caregivers perceive their situations very differently.

The next chapter provides details about the qualitative research methodology used in designing and conducting this study, the specific procedures for locating study subjects/ participants, the methods for gathering and coding data and the interactionist and Foucauldian theories used in analyzing the data.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Procedures

Because I wanted to go beyond statistics to learn about the experiences of women and men who had lived a significant portion of their growing up years with a mother in jail or prison, I chose to use a qualitative research design. I was interested in each person's descriptions, their expressions of feeling, and their ways of making sense of what had happened to them. David Karp's case for the value of qualitative methods in studying depression resonated with me as I sought a method to surface how people made meaning of their experiences.

> The hundreds of studies reporting an enormous range of statistical correlations provided a sense of the magnitude and complexity of the problem. However only qualitative data can catch the meanings people attach to depression and thereby give a deeper, and I would say more valid, sense of what the experience is like for individuals. (Karp 1996, p. 202)

Qualitative research is grounded in phenomenology with its emphasis on experience and interpretation. "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences. It asks 'what is this or that kind of experience like?'" (Van Manen, 1990, p.9). In fact, "a phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomenon under study" (Glesne, 1999, p.7). In my project, the phenomenon under study was the experience of having been a child with one's mother in prison or jail.

Bogdan and Biklen, writing for educators interested in doing qualitative research, explained that the term qualitative research first used in the 1960's was for years, with its emphasis on the subjective aspects of behavior, the methodology of anthropology and sociology. Although there are different qualitative traditions, they noted that all the traditions have certain characteristics in common.

> The data collected have been termed soft, that is, rich in description of people, places and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; they are formulated to investigate topics in their complexity. While people conducting qualitative research may develop a focus as they collect data, they do not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test. They also are concerned with understanding behavior from the subject's own frame of reference. External causes are of secondary importance. (Bogdan, Biklen, 2003, p.2)

My study has the characteristics Bogdan listed. The data are soft, gathered through interviews and participant observation. Different from quantitative studies, variables were not predetermined, and there was a study focus rather than testable hypotheses; primary attention was paid to how adult subjects or participants understood their childhood experiences. This chapter explains how I did the study. It details how I found participants for my study, the interview and participant observation procedures I used to collect data, validity and ethical concerns, the coding and analysis methods I followed, and, finally the interactionist and Foucauldian theoretical frameworks I used to interpret the data. The chapter concludes with an overview of the presentation of data in subsequent chapters.

Locating Research Participants

I was initially interested in finding students in my high school to interview because it was their heart-wrenching stories that had given impetus to the study. However, after considering the risk involved in discussing highly sensitive topics with students with whom I had a professional relationship, I decided against that plan. My second choice was to interview students from other high schools, but I learned that obtaining approval from the district's research ethics committee to interview a vulnerable population would

be daunting, if not impossible. Finally, I decided adults whose mothers were incarcerated when they were children would be able to articulate retrospectively, what life was like growing up. They would also be able to share any life changing experiences that may have resulted from a mother's incarceration.

My search to find those adult participants was long, slow and circuitous. I used a snowball sampling process which involved identifying participants from people who knew people who might be good examples for my study (Patton, 2002, p. 237). I present the timeline of the search in ten pages of detail because the difficulty finding participants highlights how long it took to build trust when seeking data on a sensitive topic, and yet, how quickly participants responded once that trust had been built. In the end, the 17 adults I interviewed ranged in age from 18 to 60. Twelve were African American, two were biracial, two were Hispanic and one was Caucasian. Ten were females and seven males. The search process yielded data from professionals who though not part of my initial research focus became important links to finding adult participants and, who themselves became sources of data. Participants in the study are shown in Tables one and two.

I was a full-time teacher determined to use every spare moment to locate adults who would talk to me about childhood experiences when their mothers were incarcerated. I started by connecting with professionals who would know of young adults whose mothers had been incarcerated. One of those persons, Imani Goode, eventually became, in qualitative research language, a "key informant," a person who has great experience about the topic, is willing to give time and is especially insightful (Bogdan, Biklen, 2003, p. 61).

Sister Rita Steinhagen, an advocate for women in prison and a mentor suggested I talk with Imani who had been in Pekin Federal Prison with Rita. Imani had left three children behind while in prison. Now they were adults. (Imani is the founder and executive director of a nonprofit organization called Women and Families for Justice, (WFJ). That organization was designed to help female ex-offenders reenter society and reunite with their children, and also to offer hope, faith and restoration, education and training for institutions working with children, and prison visitation rights.

I arranged a meeting with Imani during the summer of 2005. She worked out of a small office adjacent to a barbershop on a busy inner city street. I shared the purpose and goals of my study, and Imani shared the overall goals of her organization. She agreed to provide interview respondents. I informed Imani that I was still in the exploratory stages of the study awaiting approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We agreed to remain in close contact with each other. In the process of keeping that contact, which was not easy, I was introduced to the politics of social services and advocacy.

On August 4, 2005, I received a voice mail message from Imani's assistant about a community forum on Children of Incarcerated Parents, sponsored by the Council on Crime and Justice (CCJ). When I tried to return the phone call for additional information, the office phone had been disconnected. So the following day, I returned to Ms. Goode's office and was informed that WFJ had been given only a two-day window to apply for a major grant that would allow them to join in a partnership with many other nonprofit organizations. Unlike other organizations in the partnership, their proposal was turned down. They were now suffering from that rejection. This was nothing new to

WFJ, as it had struggled with finding funding for several years. Ms. Goode later told me that her prior criminal record as an ex-felon might have contributed to what she considered biased decision-making of the grant overseers. One of Ms. Goode's assistants explained, "This organization was started by Imani over 10 years ago and there are three things that keep her going; her passion, her vision and her focus."

To continue to jump start my data collection, I attended a symposium in March 2006 at my university's law school entitled" Exploring Alternatives to the Incarceration Crisis." I also attended a community forum on Children of Incarcerated Parents as suggested by WFJ, as a participant observer. The forum was sponsored by the Council on Crime and Justice (CCJ) which received a large grant to study racial disparities in the State. Presentations were made by key stakeholders and followed by a panel discussion, larger group discussions and a brainstorming session called "where do we go from here?" At the end of the forum, I signed on to partner with CCJ on the Children's Bill of Rights (CBOR) initiative. I met Dr. Tim at the forum and interviewed him. Dr. Tim worked primarily with adolescents and families of imprisoned parents. Because of confidentiality rules, Dr. Tim could not give me any names of adults he knew whose mothers had been incarcerated.

In April of 2006 I again pursued Imani but found her office locked with a faded note on the door. "I'll be right back." It had obviously been posted for quite some time. The building's owner, who operated a barbershop next door, said that he had not seen Ms. Goode since February and that she owed him rent money. My research proposal was accepted in May 2006 and IRB approval granted in June 2006, so I was eager to find her.

Future attempts to find Ms. Goode failed until mid-June. While attending a graduation party of a relative, casual conversation led to her whereabouts. She had opened a new office several blocks from the old one and had formed a new partnership with several faith-based organizations. She still managed WFJ, but had taken on a new partnership with faith-based organizations to include male ex-offenders as well. Imani and her new partners arranged a meeting with the Megatropolis school board members to identify kids with parents in prison. We met in a conference room at the 4th precinct police station. Imani informed me that she was still committed to providing names of adult children with incarcerated mothers but warned that they moved about so much that it was even hard for her to maintain contact with them. She mentioned that there were lots of preteens in and out of her office who said they would love to talk with me, but I did not have institutional review board approval for anyone younger than 18 years of age.

I spent the summer of 2006 attending seminars and workshops as a participant observer because I had no respondents to interview. Two workshops most closely related to my study were “Moving Beyond” sponsored by the parent leadership network, and “Racial Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System” sponsored by the Council on Crime and Justice (CCJ). In August of 2006, CCJ held a kick-off meeting for the Children’s Bill of Rights (CBOR) with its co-founder from the Soros foundation. My commitment to partner with the CBOR committee was sealed at the August 2006 meeting, and I continued this partnership until it was tabled in the early part of 2008. As CCJ underwent new leadership, the CBOR monthly meetings were discontinued.

In October of 2006, I attended a conference on aversive racism sponsored by the State Psychological Association. The purpose of the conference was to focus on contemporary

bias in organizations and systems and to discuss implications for disparities in the criminal justice system. I learned of the conference while desperately seeking an interview with Dr. Broad, who counsels children of incarcerated parents. Imani Goode still had not provided respondents for the study at this time.

In March 2007, when I was approved for a half-year sabbatical by the school district, I began to panic because I had not found any research participants. Most of the professionals I had met through workshops and committees declined my request for names because of confidentiality commitments. A couple of people who said they could provide me with contacts, never returned my calls or answered my e-mails, and when I met them later at conferences, I did not feel it appropriate to pursue them.

On the eve of Good Friday in April of 2007, I attended a brunch at the home of one of the partners on the CBOR committee and learned by chance, that Imani Goode again had been denied funding, could not pay rent, and, therefore had been locked out of her office. Once again, Imani had disappeared and all of her phones had been disconnected. The women at the brunch gave me a new list of contacts they thought would be helpful in finding prospective participants for the study. The contacts did not pan out and I was back to square one, having no prospective respondents in sight.

I called Elise, a former student whose mother was incarcerated. I was unaware of her situation when she was in my class. Because I assumed this was a very sensitive issue for her, I told her over the phone only that I would like to meet with her to tell her more about my study; then she could decide if she would let me interview her. We met on July 2007 at her aunt's house and walked around the neighborhood as I discussed my study with her. She agreed to the interview on the condition that she gets to see the transcript

before it was submitted. She also informed me that her mother was still incarcerated. Later that same day, I interviewed Ned, a young man I had met while serving on the CBOR committee.

I had a second interview with Dr. Tim a child psychologist, and was still pursuing Imani. In late July, I contacted the project director at the CCJ who told me that Imani would be attending a meeting to help implement federal legislation, Second Chance Act, which challenges disenfranchisement laws providing reentry, supports for former inmates. The purpose of the meeting was to organize a protest at the State Capital. Ex-felons and concerned citizens were planning to gather on the steps of the Capital to promote The Second Chance Act while Congress was still in session. Imani appeared forty minutes later explaining she had been running away from an abusive relationship and was residing at nearby shelter south of the Twin Cities. Her office was now located in a church in a Northern suburb. She gave me the number to the church office. The next day when I tried the number, no one answered; so I sent several emails to the address Imani gave me to no avail. Finally, the last week of July I received an email from Imani stating that she would meet me at the Megatropolis Community Center the following Tuesday.

In the meantime, I attended a three-day summer camp sponsored by Redeemer Charity for children of incarcerated parents and recorded field notes of that experience. The campsite was 99 miles north of the State and hosted children in second through sixth grades. Immediately after the camp, I went to meet Imani at the Megatropolis Community Center. When I arrived at the center, I was told that she had just left.

Unable to obtain names of research participants from professionals I had met and giving up on ever connecting with Imani, I decided to make a fresh request to the Institutional Review Board to advertise for study subjects. I put ads in two local community papers. A week later, I started getting calls from prospective respondents, but the calls resulted in only two interviews. The first was with a 49-year old male ex-offender who grew up with an incarcerated mother. He in turn referred a 38-year old female. Since she suffered from bouts of depression, he did not give me her number but gave her my ad leaving it up to her to call me. She called a few days later and we agreed to set up an interview. Responses to the newspaper ad did not lead to interviews. Although the four adult children I had interviewed so far provided rich data, the data was far from sufficient.

I then decided to create and distribute flyers seeking participants. I parked my car on a local street and walked several blocks throughout urban neighborhoods, handing out flyers at community events, local churches, synagogues, community centers, halfway houses, and treatment centers. I got only one response. A woman at a local halfway house called me and said she had a prospective respondent for me and she would have that person give me a call. A few weeks later I got a call from a very enthusiastic woman saying that she had spent years in federal prison and her daughter had been working through her pain by writing poetry. Her daughter was now a teacher in an urban Chicago school district. She gave me her daughter's phone number and email address. I called and emailed her daughter numerous times but never received a response. When I tried reaching her mother again, I got no response. I assumed the daughter wanted to move on.

A few weeks later, I met with the director of children's services at Megatropolis Community Center to seek help in soliciting adult children of imprisoned mothers. The director talked with me for a few minutes then said she was not feeling well and would get back to me as soon as she was better. I never heard from her again. I saw her several weeks later at conference but did not think it appropriate to make my request again.

It was now the end of July 2007. I felt responsible for losing contact with Imani and placing myself in a position of hopelessness. I had to begin again. I shuffled through business cards I had compiled over the past three years from conferences and workshops and started making phone calls in search of new contacts. After making many phone calls, an individual named Kareem, whom I had met at a workshop two years earlier, responded with an email containing a two-page list of new contacts. He had worked with Imani in the past and had helped her write federal grants to fund her organization. He told me that working with Imani required a lot of patience as her organization was always at the mercy of federal funding and that she, too, was on a constant emotional roller coaster. He prefaced his email with a quote from Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes were Watching God, "*De black woman is de mule of de world.*" Kareem complained, "No one wants to fund any program to help a black woman, let alone one who is an ex-offender trying to reintegrate back into society!"

I sent out a plea for help via email to other contacts I had from years earlier; Imani was included in that plea. Some of the recipients of my email sent additional emails to people they knew. Ironically, Imani was on their email listserv. Two days later, a late afternoon in August 2007, Imani sent me an email saying she had not forgotten about me; she had been struggling to keep her organization afloat. Imani provided a list of seven

adult children of previously incarcerated mothers. The list included Imani's three children.

I began calling Imani's children to arrange interviews at their convenience. Kenny, Imani's oldest son arranged to meet me at a local fast food chain while Kara met me at a friend's house. (Kara's friend was an ex-felon and mother of seven children). Imani's third child Randy and I had a conversation at his mother's office.

In the meantime I continued calling people from the list Kareem gave me. I was invited to a kick-off meeting sponsored by Amicus prison ministry as a way to meet prospective respondents. A panel of four ex-felons told stories of what life was like before they were incarcerated; how their incarceration affected their lives and how Amicus' compassion helped change their lives. I had a brief conversation with one of the panel members who said that his mother was incarcerated during his high school years, and he turned to a life of drugs and violence. He said he remembered very little about his experience in high school. He was not a candidate for an interview.

One person on Imani's list canceled three times. Each time I called him to make sure that we were meeting at a particular time, he canceled. When we finally met, he was visibly upset claiming Imani had no right to "put my business out there." He had a very public position in his community and clearly wanted to put his earlier life behind him. After the interview, however, he called his sister asking her to grant me an interview, and, he admitted that the process was quite painless and could only help in healing. I did not hear from his sister until a month later, but she provided the names of other prospective participants.

Two individuals on Imani's list were mothers who spent time in federal prison with Imani. These mothers had successful children who had grown up coping with their incarceration. One mother's daughter was a successful architect and the second mother's son was the executive director of a large organization. The mothers agreed to contact their children; but I received no responses. The mother of the executive director finally admitted that her son was ashamed of her and hardly recognized her existence, suggesting that maybe he just wanted to move on with his life.

Adult children of imprisoned mothers were not the only cancellations. Some advocates were not true to their word. Although I had the pleasure of hearing Dr. Broad's presentation at a parents' network convention and at a state psychological association conference, she never honored her commitment to be interviewed. I tried contacting her for over a year, but she continued postponing our meeting. Several advocates returned my phone calls but never followed through on an interview.

Though I had been using the list of contacts Imani sent me, I still wanted to interview her because of her knowledge of what was happening for children of mothers in prison or reentering the community. On September 11, 2007, I finally had an interview with her. We met at the Megatropolis Community Center at 8:00 a.m.; however, the interview did not take place until 11:00 a.m. Imani was preparing ex-offenders for the job market by helping them fill out employment applications online in the resource room of Megatropolis Legion. We were supposed to sit down for the interview as soon as another woman relieved her. The woman never showed up. We also waited an hour in the hallway for a conference room to become available which never happened. We eventually had to squeeze through a stack of tables and chairs to enter a sealed-off

banquet room. This interview led to subsequent interviews with Imani by phone and in person from September 25, 2007 until January 2008. On a Sunday in January of 2008, I was able to spend the entire day with Imani who shared the complete story of her life as a child, as a mother, as an incarcerated mother and as an ex-felon trying to re-bond with her children and manage a nonprofit organization.

My population sample was now snowballing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.64) as my participants provided names of other potential participants. In October, 2007, Sergeant Trisha of the Ramsey County police department e-mailed me saying that Kareem had forwarded her my email about needing respondents for my study, and that she had information for me. I was interested. The next morning, she called me and said to come immediately to meet her at the Ramsey County Detention Center. She took me to the sixth floor where I met for four hours with five women awaiting sentencing. As I looked out of our glass-encased conference room at a large circle of inmate cells with guards and security cameras, I was reminded of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (Foucault, 1979, p.200).

After a year of trying by phone to arrange an interview with Girls Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB), I unexpectedly met the group leader, Cassandra, at a Council on Crime and Justice meeting. She invited me to accompany a GSBB visit to Statesville Prison in March of 2008. It had taken a year for trust to build. That visit not only led to subsequent visits, but because I had bonded with the girls and their mothers, I was able to arrange woman-to-woman conversations with the mothers. My involvement with GSBB was a powerful culminating activity of the data collection process.

Population of the Study

The following tables provide a profile of the adult children of incarcerated mothers I interviewed and a list of professionals I interviewed or met in participant observation events. I have used pseudonyms to protect participant identities.

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Current Age	Year Mother First Incarcerated	Age of Child When Mother Incarcerated
Troy	Male	African American	18	2002	13
Anna	Female	Hispanic	19	1996	8
Elise	Female	Biracial *	20	1998	11
Reyna	Female	Part Native	23	1986	2
Kara	Female	African American	28	1989	9
Randy	Male	African American	30	1989	10
Kenny	Male	African American	31	1989	12
Rakeem	Male	African American	32	1981	6
Yana	Female	African American	33	1984	10
Lela	Female	Hispanic	35	1975	3
Ned	Male	Caucasian	36	1978	7
Leona	Female	African American	38	1976	7
Yakima	Female	African American	39	1989	21
Lucy	Female	African American	43	1973	9
Lamar	Male	African American	49	1969	11
Myron	Male	African American	56	1964	13
Nora	Female	African American	60	1964	17

Table One: Children of Incarcerated Mothers

***Elise was of African American-Caucasian descent; Reyna was of American Indian and Caucasian descent.**

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Advocates Interviewed	Organization	Participant Observer	Conf/ Forum Event	Other Participant/ Data	Title/Org.
Dr. Tim	Psychologist	August 2005 CCJ	Children Incarcerated Parents	Darcy	Interviewed Incarcerated Mom
Imani Goode	WFJ (lost her 6 times in three years)	June 2006 CCJ	Racial Disparities	Desha	Interviewed Incarcerated Mom
Sally	BBBS/Amachi	March 2006 UST law school	Symposium: Exploring Alternatives to Incarceration Crisis		
Daniela	BBBS/Amachi	Oct. 20,2006	MN Psychology Conf. Aversive Racism Dr. Dividio		
Macy	BBBS/Amachi	July 29, 2006	Moving Beyond Conf. Parent Leadership Network		
Social workers	ABA	Aug 2006 - 2007 currently	Children's Bill of Rights	GSBB Cassandra, LSW	Statesville Prison March 2008
Eddy	CCJ	July 29th – 30th 2007	Redeemer Camp	GSBB Cassandra, LSW	March 2008 Moms only
Gary	CCJ	Oct. 10th 2007	CCJ 50th Anniversary Conf.	GSBB Cassandra, LSW	Statesville Prison June 2008

Advocates Interviewed	Organization	Participant Observer	Conf/ Forum Event	Other Participant/ Data	Title/Org.
Harry Allen	Benevolence Inc.	School to Prison Pipeline	UST	GSBB Cassandra, LSW	Statesville Prison July 2008
Sully	Benevolence Inc.	Staying Connected Workshop	Children Family Services (CFS)	GSBB Cassandra, LSW	GSBB Girls only
Judge Freidman Reed, Carlyle (P.O.)	APV			Facilitated Brown Bag Lunch Forums	Children of Incarcerated Mothers
Vincent	Dads Unite				
Dr. Briggs	Psychology				
Marsha Williams	Restorative Justice				
Rita Steinhagen	Sisters of St. Joseph				
Tara and Faye	Criminal Justice Society				
Katie Moore	Megatropolis attorney				
Constance Monroe	Assistant to Representative				

Table Two: Professionals and Advocates in Study

The questions I asked professionals and advocates shown in table two were more specific relative to data I had collected. These were people who had experience working with or advocating for children of incarcerated mothers. I included some detail about the situations of the interviews in the presentation of data. Even after locating study

participants, I continued to remain connected to the advocacy world and have been actively involved in ten different community events—symposia conferences, workshops, seminars, and advocacy programs. For the past two years I have partnered with the Council on Crime and Justice to implement legislation for the Children's Bill of Rights, a list of rights for children with parents in prison. (This includes arrest protocol where children are present.)

Data Collection

Interviews

I collected data from the adult children of incarcerated parents using primarily open-ended interviews and participant observations. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), the open-ended approach allows subjects to answer from their own frame of reference rather than one structured by prearranged questions. The subjects feel free to express their own thoughts around a particular topic (p.3). "When the interviewer controls the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally in his or her own words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range" (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003,p. 97).

I arranged to meet each participant at a public location that was comfortable and convenient for them. Except for the five women confined in county jail, many of the participants chose coffee shops or fast food restaurants. Elise invited me to meet her at her grandma's house. My goal was to engage each person in a conversation focused on her/him. I greeted each person; we chatted about ordinary things like the weather; I explained my work as a teacher and the reason I was doing this research; I said thank you for helping me and gave each the Institutional Review Board permission form to read and

sign. After each person signed, I asked if it would be possible to record our session. Each of the adult children agreed to be recorded. I then began our conversation with, "Can you tell me what it was like for you growing up with your mother incarcerated—how you were treated by peers, school, friends or people in your community." With some participants, I followed up on their responses asking for more detail. "Interviewing is a 'what else, tell me more' endeavor" (Glesne, 1999, p.87). However, most of the participants were eager to tell their stories. I could hardly get a word in. Ned, Rakeem and Nora stand out as the most talkative. The five women in jail talked over each other. "I got just one more thing to say," "I have to say this."

In interviews with professionals, I followed much the same protocol as with the adult children of incarcerated parents. Several were hesitant to have the interview recorded but in the end allowed it.

Participant Observation

Participant observation involves a "researcher spending prolonged periods of time in subjects' natural environment" (Bogdan, Biklen, 2003, p.26). In fact, "in everyday life you observe people, interactions and events. Participant observation in a research setting, however, differs in that the researcher carefully observes and systematically records in detail the many aspects of a situation" (Glesne, 1999, p.46).

I was invited by Cassandra, a social worker for Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) to join a group of 20 girl scouts on their monthly visit with their mothers in prison, and I went five times for sessions, each lasting from 4:30-7 p.m. I wrote extensive field notes after each visit that included a reconstruction of the dialogue.

About 3:45 p.m. the girls, two social workers who each drove a van and I met in the parking lot and then went through the metal detectors at the guard's desk. I had to put my purse and anything else but my briefcase in a locker. My brief case was scanned. A prison social worker responsible for setting up the visits met us and took us to the gym where we met the mothers for hugs and games for half an hour. Games included basketball, volleyball and double-dutch jump rope. The mothers like other inmates we saw wore sweats in a mix of colors.

From then until 7 p.m., the time was less structured and included dinner, group conversation and presentations and some time for arts and crafts. All these events were held in a large conference room. The hallways we walked through to get to the conference room were lined with beautiful plants, and all the rooms including a library and a nursery had glass walls on the corridor side. We passed a one-chair beauty salon where I was told inmates did each other's hair.

At dinnertime, the social workers stayed with the children in the conference room while the mothers went to the cafeteria to get trays for themselves and their daughters. I also went through the cafeteria line. Inmates prepared and served the meal. The visit ended with all of us gathering in a circle in the gym for the Girl Scout oath, and then girls and mothers said goodbye.

At my first visit, a social worker introduced me; I talked about my research and that I was advocating for change in how children with parents in prison were stigmatized. Imani came with me for the second visit; she talked about the importance of mother-daughter visits and how hard it had been for her not to see her children for seven years. I had short conversations with some mothers and daughters but had no interviews with any

one. One of the mothers blew me a kiss, and another mother thanked me for coming with their daughters. She said those were the best sessions they had, and it was great to know that someone on the outside really cared enough about them to address these issues.

Twice I met in sessions with Kim, the social workers and the mothers to process what had happened in the session with their daughters. These meetings occurred whenever the social workers thought it would be helpful to the mothers. Kim said that my being in the group had made a difference in the girls' willingness to speak up. They talked more when I was there, and some issues had arisen that she felt important to process with the mothers. Kim invited me to continue meeting with the group regularly. One night about 11 p.m., I was called with a request to drive a van of girls for a prison visit the next day.

In addition to my visits to the prison, I was also a participant observer at an elementary charter school in Megatropolis district when GSBB did a workshop with teachers on understanding and responding to children whose mothers were in jail or prison. I wrote extensive field notes, systematically recording settings, events and conversations of all participant observation sessions.

Validity

As a researcher, one of my main concerns was whether people were telling me the truth, especially since most of the participants were initially reluctant to set up an interview. Some participants who agreed to be interviewed canceled several times, often changing their minds at the last minute. As stated at the conclusion of chapter one, I was conscious that interviewees were speaking from memory and not recent experience. My observation of the emotions in voice and facial expressions as each interviewee spoke was evidence to me that a person was telling the truth.

When I asked Leona, whose story about her mother "running the streets" seemed somewhat disjointed and exaggerated, whether she was telling me the truth, she replied passionately.

> I'm telling you the truth, I'm gonna [sic] to take you to my house right now and show you—I would not be lying. I'm gonna write a book about my childhood. If I really just sit down and really go way back, but I have to sit here and meditate. But I can only give you some of the updates because I have to sit down there and think. My family hurted [sic] me real bad and that's why I'm taking medicine right now!

I was initially a little doubtful about the validity of the group interview with the five women in county jail. Each told a story that seemed to be getting more horrible than the one the previous woman told. Although I wanted to be sensitive to their stories, I began to wonder if this was a case of one-upmanship. But upon closer attention, I heard the tremor in their voices and saw the pain in each woman's eyes. If the old adage "the eyes bear witness to the soul" is true, then the painful eyes of the participants verified that they were indeed being honest with me.

All this said, I was aware of Mitch Duneier's words:

> Fieldwork is very much like life itself. We may feel fully trusted and accepted by colleagues and 'friends,' but full acceptance is difficult to measure by objective standards and a rarity in any case. If we cannot expect such acceptance in our everyday lives, it is probably unrealistic to make it the standard for successful fieldwork. (1999)

Ethical Considerations

My university's Institutional Review Board approved my research project. Beyond that, however, participants told me such deeply personal and painful stories that I felt a deep ethical responsibility to them at all times. I first of all promised them confidentiality. They poured their hearts out to me, often tearfully. I owed it to them to be fair in reporting what they said to me. I felt responsible not just to their individual

stories, but to what was to be learned from attending to the patterns across their stories. There is power in the details of each person's story but another power in their collective messages.

Although sometimes feeling nearly overwhelmed by the abandonment, confusion, anger, injustice, and desperation I was hearing, I knew I would analyze and write about interviewees' experiences as a stepping stone toward my doctoral degree which, in turn, could advance my career. These adult children of incarcerated mothers on the other hand, will continue to deal with pain from their past. I have had to admit that I could be "using" them, and so am committed to giving back by sharing what I have learned particularly in the school district in which I work.

Data Analysis: Sorting, Coding

"Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together " (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p.4).

I transcribed verbatim tape-recorded interview data; these interview transcripts together with participant observation field notes totaled over 1,000 pages. Even with all these pages, I realized that I had just a snapshot of what people remembered or were willing to tell me. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define data analysis as the process of systematically searching and arranging accumulated data to discern patterns. (p. 147). I read and reread each participant's interviews, paying close attention to language, imagery, expressions of feelings, as well as relationships and events. I also noted the social/economic contexts in which experiences were embedded. Each childhood

narrative described growing up in a complex web of conflicting dynamics, being thrust into many relationships, and being subjected to many co-occurring risk factors.

I made a concept map (Maxwell, 1996) representing each participant's major experiences. (See Appendix A.) As I studied and reflected on those graphics and reread the transcripts and field notes, patterns across the data became apparent.

> I have always felt that one of the most difficult tasks associated with analyzing in-depth interviews is to uncover regularities across all the cases while respecting the complexity and diversity of each person's feelings and experiences…Of course, if there were no consistencies, there wouldn't be much of a sociological analysis to provide. Sometimes a pattern in the data is easy to spot because it is virtually universal. (Karp, 1996, p.200)

The data fell into three large clusters: relationship with their mothers; moves to various living arrangements; and, connections to institutions like schools and social services. Within those clusters, I noted similarities and also what was unique in participants' data. "While the selection of themes for discussion inevitably involves subjective choices, researchers cannot disregard materials that do not conform to the pattern they wish to highlight" (Karp, 1996, p.201).

The data told the story about childhood experiences with a mother incarcerated from the storytellers' perspectives. I tried to be faithful to participants' words and their interpretations. As Wolcott pointed out,

> Description is the foundation upon which qualitative research is built. Unless you prove to be a gifted conceptualizer or interpreter, the descriptive account is likely to constitute the most important contribution you have to make (1990, p. 27).

Data Analysis: Theoretical Framework

I organized this study around sociologist, C. Wright Mill's construct of private troubles and public issues. Troubles are personal, value-laden and biographical and have

to do with those limited areas of social life of which a person is directly aware (Mills 1959, p.8). Issues are historical and structural and have to do with public matters and institutional structures (Denzin, 2001, p. 37).

> Personal troubles erupt in moments of individual and collective crisis. They are illuminated, often in frightening detail, in the epiphanies of a person's life. These existential crises and turning-point encounters thrust the person into the public arena. His or her problem becomes a public issue. (Denzin, 2001, p. 37-38)

I worked backward from public issues to private troubles, because I was seeking participants whose troubles had already come to public attention. Conversely, participant's stories of private troubles revealed more about public issues.

I analyzed the data using interactionist theory and then Foucauldian theory. I used interpretive interactionism to examine how participants made meaning of their experiences. I wanted to stay close to their language, their ways of defining, their ways of making sense of what had happened to them as children. I wanted to enter their worlds on their terms before taking a more critical stance as I do later in using concepts from Foucault's theory of power. In using theory to illuminate the data, I tried to be sensitive to Bogdan and Biklen's advice to "avoid jamming [my] data into preformed conceptual schemes" (p.157).

Interpretive Interactionism

Interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 2001) is an extension of symbolic interactionism. Interactionist theory is concerned with how "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings those things have for them," how that "meaning is derived from social interaction" and "how those meanings are handled and modified in an interpretative process" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). As stated in chapter one, interpretive interactionism focuses on life experiences that radically alter and shape how individuals make meaning.

Interactionist theorist Denzin calls those moments that leave a mark on one's life epiphanies. He describes epiphanies as dramatic events that represent ruptures in the structures and ordinary events of everyday life.

> The epiphany occurs in those problematic interactional situations where the individual confronts and experiences a crisis. Often a personal trouble erupts into public issues like when a battered woman flees her home. (Denzin, 2001, p.37)

Denzin (2001) identifies four forms of epiphany. A major epiphany is an experience that shatters a person's life. A cumulative epiphany is the result of a series of events that have been building up in a person's life. A minor or illuminative epiphany reveals underlying tensions in a relationship or situation and, a relived epiphany is when a person lives through an experience again in memory and reinterprets it (p. 37). The following chapters reveal the multiple epiphanies in participants' lives.

Interpretive interactionism is concerned with private troubles but also pays attention to how those troubles reveal public issues. Adults' memories and meaning-making of their troubles as children of incarcerated mothers pointed to public issues like the condition of the foster care system, prison visitation and even processes for identifying children in crisis when their mothers are incarcerated. These public issues are embedded in social, economic and political contexts in which participants lived their childhoods even though as adults, they did not speak directly of those contexts. Most participants in the study focused on their private troubles with only a few speaking briefly of the larger contexts of their lives as children.

Troubles point to public issues. The intersection between private troubles and public issues demands a look at how power "twists and shapes human experience…and how

institutional and other social arrangements place people at a power disadvantages" (Thomas, 1993, p.51).

Foucault on Power

I used concepts from Foucault's theory of power and feminist researchers (Campbell, Golden, Zerai and Banks) who used Foucault to look at public issues. Most specifically, I used Foucault's concepts of regimes of truth, subjugated knowledge, disciplinary knowledge and governmentality. Foucault theorized about power based on historical analyses of sexuality, prisons, and mental institutions. He moved away from the prevailing way of regarding power as coming from above from a clearly identifiable authority (sovereign power) to envisioning power as rooted in and moving through the discourse of a society, "that is, power that is exercised by people on themselves in the specific day-to-day practices of their lives" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 120). Foucault claimed that power is everywhere. "Power relations are the necessary precondition for the establishment of social relations" (McNay, 1992, p. 67).

> Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. Not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target: they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, 1984, p.98)

Foucault claimed that each society had its regimes of truth or a general politics of truth that is the result of the society's discourse. Each society has

> types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980 p.93, 133)

Foucault asserted that it is discourse that produces knowledge, and it is within discourse that subjects are produced.

> Rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really, materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desire, thoughts, etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects. (1980, p. 97)

Feminist researchers, Zerai and Banks expanding on Foucault, spoke of dehumanizing discourse.

> Discourse is potentially the most powerful weapon of those who wish to dehumanize African American women struggling with an addiction to crack. Discourse represents the way we define the problem of maternal substance abuse, the way we construct women addicted to cocaine, and how we locate them on the social landscape. (2002, p 136)

Zerai and Banks further explain,

> Dehumanizing discourse brought the 'crack mother' into being, not simply as an individual behaving in a certain way, but as a new, distinctive category of woman in a social landscape marked by power relations the text itself helps create, maintain and reinforce. (p.137)

Individuals, in participating in the discourse at the core of regimes of truth, exercise power on themselves. What Foucault calls disciplinary power involves people's complicity in discourses of values and practices that support a regime of truth. Foucault pays attention to people's everyday rituals and interactions. "Let us not ask whether certain people dominate, but ask, instead, how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors etc" (1980, p. 97).

Foucault's concept of subjugated knowledge looks at the power of discourse to create legitimate knowledge. Whose knowledge counts? Some knowledge becomes important

and is a dominant force as a regime of truth. It is legitimate knowledge. Some knowledge is subjugated. It is not recognized by the regimes of truth. Foucault wrote about subjugated knowledge as "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledge, located low down on the hierarchy" (1980, p.82). He speaks further of "disqualified knowledge confined to the margins" (1980, p.83).

Foucault's notion of governmentality develops further his theory of power by focusing on the concept of governing mentalities that relate subject formation to the material and discursive practices of governance.

> My problem is to see how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of practices by the production of truth. Governmentality relies on technologies or ensembles of practices that consist of contradictory strategies but make up a political rationality. (Foucault, 1991, p. 79)

Using Foucault's concept of governmentality, Campbell sees policy makers as "relying on a set of discursive practices to enroll subjects in a bounded political imaginary" (Campbell, 2000, p. 54). Discursive practices are those "things and activities that we speak of … the rules which prescribe distinctions we make, distinctions that reside in our language in general and speech practices in particular … the commitments to meaning that we make which have the effect of allocating power, authority and legitimacy" (p. 101). She gives an example.

> When women violate gender norms by using illicit drugs, they are represented as spectacular failures—callously abandoning babies or becoming bad mothers, worse wives or delinquent daughters. Such violations invite attempts to govern women by targeting their behaviors and decisions. (p. 3-4)

Golden expanded on Foucault's work that explained how the penal system distances itself from public scrutiny. For Foucault,

> punishment, then, will tend to become the most hidden part of penal process. This has several consequences; it leaves the domain of more or less every day perceptions and enters that of abstract consciousness (1977, p.9).

For Golden, children with mothers in prison have become abstractions in public discourse and are "cast into scapegoat racial stereotypes that politicians use to whip up moral outrage or fear about the scourge of drugs and crime" (2005, p.2).

Ethnographic Fallacy

Ethnographic fallacy is a methodological caveat that was helpful to me in deciding to use Foucault's theory to analyze the societal dynamics that impacted participants in my study. In his research report on homeless New York street vendors, sociologist, Mitchell Duneier (1999) wrote of his dilemma with taking subjects' stories at face value. He referred to Stephen Steinberg who coined the phrase, ethnographic fallacy, to describe a practice of looking at subjects' experiences at such close range that the larger structures that affect those experiences are obscured. Duneier says, "If I had taken the men's accounts at face value, I would have concluded that their lives and problems were wholly of their own making" (p. 343). However, Duneier continues, that "to suggest that economic or political forces all but guarantee that a particular person will act in a certain way is to invoke determinism" (p 344). He says further,

> The details of everyday life on the sidewalk are much easier to account for with clear evidence than are the connections between those lives and the constraints and opportunities that shaped them. (p. 353)

Duneier cautions researchers in applying the principle of ethnographic fallacy: "The ethnographer who allows theory to dominate data and who twists perception by invoking it to cover the 'facts' makes a farce of otherwise careful work" (p. 353).

I tried to follow this advice to take a middle ground representing the meaning-making of participants while at the same time going beyond their private troubles to theorize about the intersections between private troubles and public issues.

Generalizability

Qualitative research which "carefully documents a given setting or group of subjects and provides rich, thick descriptions, leaves it up to the reader to see how findings fit into the general scheme of things" (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). This type of generalizability is commonly known in the field as "reader or user generalizability" (Bogden & Biklen, 2003, p.33). Generalizability as defined by quantitative studies applies findings to a population from which research participants were statistically sampled. Qualitative research, not based on representative sampling, leaves it up to the reader to draw conclusions from findings. Many experts agree that "unlike quantitative studies, the descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity of the conclusion of a case study all depend on their internal generalizability to the case as a whole" (Maxwell, 2005, p.115-116; Becker, 1991, p. 233-242). "The ultimate test of a study's worth is that the findings ring true to people and let them see things in a new way" (Karp, 1996, p. 202).

Presentation of Data

I wanted to organize and present data in a way that would do justice to participants' descriptions and interpretations as I heard in the interviews. There is however no question that the recognition of patterns, the coding and final presentation of data were done from my personal interpretive framework. "The telling or the writing is always an interpretation of other peoples' lives, an interpretation that qualitative researchers struggle with representing" (Glesne, 1999, p.178). As I began to write I continued to

analyze and interpret the data. It was not a linear process, though I have tried to present my findings in some manageable order. I selected quotes that best represented each theme that I had derived from the data. According to Karp, it is important to be sensitive to a balance between the researcher's writing and participant's words. "Another methodological problem involves decisions about how many and which quotes to use when exemplifying a theme…and about which respondents get to speak and with what frequency" (Karp, 1996, p.201).

In this text I used the term "participants" for the adults telling their childhood stories. I generally used the term "children," ranging from preschool through adolescence, to refer to the participants when they were growing up. I wrote in first person and used pseudonyms for not only participants but places as well.

I organized chapters three through six around the clusters of data described earlier. Chapter three introduces the reader to the adults whose mothers experienced a period of their childhood with a mother incarcerated. It expands on the population section of this methodology chapter.

Chapter four details the dynamics of the mother-child relationship from the perspectives of the adult participants. Each participant told stories of coping with instability and uncertainty as a mother moved in and out of prison or jail and in and out of her/his life. It did not matter if a mother was incarcerated for a long period of time or if she was periodically in and out of her child's life, each participant spontaneously told his or her story in a sequence of living with mother prior to her imprisonment, maintaining a relationship with her in prison and reuniting with her when she was released. For some participants, the cycle repeated itself.

Chapter five details what happened to the participants once a mother was no longer physically present. The participants in this study were minors, so responsibility for their care had to fall to an adult, usually a relative and in some cases a social worker. Since the mothers of all 17 participants were the primary caregivers, the participants were forced to move. They had no choice. Even a 21-year old young adult was persuaded to move in with her grandmother. This chapter not only describes the momentum of the moves (from one to 30 times) but also details the relationships—for good or for ill--participants encountered within those moves. Some participants "took charge" by running away.

Chapter six describes encounters and relationship beyond the family. As the participants continued "on the move," they were necessarily part of institutions like school and sometimes involved with groups or individuals that tried to intervene. This chapter details the relationships the participants formed with teachers, judges, advocates and individual helpers representing other social institutions or agencies. Interventions were often sporadic, temporary and not systemic.

In chapter seven, I provide a final analysis of findings and draw conclusions. I question whether courts, corrections, educators, policy makers, social workers, community leaders, religious officials, and all other stakeholders actually pay attention to the knowledge that research provides and challenge those groups to collaborate in efforts to alleviate the plight of children of incarcerated mothers. I offer recommendations for further research as well.

Chapter 3: Introduction to Research Participants

The purpose of this chapter is to honor and respect the women and men in this study as unique individuals by expanding the profiles presented in the population section of the previous chapter. The chapter will provide a background on each person with a focus on what was happening in their lives at the time of the interview. I use "at the time of the interview" aware that changes in their circumstances could have occurred by the time of this writing. Because some participants were more expansive in talking about their situations, space dedicated to them will be longer than for others. There is overlap with data in subsequent chapters, and data introduced in this chapter will be elaborated upon in those chapters.

Chapters four to six, rather than continuing each person's single narrative, look at patterns and themes across participants' experiences as children. Chapter three then bridges the population section of the methodology chapter and the following thematic chapters – expanding their profiles. Johnson (2005), Castillo (2006) and Boudin (2007) organized their qualitative studies using a similar approach of introducing their research participants prior to presenting thematic chapters.

My introduction to the persons I interviewed falls into two broad clusters (1) participants who consider themselves to have physically and emotionally survived though they may still be struggling with hurts of their childhood, and (2) participants who were incarcerated at the time of interview. The analysis section first examines the data from an interpretive interactionist perspective; then moves beyond interactionist theory to further examine the data using Foucault's theory of power.

Participants Exhibiting Resilience, Recovery and Coping

Participants introduced in this section talked somewhat positively about their lives at the time of the interview, though not without noting ongoing personal struggles and in some cases legal troubles. While nine participants: Kenny, Kara, Randy, Nora, Myron, Troy, Elise, Ned and Leona managed to avoid incarceration, Lamar, Rakeem and Yakima had served time in prison on drug charges but had been released and living what they described as satisfactory lives at the time of the interview. Myron admitted to getting into trouble with the law but did not indicate having served any jail time. Although Kara said she joined gangs and sold drugs to survive on the streets, she was saved, according to her mother, from incarceration by her mother's early release from prison.

Siblings: Kara, Randy and Kenny

Kara, Randy and Kenny are African American and children of Imani, an ex-felon who was a key informant for this study. Kara was nine when her mother went to prison. She and her brothers initially went to live with their Dad to avoid being split up and avoid foster care. A year later they went to live with an aunt, their mother's sister. Kara was the only sibling to run away from her aunt's care. Kara at 28 is the mother of a young son being raised by Imani. Kara was still struggling to get her life back together. It took several years for Kara and her mother to rebuild their relationship and when I met Kara, she was working for her mother's nonprofit organization that helped ex-offenders reenter society.

Randy, 30, Imani's middle son, never returned my phone call even after a little prodding from his mother. Imani later informed me that Randy was still harboring resentment from her incarceration. He was ten when his mother went to prison.

According to his mother, Randy finally revealed his resentment to his family at Thanksgiving dinner 13 years after his mother's release from prison. I eventually met Randy five months later at his mother's office. He was a very polite young man. He is married with a young son and currently separated from his wife. Randy admitted that he was uncomfortable talking to me because he was going through a crisis and working really hard to change his attitude. He told me he attributes his turnaround to studying Malcolm X and others with similar philosophies.

Kenny, 31, the oldest sibling, was married with a young son at the time of the interview. He was 12 years old when his mother was arrested. Kenny said his strong faith, his love and appreciation for his aunt who took the children in, and his will to make his mom proud of him when she returned, helped him cope during his mother's absence. Kenny said that he has a strong Christian faith, and that he is not questioning God; he's questioning the "system" because his mother has helped so many people since her release from prison, but she still cannot "get her own." He recalled his mother telling him, "God bless the child who has its own." Kenny said he got his strength from his mother. Kenney was surprised that I was interested in his story.

> I mean, it's nothing against you or anything but I'm like man, after ten years, somebody actually wants to take the time to listen to my story! It's like who cares now?

Siblings: Myron and Nora

Both Myron, 56, and Nora, 57, African American brother and sister were successful professionals and active in their community at the time of their interviews. Myron is a minister and mentor for African American youth and Nora is a social worker for a

nonprofit organization. Nora also mentors youth in foster homes. Myron and Nora both have bachelor's and master's degrees.

Nora was 17 and Myron was 13 when their mother was incarcerated. Nora and Myron have the same mother and father but Nora was adopted and raised by her aunt (her father's sister) and Myron was raised by his mother.

Imani referred me to Myron. Myron and Imani had worked together on a project for a nonprofit organization years earlier. When I first called Myron to arrange the interview, he appeared a little distant and guarded about being interviewed, but reluctantly scheduled an interviewed. When I called to verify our appointment, he said he had made other plans and rescheduled. On my way to the second scheduled interview, I called again to reconfirm at which time he said, "I really can't now, my pastor needs me." Imani later informed me that his pastor was director of the community building where we were supposed to meet and that she saw Myron in the building during the time we were scheduled to meet. It became clear at that point that Myron did not want to meet. After further prodding from Imani, he agreed to the interview. Myron admitted that he was only meeting me as a favor for a friend but was very upset at her for "putting his business out there." He was also coping with diabetes and had been undergoing dialysis; "taking one day at a time." He relaxed a little more during the interview when he found out that I was a teacher doing research on a topic inspired by my students. I reassured him that his identity would remain confidential in accordance with the university's IRB standards. Myron explained why he was hesitant to talk about his life experiences.

> I came up in a hush-hush time. We just didn't talk about it [his mother's incarceration]. Both my parents were incarcerated at some point in time; but we just didn't talk about it.

When Myron talked about his involvement in the African American community and his church, I asked if he was a deacon in the church. He replied, "I am a preacher in the church!" Myron was also a friend with several well-known community leaders, which may explain his reluctance to tell his story. He also mentored many youth on the importance of having a good education.

> I've committed my life to the community work I do…what success is to me spiritually, I am where I want to be with God; I'm a good father to my children. Relationships? Me and women – uh well (chuckles) that's a different story but I believe I have become a man that mama could be proud – I've done something with my life.

Myron said that in their growing up years, he and Nora, though in different households, had a close relationship. Myron was initially raised by his mother until she was incarcerated; then was intermittently shuffled between his dad and the aunt who raised his sister, Nora. At the end of the interview, he phoned his sister, introduced my study and asked if she wouldn't mind granting me an interview. She called me several weeks later to set up an interview date.

I interviewed Nora at her place of work. Nora said that she started her career as a social worker for the County, but because their caseloads were "so ridiculously high and because you had to do so much for so many;" she did not see it as having a real impact. Unlike Myron, Nora said she was never really affected by her mother's incarceration because her aunt raised her.

> Both of my parents were incarcerated at one time or another during my childhood, but it never fazed me because my father's sister raised me. She only raised Myron in between times even though me and Myron had the same mom and dad. We had two other brothers; one brother died last June and then we got a baby brother. So my aunt

> raised me practically from birth. I never had the opportunity to live with my mother—she was gone at two or three intervals of my life. I was closer to Myron than my other two brothers. My older brother was raised by my mother's sister but sort of drifted away from the family when he was 12 or 13. My mom didn't raise anybody but my baby brother and at intervals, Myron.

While Myron was very reticent in talking about his mom and dad, Nora admitted that she thought it was pretty cool that her dad's rather than her mother's sister took responsibility for raising her. Nora said although she never lived with either parent, her dad was always a part of her life and made sure she had everything she needed.

> I did not think it was unusual for my aunt to be raising me. I always saw my dad even though he didn't live with us. I just never thought life was so different for me; it wasn't hard. Like I said I was raised by his sister, which after I got to be an adult, I thought it was really great that your dad's sister would raise you instead of your mom's sister.

Nora always thought her aunt was her mother until she was 15 years old. Nora explained,

> By the time I was 15, 16 years old, I think she [mom] came into my life but I never lived with her; like I knew who she was but I just never knew why we never has a relationship like that.

Nora remembered treating her mother like a non-person and did not realize until she was an adult, the resentment she harbored for her mother. When Nora's mother became very ill, Nora felt compelled to "set the book straight," so she and her husband quit their jobs, put their furniture in storage and moved across country to take care of her mother who died five months later. Nora recalled, "I was very grateful for that time because I got a lot off my chest."

Troy

When I met Troy, an 18 year old African American young man, he was a high school senior living with others he called his cousins and with a foster mother he called grandma.

> When I moved with my grandma—that's who I live with now, you know it was kind of weird—just waking up and not seeing my Mom there; it was pretty crazy—my cousins lived there with us—my grandma and I and to see their moms come around—it kind of hurt me a lot.

He was a senior taking morning and evening classes so that he could graduate on time. Troy's mother had been released from prison at the time of the interview; but he continued to live with his foster mom. Troy remembered being 13 years old at the time of his mother's arrest. He also had two older sisters, 21 and 19; an older brother, 16 and a younger brother, 8 living at home at the time of their mother's arrest Troy said that while he and his younger brother struggled with their mother's absence, his older siblings were "doing their own thing" and were not affected as much.

Troy had mentors as well as a stable home. The couple that mentored him saw the ad about my project and contacted me, "We have a young man we'd like you to meet." They said they regarded him as one of their own. So Troy had mentors in addition to a stable home. Troy was very confident about finishing high school on time. When I asked Troy if he had any advice for young children who may be coping with an incarcerated mother, he shared these thoughts.

> I just really want to – you know, some kids may think it's over and it's really not; it's just a chapter you may go through…if you do have to go through it just try to bear with it … like I really just turned my hands in to God you know.

Elise

Elise, 20, a biracial African American/Euro American female had finished high school two years earlier and was in college at the time of the interview. I had known her as one of my 10th grade biology students and now observed how she had grown into a beautiful, intelligent young woman. Even though she had become emancipated, she was living with her grandmother. Elise was seven when her mother began a pattern of moving in and out of jail. Elise moved back and forth living with the mother of her brother's girlfriend, her dad and in shelters with her mother. When her mother went to prison she moved in permanently with her grandmother. She had an older brother and sister but did not talk about their situations. Because of our prior student-teacher relationship, I called Elise and arranged a meeting to tell her about my study. As we walked around the neighborhood, I explained why I was doing the study and gave her the option to deny the interview if it would make her uncomfortable. She greed to the interview, and we set a date. At the interview, she was very excited about her sister's upcoming nuptials but sad that her mother had just been sentenced to a state correctional facility. She was very concerned about getting the financial assistance she needed to finish college.

> Even though I am emancipated, I can't get a grant because I would need my mom or dad to cosign. My dad makes too much money and my mom can't sign because she is in prison. I don't want to borrow money because my friends told me—you don't want that monkey on your back girl!

It was never clear whether Elise became too emotional to finish our interview because of her mother's incarceration, or because as her former teacher, I had uncovered a secret she had kept for so long. Maybe it was both. Elise later e-mailed me to request a

recommendation letter for financial assistance for college. Therefore, I assumed we parted the interview on good terms.

Leona

Leona, 38, was a single mother of two children, ages 20 and 16 and grandmother to her 20-year old son's daughter at the time of the interview. Leona was the youngest of six sisters and three brothers, but by the time of the interview her oldest sister and brother had died. Leona did not reveal how or why they died only that she lost her mother shortly after losing her sister with back to back to back funerals. Leona had lived with her mother as an adult and moved to this state after her mother died of a heart attack. Leona was not close to any of her siblings. Because her sisters refused to take her into their homes after her mother's death, Leona ended up living in a shelter. She complained she had to do everything on her own because her siblings were never there for her even after she helped raise their children.

> Right now today we're not close at all—I wish we could be close like we 'wuz [sic] before she [mom] passed away; but everybody gone on their separate ways. All the other sisters speak to the other sisters—they just don't speak to me unless they want something … they don't call me at all. I call them to speak to them but they don't talk to me very long so I just gave up on 'em.

Leona was on medication for severe anxiety and depression, which she attributed to her difficult childhood. She had a hard time putting her thoughts together in a cohesive manner during the interview. She still could not read or spell or find her way around the city without help. Every time she needed to run an errand, she had to have someone accompany her. Leona explained: "A lot of things I have to sit and think about before I can even talk about it – you know what I'm saying?" Leona even contemplated suicide at times; but said, "God came to me and like it's not your fault – you didn't pick the life

you're living…you got something to live for." Leona credits God with saving her life. Even with her disability, Leona managed to take care of herself and her two sons.

Yakima

At the time of the interview, Yakima, a 39-year-old African American single mother of three children, was in recovery (for drug use) and had just started a new job. She brought her youngest child (two at the time of the interview) to the interview with her. Yakima's mother and Imani served time in federal prison together; so Imani set up the interview with Yakima. Unlike other participants, Yakima was a 21 year-old young adult when her mother went to prison, but her brother was just an infant; born just days before her mother's arrest. Yakima and her baby brother had to live with their grandmother when their mother went to prison.

But Yakima's life was not a simple one; she had come full circle; seemingly repeating the transgressions of her mother. As the young daughter of an incarcerated mother, Yakima herself had become an incarcerated mother and was sentenced three times for drug possession. Yakima attributes her drug use to self-medicating her pain from loosing her mother to prison. "I had my first child when I was thirty and was incarcerated the whole time through the pregnancy."

Yakima was released ten days before she had her baby and then was able to be in a home-monitoring program. She got pregnant again when her son was three and said because "I was still on paper for the federal charge but kept violating—kept using, they sent me to South Dakota prison for the whole pregnancy." She described a program called PACK where she could bond with her newborn baby daughter for 30 days and then they took the baby. The prison had a special visiting program in houses outside the

prison; so her mother brought her baby back to stay with Yakima on a couple of weekends.

Yakima promised an interview with her younger brother Seth, but he never returned my calls. I later discovered that Seth was a former student of mine and most likely did not feel comfortable discussing his personal life with a former teacher. When Seth was in my ninth grade class, he became immediately attached to me as a teacher, yet behaved negatively to get attention. I always commented on how well dressed he was, and that he looked as though he just stepped out of a GQ magazine. He would just smile and say thanks. A colleague also informed me that his mother had engaged in prostitution. I did not realize that Seth was coping with her incarceration at that time.

At the time of the interview, Yakima had been released from prison and was trying to regain her role as a mother, but not without struggle and difficulty. Yakima, after serving two prison terms while pregnant each term, said when child protection threatened to take her third baby away, she sought treatment and had been sober ever since. At the time of the interview, Yakima had a full time job and was living in a sober house. Yakima recalled,

> When I got out my daughter was six months and you know I've been out ever since…I've been clean going on three years. I live in sober housing. I started my job today.

Lamar

Lamar, a 49-year-old African American male had long been released from prison at the time of our interview. He had been in and out of jail throughout the 70's and 80's for distribution and possession of large quantities of drugs. He had fathered seven children by the same woman whom he had repeatedly physically abused, but said he had stopped

abusing her by the time of our interview. He blamed his abusive behavior on his use of drugs. Lamar remembered being 11 years old when his mother was first incarcerated. Lamar and his six siblings went to live with his aunt and uncle. From the beginning, Lamar's uncle always told him that he would be just like his mother and never amount to anything. So by the time Lamar reached 15, he did not care anymore and began a life of crime; in and out of jail numerous times until age 20, when he was sentenced to prison on felony charges. Lamar had many mentors who tried to intervene in his life including a city official and his African American physician, but in retrospect, Lamar said it was too little too late because at that point he was a full-fledged drug dealer making a lot of money.

Lamar reflected on the "importance of reaching out to kids while they are still young and impressionable." Lamar had not been that fortunate; he had been forced to live with an uncle who constantly put him down. He said he had tried to help his sisters stay on the right path, but it did not work for all of them. He explained that he did not trust women because in retrospect, he thinks his mother poisoned his father. Lamar said he no longer harbors any resentment about his childhood.

> I'm at a stage now…I'm almost 50 years old – it's time for me to do for me – it's time for me to change; not being selfish or nothing but letting go. It's bad luggage and it ain't gone do no good to carry it around…I try to tell my sisters you got to learn – not so much to forget but to forgive and that's where I'm at right now – I'm trying to forgive…

Ned and Rakeem: Parallel Lives – Contrasting Stories

The importance of Lamar's words, "reach out to kids while they are young and impressionable" is illuminated in the lives of Ned and Rakeem. Even though both Ned and Rakeem had become successful at the time of the interview, Ned managed to avoid

prison while Rakeem had become incarcerated by age 18. Their lived experiences had been dictated by race, class and the social structures in which their lives were embedded (details will be discussed in the later chapters).

Ned, a 36-year-old White male was happily married with two young girls at the time of the interview. He had a thriving Internet business and loved to golf as a pastime. He actually met his wife on the Internet. During the interview, it became quickly evident that Ned was not only gifted academically but a gifted storyteller as well. He was able to articulate his life from age seven to the present in a most intelligent and organized manner. I first met Ned when we volunteered to serve on an advocacy committee for the rights of children with parents in prison. Ned was very outspoken at meetings concerning how to advocate for kids. He never felt like any advocacy organization was doing enough for children. More specifically, Ned complained that our committee was doing more for parents – so much so that he became angry, quit the committee and sent out a hostile email to the committee chair, copying everyone on the committee. Fortunately, Ned agreed to the interview even after severing ties to our committee

Ned was seven when both his parents were incarcerated; but unlike other participants, Ned had been raised in those early years in an upper middle class family. His mother had a reputable job at a government agency and his father was a geologist who traveled extensively. Ned endured extremely challenging circumstances as a child. He had to cope with his father's suicide and his mother's substance abuse, manipulation and mental health issues. Ned said that though he had endured verbal, physical and emotional abuse, he felt he had managed to beat the odds. He lamented that his younger sister Karen (who did not participate in the study) was not so lucky; she followed in her mother's footsteps

repeating similar transgressions. Ned's mother was in and out of jail multiple times for multiple offenses. Ned and his sister were in and out of foster homes while their mother was in and out of jail. Unlike other participants, Ned was adamant that the best thing to do for a child coping with an addicted mother is to break all ties with that mother.

> The conclusion I come to is that had at any point somebody had said to themselves, to the system, to the courts or anybody…maybe…just maybe these kids would be better off if they never saw her [mother] again.

Even though Ned insisted that he wanted to sever all ties with his mother, his interview revealed that he understood that his mother's mental illness contributed to a lot of her negative behavior. He made it very clear that his understanding it did not lessen his pain. Ned felt strongly that kids residing in foster homes, group homes, etc. should be asked what type of environment they wanted to be placed in; even if the kids had no idea what a normal family looked like. Ned explained: "Most kids know how to fantasize about the ideal childhood – they just never felt eligible." In other words, if children are given the chance, they have the ability to decide what should happen to them – children are just made to feel like they don't have rights in the decision making process. Ned explained,

> …they (children) know instinctively that you need a certain level of support – I found that support through friends, fraternities and you know through teammates and other people – most people can't do that.

Rakeem, a 32-year-old African American male, was a single father of a three-year-old son and shared an apartment with his younger cousin at the time of the interview. Like Ned, Rakeem owned his own business - a small but thriving music business in a once industrial factory site. We sat down to talk in Rakeem's rather impressive office adorned with beautiful wall-to-wall artwork and a myriad of CD cases covered with similar

artwork. When I asked Rakeem where he got the paintings; he replied; “Oh I did all of the artwork. I also designed the cover of all the CD cases for the music I produce.” It became quickly apparent that like Ned, Rakeem was a very gifted, talented and intelligent young man. But again, unlike Ned, Rakeem had passed through a life of crime. He remembered living with his mother and losing her to prison at age six.

> I was like six years old—I was young and my brothers were older; one is 10 years older and other one is 11 years older, I never knew my brothers—I never knew my uncles, the only person I had ever met was my grandfather. So after she went to prison, I had to get used to people I had never met in my life.

Rakeem remembered being forced to move across the country with relatives he had never met; relatives who were involved in criminal activity; and by the time he was 18, he was serving time in prison for his own criminal transgressions. But at that time, going to prison was a family affair; most of his family members had been incarcerated as well. Rakeem’s two older brothers, two uncles, and even his grandmother spent time in federal prison on drug charges.

But Rakeem views himself as a survivor. He had a music deal by the time he was 13, and he knew he wanted to be a businessman because no one around him had done so. “I’ve got rock groups. I’ve got DVD’s. We’ve invested our own enterprises, our own economics, our own structures, our own everything and this is a start.” He said his “half spiritual, half street” music speaks for others. The people I’m a voice for don’t know that. They don’t’ know about suits and ties and stuff.” The music has a message.

> I do all sorts of different stuff around here and I don’t glamorize it—the music is what it is you know. If you listen to it you understand what we went through because we’re going to give it to you like this—in each song. We sing. we say this ain’t the way it should be, but this is what was given to me and I have to deal with it, so America—here! Deal with it!

Not only did Rakeem own and produce a growing music business, but he was giving back to the community. When I met him, he was mentoring youth and teaching them how to become entrepreneurs in the music business. Rakeem said he became a man in prison and knew that once released, he had to fend for himself. For Rakeem, the only way to build new relationships was by "learning to trust in himself." Because of his status as an ex-felon, he had to deal with denied bank loans, broken promises and community leaders who rescinded contract deals; yet Rakeem explained why he persevered.

> We're here for those [kids] who people out there call the street cats 'cause they're sagging past their waist; but I know something they don't…they (kids) are bright, smart individuals.

Incarcerated Adult Children of Incarcerated Mothers

The women I introduce in this section were in jail awaiting sentencing at the time of the interview. They were all repeat offenders. Anna and Reyna were not mothers; but Yana, Lucy and Lela were mothers who had come full circle. As children of incarcerated mothers, they were now serving time as incarcerated mothers. I interviewed all five women in a small conference room in the county jail. They each told their stories separately, but were all present throughout the entire interview process.

Anna

Anna, a Hispanic, was a 19-year old young woman at the time of the interview. At the very young age of 19, Anna had already been forced to cope with a life of sexual abuse, physical abuse, mental illness and a compulsion to shoplift. Anna had no children but was married to an abusive husband she left in California. She fled to the State with her boyfriend because they both had criminal records in California. Anna was very

emotional and cried throughout out the interview. While many participants have self-medicated their bouts with depression through illegal drug use, Anna's drug of choice was the euphoric feeling she got from shoplifting. Anna lamented,

> I promised God that if he would let me out of jail this time that I wouldn't do it [steal] anymore, but I just kept doing it and doing it…something wouldn't let me stop.

Anna was eight years old and her sister nine when her mother went to prison. Since Anna dropped out of school in the ninth grade, she lacked the basic skills necessary to live a productive life. She could not read nor perform simple arithmetic computations. Anna claimed to have no family anymore because none of her relatives would take her phone calls. According to Anna, her mother was making good money as a registered nurse at the time of the interview but refused to have anything to do with her. She said two younger brothers were living with her mother at the time of the interview, and that her mother was repeating her behavior of leaving them alone as she had done with Anna and her sister. Anna has been threatened with deportation.

> I'm not an immigrant but when I was in California they put me in INS and they were going to deport me but they didn't because I've been here 17 years. So now when I get out of here (jail) I'll probably get deported because I have been going to immigration courts.

Reyna

Reyna, a 23-year-old biracial Native and Euro American woman, was serving time in jail for selling and abusing drugs at the time of the interview. It was her fourth time in jail, but this time it was for failing drug treatment. Like Anna, Reyna had no children but unlike Anna, Reyna had never married. Reyna was the only participant to display a tough persona throughout most of the interview. All the other women cried at some point. Reyna's eyes only welled up when she talked about her mother living a bare

existence because of her Methamphetamine addiction. Reyna showed unconditional love for her mother and always fought to protect her mother's image.

Reyna was two years old at the time of her mother's arrest; her older brother cared for her and her younger brothers until discovered by child protection, which placed all five children in separate foster homes. By the time Reyna reached 23 years old, she had been abused in foster homes; she had been raped and "shot up" with dope by her dad's friend; she had gotten into many school fights; she had to cope with an adoption battle between her mother and aunt; she had been in and out of treatment centers; and she had lived on the streets and in abandoned apartment buildings. Reyna claimed that she could never have children because something terrible happened to her as a young child. Still wanting to protect her family, Reyna refused to reveal that tragedy. Reyna said she would be released in a month and was scared to death because she liked using drugs and feared being alone. She said she felt jail was more successful for her than any previous treatment program.

> The last time I was in treatment I smoked crack. So I'm here—I have no choice but to sit in these four walls and think and that's what I need to do because my whole life I have been running from everything. I ran from it all and I haven't understood why I am who I am and what I feel. The way I guess it impacted me is 'cause I thought about this while I'm here. To actually pass time here, I'm very ... no, so much dependent.

Reyna did not blame her mother for her own transgressions; she wanted to take full responsibility for her crimes. She also feared seeing her mother deteriorate.

Reyna wanted kids in a similar position to know that they were smart kids and good kids and not to bury their anger, to deal with it head on. Reyna tearfully explained,

> You can only blame someone else for your own life for so long. The fact that I'm dealing with right now is that she [mom] may never get better and never be the mother I want her to be, you know?

Daughters of Incarcerated Mothers, Now Incarcerated Mothers

The following women were interviewed as children of incarcerated mothers; yet they had themselves become incarcerated mothers. Lela and Lucy were in jail for repeated drug possession and shoplifting respectively; Yana was in jail for drugs, prostitution and aiding and abetting a murder. Lela, Yana and Lucy said that they vowed never to treat their children the way they had been treated by their mothers; but all three repeated the same behaviors toward their children.

Yana

Yana, a 33-year-old African American woman, was a single parent of four children at the time of the interview. She was ten years old and the youngest of eight children at the time of her mother's arrest. Yana was part of a high profile case accused of being an accomplice to a murder and conspiracy to commit a murder. At first, Yana said that she preferred prison to "ratting" out her boyfriend because she believed her sons had been marked for death. Nine months after our interview, Yana confessed to police for aiding and abetting two men in a murder; one of the suspects was her live-in lover. Yana and the two men had been drinking alcohol and taking drugs when she was instructed to lure a "john" to the house so that they could rob him. Since Yana had lured the victim to the crime scene, she was formerly charged with aiding and abetting aggravated robbery. Even though Yana issued a formal apology to the family of the victim, an unsympathetic judge sentenced her to ten years in prison, double the State sentencing guidelines. Yana was the youngest of eight siblings and when her mother went to prison, they were able to avoid foster care because custody was signed over to the oldest brother and sister. Yana remained with her siblings until she ran away from their care.

Yana suffers from bipolarism and crack cocaine addiction and had engaged in prostitution to support her drug habit. Yana had become the second generation of a three-generation incarceration crisis. Yana's addiction led her into the arms of a man who had been on a murdering spree for several years. Even though Yana's mother had made bad choices in her life, she was able to warn: "Girl, you have just gotten in bed with the devil!" Yana explained her troubles.

> I started using crack; spiraled out of control … started running across these guys just beating the hell out of me. I thought it was because they loved me.

Yana described how the man responsible for her being incarcerated treated her when they appeared in court.

> It's like the devil is really busy because when they (corrections officers) were frisking me down and putting me back up in that Hannibal Lector outfit to bring me back up here, the crazy man that is so in love with me comes to the window and sees them doing this to me, and he's laughing—he'd rather see me in jail than tell these people the truth—I'm like he ain't got to love me like that though!

Yana's story was unique because at the time of the interview, not only was Yana an incarcerated mother with four children, but two of her sons were also serving time in prison.

Lela

Lela, a 35-year-old Hispanic woman is the mother of five children and the grandmother of her 16-year-old daughter's child. Lela had already received her sentence at the time of the interview and was transported to the State Correctional Facility three days later. She lost custody of her five children to the foster care system, but admitted that she needed to get her life back before trying to get her children back. In Lela's words, she needed more "clean time" once she gets out of prison [this time] in order to stop her cycle of recidivism. Lela explained,

> When you are hurting and in pain, you'll do anything – the [bad] checks, the drugs, anything to cope with the pain and all it did was brought me here to this institution.

Lela was three years old, the oldest of three children, when both her parents were incarcerated as the result of a drug bust. Like her own children, Lela grew up being shuffled between her stepfather and between ages seven and nine in and out of shelters and cars with her mother until, at age 15, she dropped out of school and ran away. Like her daughter; Lela was a mother at age 16. The police picked up Lela for four felonies after she was on the run for several months. Lela said she accepted the consequences for her past. Lela also professed that once she served her time, she would live a clean life and get her kids back. Lela vowed, "I don't want to come out [of prison] with a clean life then start all over again – this has to stop and if it don't stop here…. (she burst into tears)."

> I had always said I would never use – but I ended up using drugs…I also had felt that I would never take my kids in and out of foster homes; abuse them in any kind of way but try to have their lives better.

At the time of the interview at the detention center, Lela's five children were split between foster care and her incestuous father. Lela talked about how she had broken her own rule.

> …I did what I was taught – I abused them in certain ways by using drugs … placed them in foster homes … didn't get a chance to raise them …didn't get a chance to potty train.

Lucy

Lucy, a 43-year-old African American mother of nine children and thirteen grandchildren suffered from numerous mental illnesses and cried profusely throughout the entire interview. Her 14-year-old daughter was a mother of a two-month old baby. Lucy, the youngest of 18 children who were reared on a farm in a small Southern town,

said she was ten years old when her mother was incarcerated. Lucy had a very tumultuous childhood, witnessing murders, being physically and sexually abused by relatives and being shuffled from relative to relative who abused her as well.

Lucy had been to prison five times, most recently for burglary. She described being reduced to tears when a corrections officer challenged, “Lucy your record is very long—I have never seen a record that long—it’s sad.” Lucy claims to have taken the blame for criminal acts her children and their friends had committed. “A lot of stuff on my record—I did not do and I plead guilty for it.”

Lucy’s husband and children had never visited her. Lucy was understanding of her husband’s refusal to visit and his lack of support, but she accused her children of being disrespectful and ungrateful. Lucy claimed to have done all of her crimes to support her family. Lucy did not say who was raising her nine children while she was incarcerated.

> I just wanted my kids to have stuff I never ever had…I just want them to be able to love me for who I am…but down the road, my kids are very, very disrespectful to me – every time I go to jail it’s like they don’t care about me or nothing.

Lucy said she needed the kind of help that the prison had not provided.

> If these courts could just listen to me for once in my life and give me some kind of help. That’s all I ask for. I don’t want to go to prison. Prison makes me do bad things.

Analysis

This chapter introduced the women and men I interviewed about childhood experiences when their mothers were incarcerated. It presented each participant’s current situation as well as a brief overview of life experiences relative to his/her mother’s incarceration. It showed the social, emotional vantage point from which each person looked back at childhood experiences. This section will analyze the chapter’s data

primarily from an interactionist perspective and then from a Foucauldian perspective. Because data in this chapter foreshadows the more detailed data in subsequent chapters, some analysis will be left for those chapters.

According to interactionist theory, "every day life revolves around persons' interpreting and making judgments about their own behavior and experiences and those of others" (Denzin, 2001, p.2). Further in the language of interactionism, each participant's vignette revealed relived epiphanies. "In the relived epiphany, the individual relives, or goes through again, major turning point moments in his or her life" (Denzin, 2001, p. 37).

All of the participants had difficulty revisiting and reliving epiphanies of the past. Mary Viboch (2005) of the Vera Institute suggested that in some cases, losing a parent to prison may be even more painful and harder to discuss than the death of a caregiver. Some participants have come to terms with their childhoods and have moved beyond the incredible pain, while others, although physically surviving a painful childhood, continue to struggle with the past, still dealing with hurt and anger. It became evident that many of these participants were indeed still coping with unresolved feelings. Elise's inability to continue the interview; Kara's continued struggle to get her life back; Troy's current distrust of his mother; Lamar's distrust of women; and Yakima in recovery from substance abuse as a means of self-medicating were among clear indicators of the continuing struggle coping with feelings of anger and depression rooted in traumatic childhoods.

For many, their private troubles of childhood led them into the very public criminal justice system. Of the 17 participants I interviewed, half of them - Lamar, Rakeem,

Anna, Reyna, Yakima, Lela, Yana and Lucy - had themselves been incarcerated at some point in their lives. As stated in their profiles, Lamar, Rakeem and Yakima had been released from prison long before the interview, but Reyna, Anna, Lela, Yana and Lucy were still serving jail time for drugs, prostitution and theft; Lela, Yana and Lucy had come full circle from being children of incarcerated mothers to being incarcerated mothers themselves with children under the age of eighteen. One of the most devastating examples of repeating a cycle of despair was exemplified in Yana's story. At the time of her interview, Yana was an adult child of an incarcerated mother serving time and now herself an incarcerated mother of two incarcerated children – three generations of offenders. Kara was involved in gangs and drugs but never incarcerated, and although Myron got into trouble, he did not go to jail. Troy, Elise, Ned and Kenny managed to avoid any criminal activity.

In their narratives of relived epiphanies in encounters with the criminal justice system, participants revealed that not only were they emotionally and sometimes physically traumatized by their experiences, but they were also stigmatized. Some internalized the stigma relatives assigned to them. Lamar when told "you'll be just like your mother" accepted the stigma and turned to a life of drug dealing resulting in prison time. Rakeem lived with the results of stigma as an ex-felon. He had to deal with denied bank loans, and community leaders who rescinded contract deals with his non-profit organization.

Rakeem went beyond his own stigma using music to help kids get beyond the stigma assigned to them. "We're here for the kids who people out there call the street cats 'cuz their pants sag past their waist. These kids are bright, smart individuals." Other

participants also used their experiences to work for others. Nora was a social worker. Kara worked with her mother helping children of incarcerated parents. Myron's mentoring included teaching kids how to play musical instruments.

As adult participants described life-changing events in their childhoods, they spoke not only with anger, frustration and hurt, but also in many ways showed they were making meaning of and working through what had happened to them. Many relied on their own resources and spoke of trying to change their attitudes, resolving to forgive, accepting responsibility for decisions and needing to move on. An individual "has to cope with the situations in which he is called on to act, ascertaining the meanings of the actions of others and mapping out his own line of action" (Blumer, 1969, p. 15). Lamar worked at forgiving and letting go of bad luggage, saying, "it ain't gonna do no good to carry it around." Reyna similarly worked at not blaming others. Troy turned to God. Leona said God told her it was not her fault; she had not picked the life she was living. Kenny had so accepted his situation that he was surprised at my questions, "After ten years, somebody actually wants to listen to my story. Who cares now?" Most participants were used to keeping their troubles private. As Myron said, "I don't want my business out there."

As I listened to participants' acceptance of their situations, I paid attention to the possibility of ethnographic fallacy which suggests that sometimes participants are unable to comprehend the obstacles and opportunities in their lives, the pressure and constraints they may have faced, and thus the possibilities of particular outcomes independent of their own actions (Duneier, 1999). I moved beyond interactionist theory to further examine data through the lens of Foucault's interpretive framework about power. It

suggests that individuals live within discourses that produce regimes of truth that define at a given time the way the world works. Building on Foucault, Golden cautions, "while the need to take full responsibility for one's actions is essential to recovery from addiction or self-destructive behavior, the macro-level inequities that shaped these women's lives and identities remain hidden, thus normalizing women's experiences of social, economic and political subjugation" (2005, p.78). Golden claimed further that some people (like participants in my study) live within but do not recognize a discourse of power relations that relegates them to an "invisible status in mainstream society" (p.79).

Certain regimes of truth had manifested themselves in the lives of participants. One was the mandatory drug sentencing act which affected some of the participants' mothers and many of them as well. All five women in the county jail were self-medicating their mental illnesses with illicit drugs, but rather than receiving treatment, their drug use had been criminalized. Punitive policies created and reproduced by dominant discourse made incarcerating these women a first-order response to the drug crisis (Meda Chesney-Lind, 1994). Lucy, Reyna, Yana, Lela and Anna were all serving time for drugs, prostitution and theft, repeating their mothers' transgressions. Caught in cycles of poverty and despair, they had engaged in illegal activities as a means of survival. Reyna lamented, "When you are hurting and in pain you will do anything – bad checks, drugs, anything to cope with the pain." According to Zerai and Banks, " dehumanizing discourse has been used to determine the way we define the problem of substance abuse, the way we construct women addicted to cocaine, and how we locate them on the social landscape" (2002, p.142).

Rakeem's childhood and young adulthood when compared with Ned's evidences "the damaging effects of race and class in communities which lack political or economic power" (Golden, 2005, p. 79). Rakeem had become enmeshed in a "socially toxic environment that had depleted any resources to counteract its toxicity" (p.79). However, in adulthood both men tried to get kids to think beyond their social status. Though they did not use the language of dehumanizing discourse, they were teaching youth to recognize their social situations and labels assigned them like "street cats." Ned said, "kids know how to fantasize about the ideal childhood; they just never felt eligible." Ned and Rakeem are working with kids to feel eligible and exemplifying what Foucault calls resistance to regimes of truth or a refusal to accept one's knowledge as subjugated. Foucault asserted that wherever dominant discourses and regimes of truth existed, "there are always also movements in the opposite direction, whereby strategies which coordinate relations of power produce new effects and advance into hitherto unaffected domains" (1980, p.200).

The next chapter focuses on relationships with their mothers as central to all participants' lives. No matter the quality of the relationship, the bond with mother was critical. Whether living with relatives or in foster homes, a mother's presence was felt. The chapter will examine participants' data as they talked about life with mother before her incarceration, during her incarceration and when she returned from jail or prison.

Chapter 4: On the Edge – Life with Mom

My interviews with each of the participants began with the question, "Can you share your experiences as to what it was like growing up with your mother incarcerated? For example, were you treated differently by other family members, school, friends or people in the community?" My assumption was that they would talk about their experiences after their mothers left for jail or prison. However all of the participants consistently began their responses to my question talking about their mothers at the time of her arrest and the period before the arrest. Troy, 18, said, "Um, I was 13 when my mom went to jail." Rakeem, 32, began the interview with, "I remember being six years old and my mom putting me on that plane by myself with that little purple suit on." Even 49-year old Lamar responded, "From what I can remember, I guess I was about 11 when I really remember her going to jail."

It will be clear from the data presented in this chapter that regardless of whether the participants were 18 or 60, their mothers remained a central part of their lives. Throughout the interviews, participants consistently referred back to the history and centrality of their relationship with their mothers. Each told stories of coping with uncertainty and a sense of dread that their mothers would eventually be arrested. Although a few were too young to remember much about events before their mother's first arrest, they just knew she did not come home one day. Most participants experienced short-term, temporary relationships with their mothers when their mothers went back and forth from jail or prison. Only a few said that their mothers went to prison one time and came home for good.

Participants' need to talk about their mothers gave impetus to this chapter, which presents the dynamics of the mother-child relationship from the perspectives of the adult participants who grew up with an incarcerated mother. This chapter shows how participants made meaning of their childhood experiences. It does not make assumptions about what constitutes good mothering or bad mothering. Although the data may suggest other studies about the plight of incarcerated mothers, the purpose of this chapter is to express participants' memories and their ways of defining what happened to them as children. Because they told their stories retrospectively, their narratives sometimes showed inconsistencies and contradictions particularly as they were trying to recall some very painful events. Memories about mothers fell into four broad phases, although some narratives fit more than one phase: (1) life with mom shortly before arrest; (2) the arrest and events immediately following; (3) efforts to keep in touch with mom; and (4) efforts to reconnect with mom upon her release. Narratives of what happened and how each person felt about what happened revealed a deep ambivalence about the child-mother relationship. Some participants were highly critical of their mothers but also fiercely loyal. Some felt the tenuousness of the child-mother bond exemplified by Troy's explanation, "anybody depends on their mom a lot, but you can't set your hopes too high."

The analysis section of this chapter first examines the data though the lens of interpretive interactionist theory; then expands that analysis through a Foucauldian theoretical framework to show how asymmetrical power relations shaped the participants and their mothers' lives.

Before Arrest: Coping with Instability and Uncertainty

Most participants told stories of living in turmoil, instability and uncertainty because of their mothers' lives of turmoil and instability. They coped with instability because they witnessed a lot of drinking, drug use, violence, and the comings and goings of different men in the home; they coped with uncertainty because they said they just never knew what to expect from day to day. Some participants moved around so much with their mothers they did not know where they were going to sleep or if they were going to eat. Others said that their mothers just never came home and no one knew where they were. Only Anna, Ned and Lela reported being abused by their mothers. Some recalled mothers who would do anything to support alcohol and drug addictions. Their experiences are consistent with the findings from recent studies which presented evidence of children living in instability and turmoil prior to arrest (Hairston, 2007; Boudin, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007). Several participants attributed their lives of instability to what they described as manipulative behaviors of their mothers.

Elise said that her mother would lie and steal to support her addiction to prescription drugs. She said her brother's girlfriend would steal a purse; then her mother would take the checkbook and credit cards to finance her addiction to prescription drugs. She recalled a time in sixth grade when her mother called from jail asking her to forge a check to post bail. Elise was only eleven at the time.

> My mom would use the ID and go out…like she had went to jail and there was still a checkbook at the house and she would just call me and say yeah just sign the checkbook; all you have to do is fill it out and give it to my friend and she'll come get me – know what I'm saying?

Lela had to cope with sexual and physical abuse, homelessness, prostitution and drug abuse all before the age of 16. Likewise, Anna lived a tumultuous life; fist fights with

her mother, verbal abuse from her mother; and being institutionalized twice in a mental facility by her mother. She suffered uncertainty and instability during her mother's obsession with men and her compulsive shoplifting. She lamented that the only mother-daughter relationship she had with her mother was when she accompanied her mother on shoplifting expeditions. Anna said her mother was an incessant shoplifter who actually taught her how to steal. Anna recalled her mother dressing like a teenager and bringing different men home every week. Anna, who was in jail for shoplifting at the time of the interview, blames her mother for her own addiction to stealing.

> My mom used to take me with her to steal…I started stealing really bad - I'm addicted to stealing and I started going to jail for stealing…I wanted to stop but something wouldn't let me stop.

Ned's unique story revealed that he had always dreaded an arrest for one or both of his parents. Before Ned was seven he had witnessed his parents' excessive drinking and their "knock-down-drag-out fights," until his dad committed suicide in jail. Ned said his father's suicide began his mother's downward spiral and ruined any chance of a healthy mother-son relationship. So Ned was not surprised when his mother wound up in jail.

> Oh God, both of them were incarcerated at different times in my life…well, let's start at about five or six, my parents were alcoholics…one or both of them were in jail or in treatment centers or something together.

Life became intolerable for Ned in between his mother's drinking and jail jaunts. Between the age of seven and sixteen, Ned was verbally, physically and emotionally abused by his mother and was left home alone many times to provide for himself and his sister. Ned said that his mother was pathological in many ways, "suffering from mental illnesses, on top of being a raging alcoholic, on top of being a drug addict, on top of being a sociopath." For Ned, if his mother did not get cured after going through a

treatment program three times, she was not curable. Ned recalled living in a constant state of instability and uncertainty with his mother from the time he was seven until he was emancipated at 16 years of age. Ned said his mother would do anything to continue to support her addiction to alcohol and drugs even it if meant giving up parenting. Ned recalled a time when his mother temporarily quit drinking. “My mom stopped drinking but that just made all the other craziness more evident. So she got to be even more conniving, even more manipulative, even more of that feeling of entitlement.” Ned said that his mother taught him how to lie to bill collectors, how to make drinks for her and her friends, and how to cook, clean and do laundry – all by the time he was seven years old. He said he had to do all of those chores because his mom was always inebriated.

> Honestly from the time I can remember until I finally moved out when I was 16, my mom was nasty and mean to me! There was this whole period from 1980 to 1981 where my mom was charged with every crime under the sun from forgery a dozen times to drunken driving to child abuse to child endangerment and neglect to hit and run…I mean you name it – any sort of stupid thing to keep from (a) having to provide for us on her own and (b) anything to keep drinking everyday – it was gruesome!

But what Ned deemed most scarring was when he was seven years old, his mother told him that she did not want him anymore. “I mean the physical stuff didn’t affect me as much as the emotional stuff – I remember once … my mother took me to the courthouse parking lot, told me to get out of the car and walk in there and tell somebody she didn’t want me and they should try to find me someplace else to go –I was just seven years old!”

Since many of the mothers were engaged in drugs and prostitution as stories in the next section reveal, one can speculate that most of the participants and their mothers were living in economic instability even though only a few participants stated that. Yakima said her mother went to prison as a result of trying to provide for her daughter. (I knew

from having taught her brother Seth that her mother engaged in prostitution.) While Yakima did not reveal feeling any sense of instability or uncertainty, she never mentioned her mother's prostitution. Her mother delivered Yakima's baby brother Seth just before she was sentenced to federal prison. Since Seth was born just before his mother was sentenced to federal prison, he had to spend his first three years being raised by Yakima and their grandmother.

Living in instability gave many participants a sense of dread that an arrest was inevitable. Some who had gotten used to the day-to-day upheavals, seemed more confused by the arrest than shocked. Some just knew their mother was gone and was not coming home.

The Arrest and Events Following

Only one family appeared shocked by the arrest. Siblings Kara, Kenny and Randy felt as though life with mom was perfect. The children had a good relationship with their mother. Kara even bragged of being a "mama's girl." Kenny said the family had started a better life because they had moved to a better neighborhood and had begun attending a school they really liked. Their mother had a job as an insurance agent. The family saw no warning signs or felt no dread of impending crisis prior to their mother's arrest. Then one day they came home from school and saw their house in disarray. Kara said she remembered seeing trash everywhere. Kara and Kenny thought they had been robbed.

Kenny and Kara's story is unique in this study because their mother, Imani, did not suffer from drug or alcohol addiction. All three children were too young to understand what was happening to their mother. They just remembered their auntie saying, "Well kids, your mother is going to be gone for a long time." Only in retrospect did they realize

that their mother, Imani had been involved with a friend who was an addict working with an undercover agent. The addicted friend was an informant pretending to buy drugs from foreign drug lords; she asked Imani to be the go-between because the foreigners did not trust her. So, the DEA and the informant set up Imani to be the go-between. Imani was arrested for conspiracy and aiding and abetting. She explained that she defended herself.

> I took my case to trial because I really believed in justice at that time and I had never been arrested and never had a record. Conspiracy is a broad legal trap because I did know it was illegal and I associated with people who actually did it. But who did I aid and abet—the DEA and the informant is who I aided and abetted.

There was no intermediate jail term for Imani like mothers of some participants had. Subject to mandatory drug sentencing, she was sentenced to eight years in a federal prison on charges of conspiracy and aiding and abetting in a drug deal. The judge told her he knew it was entrapment, but his hands were tied. The arrest, trial and sentencing ended the better life that Kara, Kenny and Randy had been experiencing.

Unlike Kara, Kenny and Randy, Lamar was raised by his father until he was two when his father died. His mother then became his primary caregiver. Lamar was about five or six when he noticed what he recalled as being his mother's strange behavior. She was spending a lot of time in her bedroom with a number of different men. When questioned, his mother would say to him, "Baby, I'm sick." Only later did he realize his mother was engaged in prostitution and drugs. He was 11 when she went to prison.

> My father died when I was two, so I really didn't know that much about my mother before. I started staying with her after my father died. Yeah I was about 11 when she went to jail. I don't remember how long she was in there basically. I remember I was something like in the fourth of fifth grade.

Lamar was embarrassed at his mother's imprisonment and the reason for her imprisonment.

> Back then when a mother went to jail, everybody knew—community knew it; schools knew it; friends knew it, family members knew it because that's not something you could hide--the fact that she went to jail for prostitution made it even worse

Although Nora and Myron are sister and brother, their childhood experiences were quite different. Her father's sister adopted Nora when she was an infant; so, she thought that her aunt was her mother. Myron was 13 and Nora was 17 at the time of their mother's arrest. Nora and Myron, in separate interviews, both claimed to have never known why their mother was incarcerated, "We never knew why – we just never talked about it."

Reyna was only two at the time of her mother's arrest and only remembered being scared because her mother, a single parent, did not come home and no one knew where she was. Reyna had four older brothers who were also minors. Only when child protective services got involved did the children find out that their mother had been incarcerated. Reyna recalled this first arrest.

> The first time it affected me was when I was little and my mother left for jail and nobody knew where she was and my oldest brother was forced to take care of all of us and I was two years old and that lasted about a week because child protection was wondering why he was coming to school with the same clothes on you know? So they pulled us out and we all went to different foster homes – every one of us!

At six years old, Rakeem could only sense that something was wrong because his mother was selling all of their belongings and having him say goodbye to all of his friends. Rakeem said since there was no close relative living nearby, the court gave his mother a month to get all of her things in order. She sent him to live with relatives in another state. Rakeem remembered being frightened as he boarded the airplane all by himself, without his mother.

> Yep, I had my little teddy bear. Yes because I will never forget the feeling. It was like this lady, the stewardess grabbed me and it was a White lady stewardess. I looked at her like what is this and who are you?

Ned and Leona were both seven when their mothers were incarcerated for the first time. Ned's mother was back and forth between jail and treatment centers for drug and alcohol abuse multiple times. Leona's mother was never around much prior to her incarceration, so it was never apparent exactly when she went to jail. Leona said she currently suffers from severe depression, so her memory of past events seemed a little confusing at times. It was also apparent during the interview that Leona was extremely low skilled and therefore had difficulty expressing herself.

> She [mom] didn't care about me or none of her other kids as that could goes and we found out that she went to jail and that was even harder on me. So basically my mother in my family hurted [sic] me real bad, real, real bad. That's why I'm taking medicine now. I have to stay calm.

Leona said she was not sure when her mother first went to prison or whether her mother was just in and out of jail. But she made it clear that her mother was always "drinking a lot and running the streets." So when Leona's mother left, Leona said she just thought her mother was "running the streets again."

Elise said that her mother was in and out of jail often, but had only recently been sent to prison. Elise's mother was still serving prison time as we spoke.

Lela and Reyna's mothers were in and out of prison many times. Lela's mother first went to prison when she was three years old and was released from prison when Lela was seven. Lela and her mother lived in cars, shelters, cheap motels and on the street while her mother engaged in prostitution and danced at clubs. For Lela, this work was a means of survival for her and her mother. Lela and her mother lived a nomadic life until she was nine, at which time she was reunited with her biological father.

Lela said she endured multiple beatings, which sent her to the hospital, had been force-fed crack cocaine, and actually witnessed her parent's drug bust. Her mother's drug use prior to Lela's birth resulted in Lela being born crack-addicted.

> My father and mother were addicts; so I already had this in my system and I was just praying to God that I would never use; but I ended up using drugs – lost my children. I have actually had to go to treatment because of this.

Lela spent the majority of the interview talking about her life as a parent more than her childhood with her mother and father. She said her father and mother are still married "to this day" because her mother never believed that her biological father sexually abused her. Lela's mother accused her of wanting to break up the marriage.

As described in chapter three, since Reyna's mother was arrested when she was two years old, Reyna only remembered that her mother never came home and no one knew where she was. Her oldest brother, who was also a minor, took on the parenting role until child protection intervened. Reyna said her mother "did a little stint for drugs" until she was five years old. Then she reunited with her mother until she was nine years old, at which time, her mother was arrested again for drug use and possession. Reyna never reported any physical abuse by her mother.

Lucy, who described a violent incident in her home, said it was hard for her at nine when her mother went to jail. Her mother's incarceration stemmed from the fact that she shot someone that her son was fighting. For Lucy, her mother was only trying to defend her brother, and she did not feel that her mother should have been incarcerated for shooting someone in the foot.

> My life that I grew up as a child…well my mom...my brother had got into a domestic with some other guys and my mom went and got her gun and she shot him in the feet. She didn't shoot him in anything above but she went to jail for it and they took my mom away from me at a young age and it was kind of hard for me…

Some participants were thrust into cycles of separation, disappointment and loss because of their mother's repeat incarcerations. Psychologist, Dr. Tim said that when a child is emotionally devastated by a mother's coming and going, that child's ability to function becomes impaired; whereas other children may be able to reflect on their situation in ways that allow them to gain insight into the situation. Dr. Tim said that the latter are the kids with the ability to cope, although that was not the case with most of the participants in this study.

Staying in Touch

My monthly visits to Statesville prison convinced me of the importance of children maintaining contact with their mothers. The most profound moment of those visits was when the children decided to tell the mothers how they felt about their being incarcerated. The children were asked by their social worker if they wished to say anything. Two children passed on speaking. Eight-year-old Mahalia did not want to speak to the group but rather handed a note to her mother's best friend, Casey. Mahalia had written the note to her mother and asked Casey to read it aloud. Mahalia then put her head down and covered her face. The note read. "Mom, I miss having you tuck me in at night." Everyone in the room, me included started to cry. Then other children began to tell their mothers how they felt about their mother's drug use and her not coming home at night. With tears in her eyes, Tracy told her mother, "You always said you were coming right back but you never did…you never did – I would wait and wait and wait, but you never did, Mom!" Even children who had passed on speaking earlier began to tell their story. Tracy's older sister Karen said she was tired of lying to her friends about her mother's whereabouts. At that point, Tracy's mother chimed in saying, "I always told my children

not to hold back on how they felt about me; it helps with healing. I said don't let that monster control your life – when you talk about how you feel it release its power over you!" A lot of the children just talked about how much they missed their mothers while others told stories of how they coped in their mother's absence.

Only one child maintained her position of silence. Her mother later said that when she was using drugs, she would always tell her kids, "Now don't you put our business out there in the streets!" For the mother, demanding silence was a way to keep her drug use a secret; but for the child, silence was a way to remain loyal to her mother.

During another of my visits to Statesville prison, Brenda told me that she needed to see her mother every month to make sure her mother was not using drugs because she was having recurring nightmares that her mother was using drugs again. Brenda said her older brother was still very angry with their mother and refused to visit her. But Brenda said seeing her mother sober on a regular basis helped her forgive her mother and gain a sense of closure. Brenda had witnessed a tragic incident between her mother and grandmother as a result of her mother's drug use. Brenda saw her mom trying to snatch a purse out of her grandmother's grip and as a result, a struggle ensued and Brenda's grandmother died of a heart attack. Visiting her mom with the aid of the social worker gave Brenda the courage to confront her mother about the incident.

Endia and her mother held hands throughout the entire visit. It did not matter if they were sitting, standing or walking together – they were either embraced in hugs or holding hands. On one occasion, Endia's mother was off-count for her prescription medication. This was a major infraction of prison regulation so Endia's mother was not allowed to visit with her daughter. Endia called the prison officials, social workers and other

officials begging them to let her mother attend the meeting because her mother had mistakenly taken too many prescription pills. What makes this story unique is that this was not about visitation and Endia getting to see her mother. This was the meeting where all of the mothers would get together without their children to recap their last visit with their children. Endia was simply protecting her mother from punishment. Several participants said they felt the need to protect their mothers regardless of the turmoil they had put them through. Apparently, Brenda's need to see her mother sober was a form of protecting her mother from further harming herself. One of the incarcerated mothers said when she talked with her son by phone he said, "Mom, it's time to stay away from those drugs because we need to work on being a family again; so don't go back to using."

Cassandra, the social worker who accompanied the girls on their visits revealed that on their trip home from visiting their moms, one of the girls said, "Wow, I feel lighter!" When asked what she meant, the little girl explained that being able to tell her mother for the first time how she felt about her incarceration made her feel "lighter." Cassandra told me that the girls in her group always felt the need to protect their mothers. However, when space for them to talk was opened, they somehow felt comfortable enough to share their feelings.

There is research evidence that continuity in a mother-child relationship is imperative, and during my visits to Statesville prison, I experienced the importance of that continuity. Yet only three of the participants with whom I had formal interviews, Troy, Yakima and Leona recalled visiting their mother in prison. While Yakima and Leona never elaborated on their visits, Troy said that he had the option of seeing his mother two times

monthly. He opted for once every two months because he wanted to break away from the fact that she was incarcerated.

Troy described a time when he had to wait half an hour just to see his mom. Then he only got time for a hug and they had to leave. Troy said, "That kind of beats you up a little, you know?" Troy did not really elaborate on why their visits were cut short, only that they had to endure searches. Although Troy expressed a sense of sadness each time he visited his mother in prison, he was equally grateful to have an older brother who took him to visit his mother.

Even though Yakima's mom was in a federal prison hundreds of miles away, she was able to visit her mother because at 21, she could drive her brother and grandmother to the prison. Yakima recalled, "Yes, I went to visit her and it didn't really bother me because I was older. At the beginning it did because like I said – I turned to drugs."

Although some participants said, "I never wanted to see my mother again," others could not see their mother because of transportation issues. Imani's children Kara and Kenny said that they suffered from not being able to see their mother because she was too far away. Kenny recalled, "Out of them whole seven years, we only seen my mom…I want to say one time …right before they transferred her [to federal prison] or something." Kara said her life spiraled out of control because of not being able to see her mom.

> … so yeah, it was bad - not being able to see my mom. She called…we talked but then after a while with all the collect calls and all the bills, we weren't able to talk to her and we weren't able to go see her…we didn't have the money to go see her. So she was gone all those years and she was the only person I trusted to talk to.

Rakeem and Elise also had transportation problems. Elise said that she talked with her mother over the phone because she was unable to visit her. Since Rakeem's only

relatives were in Michigan, he had no choice but to be transported across country hundreds of miles away from his mother's prison in California. Rakeem explained,

> I got to talk to her [mom] every now and then in prison. I never went to visit her because it so far you know...

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Evidence shows the importance of transportation to make prison visits possible. According to Travis and Waul (2003), "despite the problems associated with visitation, evaluations of current visitation programs underscore the benefits of these efforts; the Snydor-Joy (1998) mother-child visitation program provided 40 mothers with special monthly visits in addition to regular visits and the Sesame Street program (Fishman, 1983) provided children and families with special playrooms next to the adjacent visiting rooms" (Travis & Waul, 2003; p.213).

In the course of my study, I discovered only two local prison visitation programs. The Girls Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB), which provided visits to Statesville prison and the American Charity Association (ACA), which provided visits to a federal prison for women. As mentioned earlier, GSBB was part of a larger nonprofit organization for girls only. The ACA relied on a group of kind-hearted judges, Judges Visitation Fund (JVF) who provided funding for the program. Children and their caregivers could visit incarcerated mothers at a women's federal prison over 600 miles away. ACA accompanies busloads of children and their caregivers four times a year for a weekend overnight stay in a nearby hotel. The children visited their mothers Friday evenings, all day Saturday and Sunday mornings before heading home.

While the Statesville prison visitation program provided great resources for families, there was never a time when the mothers and children could ever be alone together; guards or social workers surrounded them. (I was not allowed to use the restroom unless

someone was standing just outside the door.) One mother in the GSBB program requested a private goodbye with her three girls—yet the only privacy she was allowed was a quiet, little corner on the floor of the gymnasium where the rest of us were saying goodbye.

Reconnecting with Mom after Prison

Studies show that a mother's release from prison rarely alleviates a child's feeling of turmoil. Years of separation, compounded by a mother's failure to successfully reintegrate into society, can impair a child's ability to reconnect with his or her mother (Corrections Today, 2008). According to participants in this study, their relationships with their mothers before incarceration had great bearing on how well they reconnected with their mothers upon release. Most of the narratives showed that it did not seem to matter whether the mothers were gone for long periods of time or whether they were constantly in and out of participants' lives, the majority of participants had a difficult time adjusting to their mother's return home. Some struggles were due to financial problems and other struggles were due to their mother's own turmoil and failure to successfully reintegrate into society. Three mothers went to prison only once and returned home for good--Rakeem and Troy's mothers and the mother of Kara, Kenny and Randy.

At the time of the interviews, siblings Kara, Kenny and Randy's mother, Imani, had been out of prison for eighteen years, yet only recently has the family started to heal. When their mother tried to return to her parenting role upon her release from eight years in federal prison, the children said, "But, Mom, we don't know you!" Imani recalled a very painful event not recognizing Kenny, her 18-year old son.

> When I got off the bus, I walked right past my son [Kenny] because I didn't recognize him – he said, "Mom, it's me, Kenny! I burst into tears and my son said, its okay, Mom…everything is going to be okay.

The road to recovery for Kenny, Kara and Randy's family has been long and hard. They talked not only about the psychological trauma they experienced during their mother's incarceration but also the financial struggles their mother has had to face upon her return to society. Kenny told me that his mom would always say, " God bless the child that has his own." Yet, he was wondering when that was going to finally come true for his family. Kenny said at least he was very thankful that his mother was released from prison in time to see him graduate from high school. Though a joyful event, it was not without pain. When Imani was invited to sit up front in the parent section, the auntie who had raised Kenny and his siblings during Imani's imprisonment became hurt and resentful complaining, "I should have been the one sitting up there in the parent seat—I raised him for eight years."

Kara and her mother have started to rebuild their relationship but not without difficulty; Kara said at first she blamed her mother for everything that went wrong in her life. She once berated her mother,

> How can you do something so stupid and leave us like that especially me. I used to be like "…you ain't my mama – you ain't nothing to me – you left me to deal with myself!"

Kara has apologized and told her mother that she is very proud of her since she has come home. As I write, the family is still healing from their mother's incarceration.

Troy's mother was released after serving five years in prison. Troy said he wished his mother had been in and out of his life rather than just going to prison and staying.

> She [mom] went and stayed…that was the hard part… if she had went in and came back and went again – okay, she's going to be juggling around but for her to be gone the period of time that she was…that's what really hurts.

Troy was one of the participants whose mother was in and out of his life a lot before her incarceration. Thus, his mother's back and forth lifestyle was more familiar to Troy than his mother's prolonged absence. At the time of the interview, Troy said he had forgiven his mother and wished her well, but warned his younger brother not to depend on his mother too much. Troy, trying to protect his little brother from the pain he had endured, explained,

> …When my mom comes around, he's holding onto her, laying on her, wanting to do things with her and I'm like you can't set your hopes that high that they are going to come through – they might not…so I'm trying to teach him don't depend on everybody – he depends on my mom a lot…well anybody depends on their mom a lot and he really does, so that's one thing I don't want him to be doing.

Ambivalent Feelings about Mother

After all they had experienced, some participants expressed unconditional love for their mothers; some seemed to vacillate between loving and hating their mothers; while others said that they wished their mothers had never been a part of their lives.

Unlike most of the participants who vacillated between loving and hating their mothers, Ned was adamant about wishing his mother had never been a part of his life. After becoming emancipated, Ned tried distancing himself from his mother. He received a full academic scholarship to a local University, joined a fraternity and moved into an apartment with friends. Ned lost contact with his mother for three years. However, when someone informed him that his mother had been hospitalized, he stopped in the middle of an important speech he was delivering, ran to the nearest airport and flew back home to be with her. When he saw his mother in a coma and it seemed hopeless for any recovery,

Ned said, "I guess she's going to die – it couldn't happen to a nicer person." But his mother did not die; she recovered completely and stopped drinking for three years. Ned, who was previously adamant about his mother not being a part of his life, told me that he was so proud of his mother's sobriety that he bought her a new car. However, his mother's sobriety was short-lived. When she got drunk, wrecked the car in a hit-and-run accident and blamed his sister, Ned lamented,

> I guess…well there's an old saying that says… if you have a drunken chicken thief, it makes him a bad chicken thief but if you get him to stop drinking, it doesn't make him stop stealing chickens, it just makes him a better chicken thief.

On several occasions during interviews, participants expressed a love-hate relationship with their mothers. Anna said, "I love my mother but then I began to hate her because of what she did to me," referring to being physically abused by her mother. But during the interview, when another participant told Anna that her mother was hurting, so she wanted everybody else to hurt, including her kids, and that Anna needed to find a way to get over the abuse and heal, Anna quickly snapped,

> I don't hate my mom – I don't hate my mom. I love her very much because she kept a roof over our heads; but I will never forget what she did to me…what she made me go through. But I don't hate her – I love my mom!

Leona said she loved her mother and missed her a lot after she died. Yet, she continued to express concern over the fact that her mother would leave her alone all the time when she was a child. Even though Lela lived in cars, motels and shelters with a mother who physically abused her, she blamed most of her turmoil on her father. She never expressed hatred for her mother, only for her father; yet, she eventually forgave her father.

> …So I thank God that I faced that ghost – I love my father…I won't forget what happened but I can forgive him.

Reyna talked about countless cases where people would find out about her mother's incarceration, and she said, "I would just get mad, blow up and fight…that's me you know. I always defended my mother." However, Reyna said that when she was fifteen, her mother came and got her again, upon release from prison and took her up North. Reyna mockingly said her mother was ready to "play mom and all that shit; but at fifteen it was a little late to be playing mom." However, Reyna told me she loved her mother and wanted to give her a chance, but was sick of having to defend her mother to the rest of the family and everybody else.

Myron initially said that he did not want to be like his mother and get caught up in the type of lifestyle she lived. Myron later said he credited his success to his mother's entrepreneurship.

> …So I thank God that her incarceration did not stop me from getting to know her as a person – to know that she loved her children…to see mom at both ends of the spectrum really had a heck of an influence in my life.

Yana also showed ambivalence toward her mother during the interview. She said she now considers her mother her best friend, but blamed her mother for leaving her with mean relatives. Yana said her relationship with her mother was much better because her mother was saved, alluding to her mother being a Christian. Throughout the interview, Yana appeared very confused about her relationship with her mother. One moment Yana kept repeating how much they were best friends and the next she was seemingly distressed that her mother did not reveal her paternity sooner. Yana lamented,

> I found out when I was thirteen and a half going on fourteen, that my mom was raped and was raped by my grandfather and my dad wasn't my dad, my

> grandfather was supposed to be my dad. So that pretty much right now let's me know why he hates me… I drifted away from my mom. I drifted away from my sisters and brothers… all my life since I was like five years old, I was like the loner. I was always like the odd ball.

When Yana's mother surprised her with a visit at the jail in the middle of the interview, Yana seemed very excited to see her.

Kara explained how her feelings for her mother have shifted.

> For me, it was harder than my brothers because I was a like a mama's girl and that's all I knew was my mom, so it's like still a struggle—I'm struggling from way back.

Kara scolded her mother saying, "How can you do something so stupid," but later recanted when she had her own child while living on the streets. Kara explained,

> I had to realize that what she did … it was for us. It wasn't that she wanted to do it – she was just backed up in a corner…just how I was…to be in gangs and be selling drugs – it was just I was backed up in a corner – it was survival for me.

Kara's ambivalence points to the larger economic forces many of the mothers of participants in this study had to face.

Analysis

Study participants' strong desire to talk about their mothers steered the interviews in a direction that, in retrospect, I should have anticipated. Each participant's central focus was on the relationship with his/her mother before her first arrest, during the time she was incarcerated, and for some, the relationship after incarceration.

The next section first presents an analysis of this chapter's data from an interactionist theoretical perspective that is concerned with meaning-making. It then moves to using concepts from Foucault's theory of power to look at those meanings within the power dynamics in which participants' families' lives were embedded.

In interactionist terms, the core meaning of participants' lives was tied to relationships with their mothers. "Meaning refers to that which is in the mind or the thoughts of a person … meaning is embedded in the stories persons tell about their experiences" (Denzin, 119). Each spoke of the particulars of his/her situation: The numbing realization that one's mother would do anything to support her drug habit; the fear when mother did not come home one day; the trauma on the day of a mother's arrest or on waking up one morning and realizing mom was not there. It did not matter whether mothers were incarcerated for an extended period of time in prison or in and out of their children's lives serving brief jail terms, the painful narratives revealed child-mother relationships filled with uncertainty and instability, as well as hurt and anger. According to the Women's Prison Association (2007), imprisoning a mother can issue the final lethal blow to an already weakened family. As the family disintegrates, children experience prolonged periods of instability and uncertainty.

Regardless of painful experiences, many participants showed unconditional love for their mothers. Kenny wanted to do well in school so his mother would look like a good mother. Even participants who were highly critical of their mothers defended them to anyone else who dared to criticize. Reyna's need to defend her mother not only affected her relationship with relatives but also her school life. Some participants recalled acting like parents to their mothers though sometimes with faulty judgment not surprising in a child. For example, one of the girls visiting at the prison tried to cover for her mother when her mother's prescription pill count was off. She did not want her mother to be trouble. Ned said at seven he was doing laundry, paying bills and fixing drinks for his

mother and her friends. Lamar and Rakeem supplied drugs for their mothers, fearful they would get tainted drugs from the streets.

Other participants expressed ambivalent, sometimes anguished feelings. “Every human situation is emergent and filled with multiple and often conflicting meanings and interpretations” (Denzin, 2001, p.46). Anna spoke of a love-hate relationship with her mother; saying in the same breath, “I love my mother but I hate her because of what she did to me.” Kara was very angry with her mother for leaving, and devastated when her mother left her in the care of a father who raped her. As an adult mother herself, Kara’s feelings shifted to a new appreciation for her mother. Even Ned, who vowed to never see his mother again, jumped on the nearest flight once he heard she had been hospitalized. After he befriended her when he was an adult and she returned to drugs, he concluded, “I was put in a visible, deviant position because of her. I didn’t screw up. She did.” Nora resented her mother but was grateful for the five months of taking care of her before her mother died. Troy, who regarded his mother as a best friend before she went to prison cautioned his little brother to avoid being hurt by not putting too much trust in their mother. Some participants had epiphanies or turning-point moments (Denzin, 2001) about learning from their mothers how they did not want to live their lives. Lela had an epiphany that though she had promised herself never to be like her mother, she had become like her mother, in prison with her children left behind. She felt sad, lost, and overwhelmed.

Participants’ stories concentrated largely on their feelings about their mother’s actions although some recognized the struggles their mothers or adults caring for them had faced. Kara, now raising a son, realized what her own mother’s financial struggles must have

been. She also remembered how difficult her aunt's financial situation was when she took in Kara and her siblings. Yakima recognized that her mother's prostitution was a way of providing for her daughter. Most other participants did not talk about the conditions in which their mothers lived or the external forces affecting those conditions.

As I pointed out earlier in this manuscript, the principle of ethnographic fallacy warns researchers not to overlook the larger structures in which subjects' lives exist. "Sometimes participants are unable to comprehend the obstacles and opportunities in their lives, the pressure and constraints they may have faced, and thus the possibilities of particular outcomes independent of their own actions" (Duneier, 2003, p.343). I heeded this methodological caveat to look beyond the face value of what participants said. How is it that they, even as adults, did not realize what their mothers were facing?

Using a Foucauldian perspective, I considered that participants as children, and now as adults, lived within a prevailing discourse about women incarcerated for drug use and discourse about standards of motherhood. Discourse creates a distinctive worldview filled with language reproduced over and over again (Foucault, 1980, p. 69; Zerai & Banks, 2002, Campbell, 2000). For Foucault, prevailing discourse results in regimes of truth that align with those who are charged with saying what counts as true (1980).

As evidenced in this chapter, most participants' mothers were poor, single and heads of households. Whether the mothers were engaged in illegal activities to support their drug habits or to survive poverty, the mothers were doing whatever they deemed necessary to survive. "The macro-level inequities that shape these women's lives and identities remain hidden, thus normalizing women's experiences of social, economic and political subjugation" (Golden, 2005, p.78). Most of the mothers were fighting both

addictions and poverty. Elise's mother would steal checkbooks not only to support her drug habit but to get bailed out of jail. Lela, Lamar, and Yakima's mothers engaged in prostitution to survive economic hardship. Reyna, from jail, talked about her own life as a mother, "When you are hurting and in pain, you will do anything—bad checks, drugs, anything to cope with the pain." But women who use drugs to dull the pain of poverty and abuse have been subjects of dehumanizing discourse, which "represents the way we define the problem of maternal substance abuse, the way we construct women addicted to cocaine, and how we locate them on the social landscape" (Zerai & Banks, 2002, p. 142). Making incarceration rather than treatment a first order response, thrusts the mothers into "abstract consciousness" (Foucault, 1977, p.9; Golden, 2005 p.2) and their children into the "other America" (Golden, 2005, p.79). Golden asserted:

> Understanding of both a mother's imprisonment and her children's plight demands an examination of the negative reality that families face daily in the "other America." Children of poor, single mothers of color experience violence that is pervasive and daily.

Zerai and Banks (2002), expanding on Foucault, claimed that "discourse is potentially the most powerful weapon of those who wish to dehumanize African American women struggling with addiction to crack." According to Campbell, who also applied Foucault, "Discursive practices construct a social reality that resides in our language in general and speech practices in particular; which allocates power, authority and legitimacy" (2000, p. 101). Campbell contended that dehumanizing discourse functions to create distinctive versions of the drug problem that was harsh in its treatment of women without resources (2000). "When women violate gender norms by using illicit drugs, they are represented as spectacular failures – callously abandoning babies or becoming bad mothers, worse

wives or delinquent daughters. Such violations invite attempts to govern women by targeting their behaviors and decisions" (Campbell, 2000, p. 3, 4). A corrections officer accused participant and mother Lucy of having the worst record he had ever seen. Campbell asserts further that addiction has figured as a feminine attribute with women being blamed for dragging young men and babies along the path to addiction. "Drug related films conveyed to a larger audience the tenacious governing mentality that women are responsible for 'reproducing' addiction" (p. 73).

Some participants' descriptions could be interpreted to show that they participated in dehumanizing discourse about their mothers. Elise called her mother lazy for wanting to move into a shelter because for Elise "you get free stuff." Elise viewed her mother's wanting her to forge a check to bail her out of jail as manipulation not seeing the possibility that her mother wanted a way to get home. Lela and her mother, often a prostitute, spent their lives in and out of shelters, strip clubs, and slept in cars; Lela was unable to articulate the possibility that this life style was a means of surviving economic hardship. Golden's perspective could explain these participants' lack of understanding of their mother's situations. "Being subjected to powerful images of uncaring, parasitic welfare cheats, prostitutes, and drug addicts detracts scrutiny from colonial histories, policies, and laws that maintain a racialized system of social inequity" (2005, p. 57). Gramsci's concept of hegemonic ideology further explains how people enthusiastically embrace oppressive ideology as their own when in actuality it works against their own best interest (Brookfield, 2005). "We ascribe to a culture that is successful at getting us to 'consent' to our own oppression and exploitation" (West, 1982, p. 93).

The complexities of participants' lives challenged assumptions made by dominant discourse on the concept of mothering or motherhood. For example, dominant discourse asserts that how well children adjusted to having a mother incarcerated largely depended on the quality of the mother-child relationship before her incarceration (Morton & Williams, 1998). However, the Boudin (2007) and Johnson (2005) studies challenged assumptions under that assertion. Boudin wrote, "The population under study should be understood in its own context because social, cultural, economic, political and historical conditions all create options, limits, and possibilities" (2007, p. 36). The Johnson study acknowledged, "The concept of mothering and motherhood cannot be narrowly defined using mainstream ideology" (2005, p. 123).

Nevertheless from what they said in interviews, many participants in my study, even though they were fiercely loyal to their mothers, still held their mothers to mainstream ideology or dominant discourse of what constitutes good mothering. Kenny, for example tried to do well in school so his mother would look like a good mother. As participants remembered their childhoods, they were still lamenting about what happened to them as children and still wished their mothers could have given them a more secure home life. I can interpret what happened for them and their mothers through the lens of regimes of truth and dehumanizing discourse, but for most adults I interviewed, their lenses were personal and all about relationships with their mothers. Professionals may find Foucauldian analysis helpful in understanding how to change conditions for children of incarcerated mothers, but first they must listen closely to the personal narratives of those children.

The next chapter turns to what happened to the children after their mothers were incarcerated. While research has shown that children with mothers in prison will move at least once during her incarceration, most children described in my study moved multiple times. According to Harden (2005), if in those moves children find a stable family life, the deleterious effects of incarceration, poverty and its associated risk factors will have less of an impact on them. In the next chapter participants talk about their memories of living with relatives or foster families when their mothers were jailed or imprisoned. For most, the journey continued to be painful.

Chapter 5: On the Move

Once a single mother is sentenced to either short-term jail time or long-term imprisonment, she can no longer be physically present in the home, and minor children who cannot make decisions for themselves, are in essence, "on the move." Except when they ran away, research participants, as children, did not have a voice in where they lived. Relatives or sometimes social services made those decisions for them. With few exceptions, they had to accept their living situations. In Rakeem's words, "It was nothing I wanted. It was chosen for me."

Since 16 of the participants in this study were minors with mothers as their primary caregivers, they were forced to move when their mothers were incarcerated. The number of times participants remembered moving ranged from one time to 30 times. (See appendix A for the pattern of moves for each person.) Three participants, Troy, Rakeem and Yakima moved one time; four participants, Kara, Kenny, Randy and Lamar moved at least two times; five participants, Anna, Elise, Yana, Reyna and Myron moved five times; Lucy moved over six times; Lela moved over eight times; and while Nora never had to move (she was adopted as an infant), Ned had to move as many as 30 times; 26 of which were to different foster homes. In Troy's case there was an intermingling of foster care and relative care as he sometimes referred to his grandma as a foster care mom. Leona did not describe moving but only said she raised herself along with her nieces and nephews. Seven participants ran away at one time or another in the sequence of their multiple moves, and the courts ruled one participant (Ned) as emancipated at age 16.

When participants described their moves as children, what was important was not how often they moved, which created a lot of disruption and uncertainty in their lives, but

the quality of experiences in a new place, experiences which sometimes forced them to move again. They moved because relationships in a household, for whatever reason, broke down, and as minors they had little or no choice but to allow adults to decide for them. Sometimes they left nurturing living arrangements to live with abusive caregivers. Sometimes the move was from one abusive household to another.

The previous chapter described children's relationships with mothers who were imprisoned and in and out of their children's lives. This chapter focuses on children's lives and relationships without their mothers as they navigated from place to place living with relatives, in foster homes or living on the streets as runaways. Working within the theory of interpretive interactionism, the chapter details the impact of the many moves and the meaning participants made of their multiple relationships as they were shuffled about. The analysis section examines the data from an interpretive interactionist perspective then deepens that analysis with Foucauldian theory to show how disciplinary power flows throughout society.

In Relatives' Care

Since most of the children's fathers were not living in the home at the time of the mother's arrest, participants recalled that they were taken in by other relatives. Recent statistics show that when mothers go to prison, only 37 percent of children remain with their fathers (Schirmer, Nellis, Mauer, 2009). As this study revealed, living with a father might or might not be a nurturing experience.

Siblings Nora and Myron recalled having only positive relationships with their father even though he served time in prison. Myron said his father helped raise him, and Nora said her father always made sure she had what she needed. But Kara recalled, "My

brothers, Randy, Kenny and I first moved with my father so we wouldn't have to go with child protection and get split up." Her father had temporary custody, which he lost when an aunt discovered he had molested Kara (discussed in abusive relationships). Only a few other participants mentioned having a father briefly involved in their lives.

Elise's father sued for custody after discovering her involvement in her mother's check fraud, but was only assigned temporary custody for a year while her mother was incarcerated. Elise had a guardian ad litem during the custody battle. Her dad fought for custody during her mother's jail terms but Elise was not comfortable living with him and went to live with her grandmother instead.

> When I was 13 and mom and dad had…,.uh a custody battle going on, why was he needing custody, you know…it was like okay, you know…I was not used to him….staying with him….me and him got into it really bad and I came back over here (grandma).

Lamar was raised by his father until he was two. Ned's father committed suicide in jail when Ned was seven. Lela's stepfather had temporary custody, which he lost because he raped her at age three (discussed in abusive relationships). With both parents incarcerated, Lela navigated her way in and out of foster homes and shelters for several years until she said she was introduced to her supposed biological father when she was nine and sent to live with him. Lela said there is still no father listed on her birth certificate. All of the other fathers were either in prison or permanently absent from their children's lives at the time of a mother's incarceration. Leona had never met her father and had no idea who he was.

Like Kara and her brothers, most of the participants revealed that their families wanted to avoid having to deal with child protection agencies. Yana, Lucy and Reyna said that older adult siblings took care of the younger ones, which leads me to speculate

that child protection may not have been informed that the mother was incarcerated. Only one participant, Reyna said that child protection eventually intervened, and this was only after the schools reported her situation.

The data point to the many dynamics in the quality of relationships between the participants and their grandparents, dads, aunts and uncles, and older siblings as they moved from place to place. There was a wide range in the length of stays at each residence as well as a wide range of experiences; some homes were stable and nurturing, some homes lacked stability, yet were not abusive; other homes were downright abusive. Some participants were shuffled back and forth from stable homes to abusive homes. Others actually thought they were living stable lives at the time, but in retrospect, realized that they were living in what Rakeem refers to as "normalized chaos." The evidence shows that the participants who experienced positive and nurturing relationships with their relatives immediately after their mothers' arrest moved only one time and stayed.

Stable and Nurturing Relationships

Researchers working within dominate discourse categories for what makes a good family describe stable and nurturing families as those which consistently promote the well being of the whole child; homes with characteristics of warmth, emotional availability, stimulation and family cohesion (Harden, 1998). Typically, participants used those categories to judge their families.

Six participants, Troy, Yakima, Elise, and siblings Kenny, Kara and Randy recalled living with stable, nurturing relatives at some point; but only two participants, Troy and Yakima moved to nurturing, stable environments with their grandmothers immediately following their mother's arrest and remained there throughout her incarceration.

At the time of the interview, Troy had become a success story; he was still living in a stable environment with his grandmother and was preparing to finish high school. When I asked Troy about his future, he replied,

> Right now I'm just trying to put things in the past and I realize I have a life now and I need to make sure my life is right before I can help somebody else's…I'm just really trying not to look back – it would be too much. I just really want to get my life going so that I don't get any more behind than I already am.

Not all participants who lived in positive environments had positive outcomes. Yakima's story is unique because she lived in a nurturing environment with her grandmother; yet, her life spiraled out of control. Even though Yakima remembers her grandmother providing a very safe and stable home for her and her infant brother, the pain of losing her mother was too overwhelming for her to bear, and she turned to alcohol and drugs as a means of self-medicating. Yakima explained,

> I didn't have that mother-daughter relationship you know, because it was always just me and my mom …when she went to prison, I felt that emptiness inside and I turned to drugs and alcohol looking for the answer. I just used drugs for the pain – you know…but it didn't help at all…but I never stopped using, never went to treatment.

Yakima said even though she was struggling with her addictions, she still managed to help her grandmother take care of her baby brother who spent the first three years of his life with his grandmother. Yakima said when she tried to leave her baby brother with her grandmother, he would always cry to be with her.

> I tried to leave him with her [grandma] while I was out doing whatever I was doing but he cried all the time…he wanted to be with me; but I was so deep into my addiction, I never stopped to see…but he was okay – he wasn't mistreated or none of that.

Yakima as an adult was incarcerated three times on drug charges during two of which she was pregnant the entire time. The first time she was incarcerated while pregnant, the

judge released her from federal prison to have the baby, but the second time she delivered the baby in prison.

Like Troy, Elise, too, had become a success story at the time of the interview and still was living with a nurturing grandma while preparing to go to college. But unlike Troy, Elise had a mix of relationships. While Elise never mentioned having been abused or maltreated in any way, her life was unstable from the time she was 11 until she was 14. During her mother's earliest jail terms, she lived in shelters. She was also shuffled around a lot; she lived with her brother and his girlfriend, the mother of her brother's girlfriend, for a year with her dad, and also her mother in periods when she was out of jail. At 14, Elise finally found stability by moving in with her grandmother permanently.

Siblings Kara, Kenny and Randy also had a mix of relationships. They found stability with a nurturing aunt, but only after a failed relationship with their father with whom they lived for a little over a year. Thanks to their aunt, Kenny was able to finish high school on time. Kenny recalled,

> I mean I just really thank my auntie - man … that she was there. She was the one who stepped up and took care of us all them years…she was working hard trying to take care of five kids…I mean we specifically stayed with my auntie them whole seven years that my mom was gone!

Instability and Neglect: Non-Nurturing Relatives

Some relatives tried caring the best way they knew how, but things did not work out well for the children. Some participants blamed themselves for the chaos, others blamed their caregivers and some were unable to ascertain that they were actually living in chaos. Rakeem's story is a prime example of a child living in an environment that he and his relatives came to think of as normal. After being forced to fly across the country to live

with relatives he had never met, Rakeem at age six entered a home marked by instability and neglect. While his relatives did not physically abuse him, they were engaged in very harmful behaviors. Rakeem's grandparents along with his uncles and aunts were heavily involved in the drug trade. Rakeem recalled,

> My family was drug infested-- period … you come in the house and there would be pancakes and sausage and eggs – it was crazy – we normalized the drug culture! But I've seen stuff you couldn't imagine … I've seen people get beat in the face like beat to death. …It was nothing I wanted – it was chosen for me.

It was not clear during the interview whether Rakeem physically lived with his grandmother or with his uncles or whether he moved back and forth between them. He only talked about how his grandmother and grandfather and his uncles were all involved in raising him. Rakeem said his grandmother did not like him and would treat his cousins better than she treated him. This hurt him.

> My grandma showed favoritism all the time you know…so that made me bitter…one time she [grandma] spent all her money up in prison and bought him [cousin] this lambskin coat and I got socks and deodorant…I always wondered why that was…yeah because she liked uncle Ace who was the master mind behind my whole family – he was really the one who introduced us to the drug culture. Back in the 70s you know; and my Uncle Cliff and the youngest was Uncle Dan and everybody was addicted to drugs. Uncle Dan was an alcoholic; Uncle Ace was addicted to heroin; Uncle Cliff was addicted to heroin and my Aunt Chloe also.

Unlike the relationships Troy, Elise and Yakima had with their grandmothers, Rakeem was forced into a relationship with a grandmother he did not know, a grandmother who made him feel unwanted and who was engaged in criminal behavior. Rakeem said that having to live in that environment just made him emotionless and tough. "I didn't know anybody but my mom …didn't know none of them; so it was like here you go [to live with strangers]…it made me a chameleon because I learned how to wear two faces at all times." Rakeem said that since he never told anyone about his

family's drug business, he could become a student in school and be a drug-dealer-gang banger at home and on the streets. Rakeem said that he lived this chaotic, drug infested lifestyle with this family until he was 17, at which time he himself was incarcerated.

> …That lifestyle started off into the other stuff though – it destroyed them – it really destroyed my whole family because we ain't never been a real family. Once my uncle got incarcerated the whole family got arrested one after the other…what was so crazy is right before my mom got out [of prison], my grandma got locked up – locked up for the same thing…child porn, cocaine, got caught…her and my uncle got popped at the same time…. there was always someone in prison every couple months.

Rakeem did not define his situation as abusive – only as "the situation you get into when your mom goes to prison – it turns into survival so you don't want anybody to tell you what's right or wrong – what's wrong is that you've got to go into this house and deal with that, and you can't change that!" Rakeem said sadly that thanks to his environment, he was destined to go to prison. Although Rakeem said he mostly formed bad relationships with known drug dealers and gang bangers, he recalled having a positive experience with a family of his closest friends.

> I would look at what normal people were doing…I had friends – the Brooks…their mom was an alcoholic but their mom and dad were there. I would be over there all day every day…they didn't have much but they were normal. They loved me.

Reyna and Lamar, although not physically abused, lived in emotionally harmful and belittling environments. Reyna and Lamar's aunts tried to provide somewhat of a nurturing environment, but there was always someone in the household reminding them of their mother's transgressions. When Lamar and his younger sisters went to live with his aunt and uncle, Lamar recalled, "My uncle would always tell us, you ain't going to amount to nothing – you're going to be just like your mama." So Lamar said by the time

he reached 15 years old, "it didn't matter one way or the other" because he really did not care anymore. Lamar said he always had this "thing in the back of his head" that told him he was never going to be anything anyway so whatever he did wouldn't make a difference. He explained,

> By the time I was fifteen, it really didn't matter what I did – I was getting in and out of trouble, going to jail, getting into things I had no business. I really did not care one way or the other.

When Reyna moved in with her aunt, it was the second stop in her journey. Reyna at two years old had started out at home with her brothers trying to raise her until she was discovered by child protection, sent off to foster care and finally to a nurturing aunt who stopped the foster care adoption process. But Reyna's aunt, although well intentioned, often chastised Reyna. While she never abused Reyna and tried to provide her with clothes and food and guidance, Reyna said she was sick of defending her mother to the rest of the family.

> I would always be told you're just like your mother! You act just like your mother! You remind me of your mother – and it pissed me off!

Reyna, like others, was guilty by association and arguably paid the price for her mother's transgressions through emotionally harmful remarks by relatives entrusted to care for them. Reyna said those remarks made her decide to leave her aunt in the middle of an adoption attempt and go back to her mother who stopped the adoption. However, when Reyna's mom landed back in jail, the adoption went through and Reyna's aunt became her legal guardian.

> …So they took us and put us back with my aunt and uncle – this time they wanted to adopt and they did…she [mom] got out of jail again and this time I had a really bad drug problem – my aunt and uncle couldn't handle me anymore; I was fighting…I just didn't give a shit about nothing you know?

Abusive Caregivers

Clearly, moving in with relatives to avoid foster care did not guarantee a better life for the children because some relatives were abusive. Intervention by child protection was not evident in most of the participants' stories. Lela was only three years old, but Kara and Reyna were both nine, and Lucy was 12 and certainly capable of self-reporting the abuse. Eight of 17 participants said that they were either physically abused, sexually abused or both. Most disturbing is that fathers of some of the participants – a parent they thought they could trust - raped and sexually molested their own daughters. Kara, Lela and Reyna were abused by their own father or stepfather. The decision to leave the children with their fathers, although disastrous, was a family decision.

When Kara was eight years old, she was raped and sexually molested by her father after being in his care for only a few months. Kara lamented,

> I was probably seven going on eight and we stayed with him (dad) for a couple of months and in the process, my father raped me – he molested me when that was supposed to be the person I had trusted!

Kara only said that her aunt suspected that something was wrong; so she removed Kara and Kara's brothers from their father's home and brought them back to the State along with her aunt's two children, to start a new family life. However, According to Kara's brother, they were forced to live with their father for a year before being rescued by their aunt. Kara did not want to reveal any more information about her relationship with her father during that year she and her brothers were forced to live with him. Imani, their mother, said in a talk to mothers and daughters at Statesville prison that when she

found out in a letter that Kara's father was raping her, she wanted to break out of prison (in four interviews with me, Imani had not revealed this).

By the time Reyna was left in her stepfather's care, she was nine years old and had journeyed from a family of siblings trying to raise themselves to abusive foster parents, who tried to adopt her, to being rescued by an aunt who also tried to adopt her to being taken back by her mother who then left her in the hands of an abusive stepfather. This is what Reyna recalled.

> …Now my step dad at the time - he was a member of Hells Angels and I was left in his care…and when I was nine he shot me up with dope and I was raped by somebody who came into our house…that lasted for a little bit until he didn't come home – he ended up in prison for like fifteen years.

Reyna said there were a lot of sexual abuses that she did not want to discuss in the interview; but due to a traumatic event when she was nine years old, she will never be able to have children. She explained,

> …So I mean, there's a lot in between – there's a lot of sexual abuse; there's a lot of B.S. – I don't really like to talk about it. I guess the biggest thing…I don't have any kids which is good. I can't because of an episode that happened when I was nine. I won't ever have kids in my life! I'm kind of glad that I can't though because if I had kids right now, it would be ten times harder because I harbor…I have drugged this with me my whole entire life – I've drugged this pain.

Lela recalled being three years old when she was forced to use powder cocaine and was sexually molested by her stepfather. At age nine, she was raped again by her biological father. Lela said that while her stepfather was arrested for the abuse, her biological father never owned up to the abuse, and her mother accused her of lying to break up the family. She was left in the care of both of these men by her mother. Since Lela never revealed how her stepfather's abuse was discovered, it remained unclear as to why child protection never got involved when she was abused the second time.

> …I love my dad to this day – I won't forget what happened but I can forgive him…and the only way I can forgive is to ask God to please let this man confess in some way and he spoke to my kid's godmother which …she used to be my foster parent – he went to her and told her I can't change what happened in the past but I love my daughter and I know I did wrong …he never told my mom.

Lela was one of several participants who said that she was abused multiple times. (After her stepfather's arrest for sexually molesting her, Lela continued in a downward spiral. She was in and out of foster homes until fifteen when she dropped out of school, became addicted to drugs and engaged in prostitution to nourish her addiction—repeating her mother's transgressions.).

Lucy and Anna were also abused several times by different caregivers and described their horrifying experiences of being abused over and over again as they moved from place to place.

As the youngest of 18 children, Lucy had many siblings old enough to take care of her. Unfortunately, many of them were abusive or had abusive partners. Immediately after the death of Lucy's mother, she moved in with an older married sister whose husband sexually abused Lucy when she was 12. Lucy talked about that experience.

> My brother-in-law would come in the night time and try to have sex with me at the night time [sic]…put his penis in my mouth – you know I went through a lot of abuses by sexual things going on.

Lucy then moved in with her brother who had just been released from prison. Lucy said her brother physically abused her by beating her and locking her in her room because she skipped school one day. Lucy then moved again to another older sister's home and this is how Lucy recalls that experience.

> I went to my sister's home and messed with…her man messed with me…he broke me in at the age of 15…he broke me in so I started having sex with … you know, boys

> and stuff ... all this happened between the age of 12 and 16 - so that was how I grew up being a kid.

Lucy recalled being both physically and sexually abused repeatedly from age 12 until she finally ran away at age 16.

Anna told of being molested by two of her mother's boyfriends. Each time Anna's mother went to prison, Anna was left with her mother's then-live in boyfriend; so, Anna said she moved in with different relatives to get away from her mother's abusive boyfriends; yet all of her relatives treated her badly.

> My mom was in jail when I was eight and I had to live with all my family, and they treated me bad and then when my mom got out she got with this guy and he molested me…then she left that guy and then went with some other guy and he molested me too…

It never became clear whether Anna ran away from the abuse to live with relatives or whether they rescued her from the abusive men.

In and Out of Foster Care

Although there has been an increase in foster care placements over the past two decades, recent studies suggest that the number of children of incarcerated mothers in foster care remains relatively small (10 percent). Data in this study support this finding, as many of the participants said that relatives took them in to avoid foster care. The data also showed that child protection was not present at the time of arrest. Only one participant, Reyna, mentioned that child protection intervened, and this was only after the school staff noticed her brother wearing the same clothes day after day. As a result, one could speculate that their mother did not reveal she had children at the time of arrest and that there is a growing distrust among families of the child welfare system. Much of the literature also supports this finding.

A 2003 study on critical issues in child welfare (Shireman, 2003) blamed the current child welfare crisis on thirty years of under-funding child welfare agencies, which led to hiring people who were not professionally trained to deal with the crisis at hand. However, a 2008 study revealed that many families will not seek the help of child welfare for fear that their mother's incarceration or another family member's criminal history may be exposed resulting in the child's removal from the home (Hairston, 2008). In addition, while working on a children of incarcerated parents' initiative for a nonprofit agency, I discovered that there was no police protocol in place to involve child protection at the time of arrest. Police were only required to secure the area for safety. Child protection was only called if child abuse was suspected.

Based on interview data, three key assumptions can be made on foster care: Child protection is not automatically called at the time of arrest; the participants' families did not solicit the help of the child welfare agencies at the time of arrest; and foster homes did not necessarily provide a safe haven for the participants. My conversation with a social worker, Jim, at Statesville prison, revealed that there is a disconnect between people in academia and upper-level management and those working at the ground level (like social workers). As an example, Jim explained a typical situation, "Upper management [at the prison] has a meeting and someone makes a decision and they all go along with it and it turns out to be illegal!" Jim was referring to a situation where in the past, imprisoned mothers were required to fill out paper work prior to a visit with their daughters. Then during a meeting of prison officials, someone in upper management decided that the children's caregivers rather than their mothers would be required to fill out the paper work – taking control and responsibility away from the mothers. The

mothers were never told this. Jim told officials, "That's illegal – you can't just make a decision like that! The mothers still have legal custody." Jim also stressed how people in positions of power do not really know the law and therefore make unfair assumptions that once a mother is incarcerated; she automatically loses all of her rights. Some states have actually deemed a mother unfit based solely on her status as an incarcerated mother (see literature review).

While five of the 17 participants (Troy, Lela, Ned, Reyna and Kara) mentioned being placed in foster care at some point, only three participants (Ned, Reyna and Kara) talked in detail about living with their foster families. Lela briefly mentioned having spent time in foster care. "I was placed in shelters, foster homes all the way up to the age of seven…my mom got out (of prison) and we lived on the streets." Lela did not elaborate on what life was like with her foster family, only that her mom came and got her upon her release from prison. However, Lela said she appointed her former foster mom as the godmother of her five children, a sign that the foster home experience had been nurturing for her.

Troy said that he went to his grandma as a foster care child, "My older brother was the first person to step up …even though he wasn't living with me …he stepped up big time, then my grandmother came in and ever since she's been there."

Of the three participants sent to foster care, there were no long term placements. Their mothers or other relatives were able to get the children back at will. Kara was placed in foster care after calling child protection on herself simply because she said she did not like living with her strict aunt. She elaborated,

> I used to call the people [child protection] on myself thinking that if I was in foster care, life would be better but in reality it wasn't because once I got there it was like I wanna go home … then after that - so yeah it was bad.

When Reyna and her brothers were discovered by child protection to be raising themselves, they were placed in foster homes. Reyna explained what happened in the foster home.

> Me and my brother went to the same foster home—they were sexually abusing me when I was two years old, they beat my brother and wouldn't feed him. They wanted to adopt me but the adoption was stopped because we've got Indian blood in us, and my auntie wanted us and she is part Native and you can't stop that when your family wants to take you.

Ned would often run away from his mother in between her jail jaunts. Once he ran away from home and spent three weeks in a boxcar after his mother bashed him in the face with a vodka bottle for eating all of the hotdogs. Ned said that he actually felt a sense of relief while living there. He was in and out of foster care as many times as his mother was in jail. He described a cycle of foster home placements that totaled 26 in all.

> It would literally go like this: my mom would do something, I'd get stuck in a foster home, she'd be in jail for two weeks or something; they would let us out [Ned and his sister] on Thursday and by Sunday we'd be back in a foster home again – a different one each time…Honestly, from the time I was eight until I was 16, I had been in 26 foster homes, three group homes... they stuck me in jail a couple of times because they didn't know where to put me. That was trip because I couldn't think of any specific incidence where I had done anything to have my life pulled apart.

Ned as an adult was able to put his experience within the larger context of how the foster care system works. He said the system cannot handle the cycles of a mother's arrests and her children needing care. So in his opinion the child is ultimately blamed.

> Even social services got tired of arresting the same people over and over; pulling kids from the same parents' care over and over because they don't know where to send them so they start ignoring it. So they say, "aw, we are tired of wasting the taxpayer's money," and they have sent her (mom) to treatment many times, so they figure it's the kid's fault.

Ned did have one very nurturing foster family experience, which nearly led to adoption.

> There was one foster family that was very wealthy that wanted to adopt me and they ended up having to basically kick me out of the house because they were so afraid my mom was going to sue them…my oldest daughter is named after that foster family…I mean the greatest foster family I ever had – the greatest family ever!

Ned's complex journey through foster home and group homes finally ended at age 16 when the parents of his best friend, Shawn, invited Ned to live with them. He had known Shawn since they were three and went to the same church where Ned said his mother sent him every Sunday "to get rid of me for three hours so she could get hammered." He and Shawn attended the same high school where both were on the swim team. The move to his friend's home lasted only seven months when Shawn's mother asked him to leave. No explanation was given. For Ned, that was okay, "I just moved from one crazy that I know to another I don't know--I did not know how to handle that at all." Ned said he had enough and went to court to request emancipation.

> For the first time, there's no way you can tell me I did anything wrong – I had sort of outgrown that. I wasn't a hard to be around kid, I did well in school, I was an athlete. I said fuck it! I'm not going back to the foster care system; I'm not going back to group homes; I'm not going back to jail; I'm not going back to state hospitals – I'm not doing it…so I went to court and the judge said what do you think I should I do with you? I said you should just leave me the hell alone!

Ned convinced the judge he would use his social security benefits from his father's death to cover living expenses.

> I said I can do this – I've been doing this for quite a while. When a parent dies, the child gets social security benefits…because I was in foster care, that social security money was supposed to be getting put into a trust – so I should have enough money to finish the last two years of high school and go to college right?

The judge granted him emancipation, but the day Ned was to move into his new apartment, he found his mother had emptied his trust fund. Once again, Ned was forced to move; this time into a studio apartment with two other young men. Ned lamented,

> So I'm 16, in high school with no job and no money and it's the middle of the month and I don't get a social security check until the middle of next moth – so what do you do – the first thing you do is find a job – the second thing you do is find some place to live so that's what I did…I slept on the floor of a studio apartment with two other guys.

He attended high school during the day and worked after school until midnight—living in survival mode from month to month until he finally graduated from high school.

Runaways: We Moved Ourselves

Ned was not the only one with running away stories. Others who ran away said they did so because they felt like outsiders that did not fit in with the family. Others said they missed their mothers, but most of them said they ran away to escape the abuse. Participants who were abused multiple times remembered feeling like there was not much more that could be done to them that had not already been done; so they had developed a take-risk mentality. They eventually ran away from abusive caregivers. Lucy, Lela, Anna and Reyna had been abused multiple times before they decided to run away. Some participants lived on the streets and recalled surviving by self-medicating with drugs and financing their drug use by engaging in prostitution. Some as teen girls ran into the arms of abusive men; some lived in abandoned buildings, and others joined gangs and sold drugs to survive.

Reyna's story was unique because she remained on a continuum that fluctuated between abusive relationships and non-abusive relationships until she finally ran away to live with her sister in an abandoned apartment building. With both her mom and

stepfather incarcerated again, she refused to go back to her aunt (who had successfully adopted her by this time) and decided surviving on the street was better; she and her sister moved into an abandoned apartment building which she called “rent free” and sold drugs to survive. Reyna remembered,

> I couldn’t work because I missed a court date – I couldn’t do that so then you know you start selling drugs because my whole family sells drugs at this point – everybody …so that spiraled my drug addiction…

Yana recalled running away from verbally taunting siblings to encounter physical and sexually abusive men on the streets. She said she felt like a loner. Family members ridiculed her, calling her the milkman’s baby because she did not look like her siblings. Yana said that when she found out that her grandfather had raped her mother, and that he was actually her father; it made her realize why the family hated her and verbally abused her. She recalled,

> I found out when I was thirteen and a half going on fourteen that my mom was raped by my grandfather and my dad wasn’t my dad – my grandfather was supposed to be my dad…so that pretty much right now let’s me know why he hates me – because I’m his daughter not his granddaughter.

She described her life on the streets.

> I drifted away from my sisters and brothers – I turned to the streets trying to find somebody to love me and got pregnant at age fourteen …he died…met somebody else – got raped at knifepoint…kept the baby…started using crack; spiraled out of control kept running into these men beating the hell out of me!

Lucy said she married an abusive man when she was on the run at only 16 years old. At the time of the interview, Lucy was still married to this man, and they had nine children together; the youngest was five. As Lucy sat in jail, she lamented,

> I have a fourteen year old that’s dun had a baby and I know it’s hard because she only visited me one time and I’ve been here [in jail] six months! …and I haven’t had a visit from my husband because he’s not a man that comes to prison and I been with him 26 years – since I was 16.

Lela at age 15 and Anna at age 14 said that they also ran into the arms of abusive men when they ran away from home. Both girls became immediately involved in drugs and prostitution while living on the streets. Lela recalled,

> At the age of 14 – 15, I tried prostitution and almost got killed…I've been pimped; age 16 had my first child and because of my reputation…people knowing I was being abused, they thought my oldest child was by my father.

Lamar was the only male participant who said that he had an abusive relationship with his partner while surviving on the street. He described his life as a runaway.

> I was a known drug seller – known gang banger – straight up rotten apple … I was rebellious toward people period – not just the law but people period …the way I was brought up women were a bunch of shit they ain't gonna do nothing but lie to you – use you so don't let them get close to you.

Kara, ironically, never ran from her abusive father but later ran away from the nurturing aunt who had rescued her from her father. She said she ran because she missed her mother, and because her aunt was too strict.

> You know I couldn't talk to my auntie like that [like with mom] because me and her didn't really have that type of relationship. My auntie was more hard-core…I couldn't deal with that – that's what made me run away a lot too

Kara said that if she got into any trouble, she just wouldn't come home; she would rather be on the streets than get a "butt whooping."

Analysis

Interactionist theory requires a close look at how participants made sense of or meaning of what happened to them after their mothers were incarcerated. It was important to me to honor their words, their ways of explaining their experiences. Once their mothers were no longer present, children needed caretakers. A father would be the

first one on whom they could depend, but most of the children in this study did not have a father living at home at the time of their mother's arrest. Lamar's father raised him until he was two. With the exception of Nora and Myron who said they had positive experiences with their father, the few participants who did have fathers briefly in their lives described the relationships as either negative or abusive. Elise remembered being forced to live with a father she did not know as a very negative experience; Kara and Lela's fathers abused them, and Ned, at seven, was traumatized by his father's suicide. Lucy's words expressed the understated resignation with which children made meaning of what had happened. "They took my mother away from me at a young age and it was kind of hard for me."

Participants described being forced to move in with other relatives - grandmothers, aunts, uncles or older siblings – they had no choice in the matter. As data in this chapter show, they felt helpless over their mothers' absence. Their private troubles at home had pushed them out of their homes and most often into fresh troubles. They had nothing to say about where they moved or how many times they had to move. They were powerless over the multiple abuses they had to endure within moves. Rakeem's words summed up how the children made meaning or interpreted their situation. "It was nothing I wanted. It was chosen for me."

I approached this research with the assumption that children who remained with a relative during their mother's incarceration would be safe and cared for, but as the evidence shows, that was necessarily not the case. With the exception of six who had some good experiences with their grandmothers, there were few or no positive relationships with relatives. The instability and uncertainty participants had experienced

living with their mothers intensified when she left, was heightened with each move and often exacerbated by abuse and manipulation. Rakeem realized that as a child he had come to accept a chaotic living arrangement as normal. By telling himself that the drug use and violence in his relatives' home were normal, he was able to survive.

As evidenced in this chapter, even relatives who were not abusive were not particularly effective as caregivers. One can speculate that the stress of taking on additional family members may have contributed to the familial conflicts.

Participants who moved only one time and lived with nurturing grandmothers sometimes still felt like outsiders. Many told stories of feeling a sense of loneliness and isolation. Troy who had a stable relationship with his grandmother said his cousins would taunt him about his mother not being there for him.

What children experienced in foster home placements challenged the very meaning of child protection. According to interactionist theory, many times social programs designed

> to alter and shape the lives of troubled individuals are based on faulty or incorrect understandings. The understandings these social programs are based upon bear little relationship to the meanings, interpretations and experiences of the persons they are intended to serve. (Denzin, 200l, p.3)

Data in this chapter show no evidence that children's perspectives or interpretation of what was happening to them counted in decisions about their living arrangements.

Some participants' feelings of helplessness ended when they decided to challenge decisions made for them and make their own decisions – for good or for ill. These cumulative epiphanies were "interactional moments that left positive and negative marks on people's lives. It is in these problematic interactional situations where the individual confronts and experiences a crisis that often erupts into a public issue" (Denzin, 2001, p.

37). When Ned refused to go to another foster home, group home, or any other temporary caregiver, he went to court and fought for and was granted emancipation at age 16 - Ned had had enough of his mother's abuse and manipulation. Reyna, Yana, Anna and Lucy refusing to tolerate any more verbal, physical or sexual abuse decided to run away – risking their lives on the street, and Kara decided to call child protection on herself because she thought it would give her a better life. Thus participants' private painful experiences were thrust into the public sphere once they confronted their troubles. Ned's emancipation led to a positive direction, but as in case of runaways, life on the streets led to more destructive behaviors.

Interpretive interactionist theory addresses how power is actualized in human relationships and how it permeates every aspect of social life (Denzin, 20001). The data analyzed in previous paragraphs using interactionist theory shows how participants in the study experienced being powerless as children. Foucauldian theory goes further to explain,

> disciplinary process that flows through bureaucracies, policies, laws and social images prepare society to accept coercive measures as necessary for the protection of the common good. Surveillance and regulation of the dangerous and helpless people is possible through controlling images that mark them as outlaws, social cripples or at-risk-populations that need fixing. (Campbell, 2005, p. xxiii)

In moves to relative care and foster home by adult relatives or social agencies, children were marked as needing fixing.

Data in this chapter match earlier findings that when children are assigned to a relative's care, there is little or no screening to determine the fitness of the relative caregivers (Krisberg et. al. 2001). Even states like Oklahoma with statutes in place that assign the placement of children of single custodial parents to the responsibility of the

court, showed no evidence that the courts were actually placing children. Prior Oklahoma studies only showed that children were being placed in homes with a history of abuse (Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001, p 36). A child's place was to accept the living arrangements made for him/her.

It is ironic that child protection agencies intervened in the lives of runaways attempting to raise themselves, only to place them in foster homes where there was as much danger of their being harmed as there was the possibility of their being nurtured. Kara had enough confidence in the system to ask Child Protection to place her in a foster home, but she was sorely disappointed. Children in foster homes under supervision of child protection were not protected from neglect and even sexual abuse. Nobody seemed to have kept track of the children and there were no checks on caregivers' quality of care. Ned observed that Child Protection was simply overwhelmed trying to monitor foster care. Using a Foucauldian perspective, the children marked as at-risk and needing to be fixed were also marked as "o.k. to overlook."

> The problem is not the callousness of the individuals responsible for a child after mom's incarceration but the mechanical indifference of multiple bureaucracies each of which functions according to its own imperatives. These bureaucratic exigencies, rather than children's experience, become the lens through which policies and protocols are drawn up and assessed. (Bernstein, 2005, p.11, 12)

While the law prohibits minors from living alone in a household raising one another, Reyna interpreted the intervention of child protection as an infringement on her family. For Reyna, when her older brother took charge of the family, at least she and her siblings were still together and felt safe. When social services intervened, not only did each sibling go to a different foster home but Reyna and her brother were abused by their foster parent and were powerless to do anything about it. Reyna's story exemplifies the

dilemma that while social programs are required to keep minors safe, the norms and standards on which the programs rely are not necessarily effective.

In Foucauldian language participants had knowledge of what was good for them, but representatives of institutions as well as most adults in their lives considered their knowledge to be naïve knowledge (Foucault, 1980, p.82). Elise, at 13 had knowledge about who she wanted to live with, but no one listened; so, her father whom she barely knew was awarded custody with negative results. Ned had knowledge about a nurturing foster family which he deemed the perfect fit; yet he had no choice in the matter – the family, fearful of a lawsuit by his mother dropped the adoption process. Ned lamented that children, if given the chance, have the ability to decide what should happen to them – they are just made to feel like they don't have rights in the decision making process. In Foucauldian terms, the children's knowledge was subjugated knowledge and not recognized by the regime of truth about the place of children in society. Children's knowledge belongs to "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task…low down on the hierarchy" (Foucault, 1980, p. 82).

Because many participants could not see the asymmetrical power dynamics within their lives, they accepted the emotional, physical and sexual abuse layered onto their lives as normal. Most disturbing was that participants remained powerless because the environment in which they lived provided scant resources and few options to nurture any resilience. Eight of the 17 participants were abused in this study – yet no one reported it. While some participants were too young to report the abuse, Lucy was 12 and capable of self-report. Even Kara and Reyna ages eight and nine respectively could have self-

reported if they had someone they could trust. But most children with mothers in prison either blamed themselves, their mothers, their race or their gender (Golden, 2005).

One of the most damaging effects of this abuse is the participant's inchoate sense that people who abused them did so out of love. Lucy, Lela and Yana had been abused so long by their caregivers that they began to choose relationships with men who abused them as well … equating it to love.

Participants who were not physically or sexually abused suffered emotional abuse. Being scolded by caregivers; "you are just like your mother – you are going to be just like your mother" evidenced how even vulnerable families had become entrapped into believing the dominant discourse which held their vulnerable families accountable for their difficulties. What happened to the mothers greatly affected the children they left behind. As many participants as children had internalized the social stigmas and stereotypes assigned them by dominant, dehumanizing discourse, they lived a silenced, stigmatized existence.

Whether participants were moving from place to place or running away from home, there were multiple encounters with others, individuals and organizations beyond the household. Schools, especially certain teachers, social services, courts and other organizations became involved. The next chapter will present participants' perspectives on the relationships they experienced with people beyond the relationships of their daily living arrangements. As the stories in chapter six demonstrate, institutions such as social services described in chapter five that should have provided much needed services, with few exceptions, did not do so.

Chapter 6: Encounters with Institutions

Participants' childhood stories of navigating among various social institutions beyond their households revealed a continuum of uncertainty and powerlessness. This chapter details their experiences with schools, mental health services, legal systems, community services and recognition of their economic situations while growing up with a mother incarcerated.

In this chapter, although I use data primarily from the adults I interviewed, I also use interview data from professionals and data from settings where I was a participant observer. I have interwoven professional perspectives with participants' childhood experiences, juxtaposing children's needs with professionals' understandings of those needs. Interpretive interactionism speaks to the "interrelationship between private lives and public responses to personal troubles and identifies assumptions made by various interested parties" (Denzin, 2001, p.2). In other words, I will show how school, court and correction professionals' responses to situations that mirror the participants' meaning-making were based on assumptions made from their own social locations.

Again, in the analysis, I examine the data through the lens of interactionist theory; then more deeply show how private troubles point to asymmetrical power relations. Foucauldian theory was use to examine relations of power using concepts of discourse, regimes of truth, disciplinary power, and governmentality.

In and Out: School Life

Schools were necessarily a major part of participants' growing- up years. According to state law, as minors they had no choice but to go to school; yet, only five of the 17 —

Elise, Nora, Kenney and Myron earned high school diplomas. Myron earned his later in life, and Troy, a senior, anticipated graduating on time.

Ned got a GED, and Lamar got his GED after serving one and a half years in prison for drug charges and winding up in prison several years later. Ned, Myron and Nora completed college and went on to receive advanced degrees. Elise was attending college at the time of her interview. Anna, Lela, Lucy and Yana dropped out of school; Kara was kicked out, and Reyna's mom took her out of school; all six of them were also runaways. Rakeem was incarcerated on drug charges before he could finish high school. Leona and Randy failed to finish as well but did not share that part of their story.

Elise and Troy experienced the least disruption in their educations, remaining in the school they'd attended before their mothers' incarcerations. Troy described a stable school experience although with an alternative schedule.

> The school kind of knew my situation since I went to my grandma as a foster care kid. I do morning and night school—so that's my main thing trying to get credits so I can graduate to show people--you know--you can do it.

Elise found solace in school, commenting, "School was a way to be normal." She explained,

> …So I mean school was pretty stable, so yes that was no problem – it was different; like when I would be in school, I would be somebody different like I wasn't thinking about being at home…yeah - and a way to be normal.

Even though school gave Elise a sense of consistency, she felt sad that she had to lie to friends about her mother's whereabouts. "I was lying a lot. People would go, where's your mom? Oh, she's out of town or stuff like that."

Though Kenny went to a new school after moving in with his aunt, he was able to remain there, focus on his studies and play sports. He wanted to make his mother proud of him, and as noted in chapter four, his mother was released in time to see him graduate.

> …The main thing they are always stressing is finish school – graduate – finish school…so that was my first goal you know, I was like if I could just do that; she [mom] would be proud and people couldn't say aw… she wasn't a good mother. So I kind of focused myself on school and sports – you know, just so she could be proud and not feel bad…because you know that's the reason I pushed myself to finish school.

All others described moving schools as often as they moved households. Katie Moore a special education attorney for Megatropolis school district, talked about how extremely difficult it is for students who move not only to new schools but to new households.

> The whole in and out of school is hard enough on a child from a stable home environment who must move two or three or four times a year, much less for a child who is not in a stable environment…different school – different home environment…I don't understand how they survive at all - I just shake my head.

Part of surviving being in different settings was enduring others' curiosity and sometimes ridicule about why all the instability. Ned explained,

> When you are 13 and another kid asks, "Why are you getting on the school bus at that house now—you don't live anywhere near that place," you either had to lie or say nothing because telling the truth means you're guilty by association.
> …So you're asked questions you are forced to explain – why are you in this position because your parent isn't in that position at that time when you're on the bus and you're thirteen – so there's no buffers or boundaries there at all - and of course with kids, there's no questions they won't ask…clearly "you" have done something to be in this position and you're not equipped to handle that at that age…you're not equipped to say, you know what? My mom screwed up – I didn't do anything wrong.

Missing Mom: Acting Out Unresolved Grief in School

Dr Tim, an adolescent psychologist who works with families of incarcerated parents talked with me about what he observed in school-age children having to cope with stress, trauma, disappointment, separation and loss when their mothers become incarcerated.

> Grieving issues need to occur and often do not because people may not be willing to talk about the situation in very much detail. We love as children or teenagers with the expectation of being loved back, and when we reach out to a parent who is emotionally inaccessible – we revert to a more manageable behavior like anger.

Kara and Rakeem were explicit about how missing their mothers caused them to get into trouble in school. Kara recalled,

> So with me missing my mom a lot, I started to get into trouble – I went from a straight A student to getting Ds and Fs…I really didn't care about nothing no more because I felt like people didn't care about me…especially the [school] system.

Rakeem described fighting in his earliest school years when he was six and started school while living with relatives he did not know.

> …And so my first year or two in school were terrible – I was fighting all the time…cutting up you know because I missed my mom…I didn't know none of 'em – just my mom because I was young.

Reyna, Kara, Rakeem and Yana talked about fighting a lot in school. Yana said she started fighting a lot in school at age 14 when she found out that her grandfather was really her biological father.

> …At fourteen, I started fighting, getting into trouble, looking… turned to the streets trying to find somebody to love me and when I was fourteen – I got pregnant.

Reyna remembered how feeling a need to defend her mother affected her school life.

> …there's countless cases of me going to school and people would find out somehow about my mom and I'd always get really mad and I'd just blow up and I'd fight…that's me you know – I'd always defend my mom.

By the time Reyna reached fifteen, she said her aunt could no longer handle her; she was heavily involved in drugs and got into so many fights that the school didn't want her anymore; so, Reyna's mother withdrew her from school promising to take her home and sober her up. Reyna's mom wound up back in prison, and Reyna once again, started working and lived on the streets.

> I was fighting – just didn't give a shit about nothing – so my mom decided to come and get me when I was fifteen - take me out of my school or whatever; actually I wasn't going to school that much at this point because I got into so damn many fights in school they didn't want me there no more so I just decided to start working … I liked work – kept my mind off of things.

Kara was only 12 years old when she was kicked out of several schools in the Megatropolis school district for getting into so many fistfights. She said she was doing "all kinds of crazy stuff," bringing weapons to school, to get her pain out; but "nobody would listen." Kara said when alternative schools did not work out for her, she turned to the streets, joined a gang and got pregnant at age 16. She explained,

> I really didn't care about no school – after a while I ran away…as I was growing up, I just started basically trying to provide for myself – being out on the streets, selling drugs, doing whatever I could do to get money in my pocket…feeding myself – I was pregnant with my first child at the age of sixteen and that was from being on the streets.

Anna did not mention fighting in school but recalled being bad, being labeled with attention deficit disorder and dropping out, a decision she now regretted.

> When I used to go to school, I was very bad, and they would tell me I had ADD…I started using drugs in the sixth grade—just run away and did drugs…I dropped out in the ninth grade. I don't know my times tables…I don't know no math. I have like no education.

Piped from School to Prison

Lamar and Rakeem, both African American males, exemplify the "school to prison pipeline." Lamar was in and out of jail by the time he was 15 and sentenced to prison at 20 on drug-related charges, a pattern of behavior consistent with other family members.

> I think I was about 20 years old I had did a year and a half bit – a year and a half in Maxville [prison] - when I got out it was mandatory for me to get a job…what was funny about that is I was making more money selling heroin than I was working a job although heroin was what sent me to jail…but I figured my mama's been to jail; my uncle's been to jail – shit it's just a part of our life!

Lamar said he had a mentor who tried to intervene once he was released from prison. A local news reporter successfully talked him into getting his GED and got him a job at a local newspaper; but Lamar said that he never stopped smoking marijuana, which eventually led him to gangbanging and selling drugs. By the time Lamar was twenty seven, he was incarcerated for 28 felonies and five misdemeanors.

> …He [mentor] was saying what are you intending to get out of life …I couldn't answer that because I didn't know anything about life and he took me under his wings and sent me back to school – I went ahead and got my GED and started working for the City Daily Times…I'm back with my wife – I've got two kids and she's pregnant with one and I'm looking at my mom – I'm looking at me - it doesn't look right … it's got to be more…I'm smoking weed like crazy – I've got to have a joint to wake up – a joint to lay down if I wasn't going to jail for drugs – I was going to jail for a gun – if you had the drugs – you had to have a gun.

Rakeem said he became heavily involved in gangs and drugs by the time he was 17 years old.

> By the time I got to high school – it was kinda like I had an ego to teach …so what if we're this [drug dealers] I'm still smarter than ya'll! I make A's and I'm president of the debate team - but when that bell rang at four o'clock …I did my other work …I'd go on the block dealing with that [drug dealing]; I got into the drug gang real seriously when I turned 17 …super, super seriously.

Rakeem had a teacher who tried to help him turn his life around. Rakeem explained what happened when his economics teacher caught him on the street selling drugs.

> She drove down on me [in the streets] because I left my book bag in her office and she looked in my file to bring me my stuff and caught me out there… she said, "I knew it!" She took the drugs from me – actually I gave it to her because it wasn't really big…I said here you can have it …she was so disappointed in me, and I was so embarrassed that I told her everything!

Rakeem went to prison at age 18 and concluded, " I became a man in prison." Rakeem said he thinks it was his fate to become locked up so he could become a better person. "I mean some people have to go through the rough stuff ... I went through some rough stuff!"

A Teacher Intervention that Worked

Ned changed schools a lot because he had to move a lot; not only because of the different foster homes, but also because his family kept getting evicted – they couldn't pay the bills. Ned recalled his initial school experience.

> I had severe ADD and all kinds of emotional problems because of my surroundings; yet, I was labeled hyper and rotten because ADD hadn't been defined back then…that said, I was horrible in school…just a hard, hard kid to be around. Even though I was terrible in school, I could read before I entered kindergarten. I could just sit and read it and never forget it.

Ned claimed nobody knew how to deal with him. School administrators stuck him in special education classes where he would "sit and cause even more trouble until I got placed back into regular education classes." It was "a horrible cycle for everybody." Ned said he was the only kid in the State to get perfect scores on every state standardized test, yet he remained six weeks behind everybody in his class. So the school just started

passing him from grade to grade until he reached fifth grade, where his fifth grade teacher failed him; and held him back another year.

> …They were passing me and passing me and finally I got to the fifth grade and had a teacher who just hated me – absolutely hated me and used to smack me…one time he grabbed my face so hard he popped a filling out of my tooth.

Ned did not report the teacher striking him and described school as a misery. After fifth grade no teacher wanted him in their class, so the principal placed him in special needs classes (children with Down syndrome and physical disabilities). Then he finally had a sixth grade teacher who recognized his talent and set him on a new path of independent learning.

> I actually had a really good teacher that brought me in after the first day of school…he goes I know everything about you … he goes listen you read better than me, you read faster than anybody in the city, you spell better than everybody in the district, you forgot more social studies than I'll ever know…the only thing you're not good at is math and science but you're still better than everybody else your age.

Ned's teacher told him that he was only required to spend two hours each on math and science per day and skip all other class work. Ned was amazed at this teacher's treatment. He declared in the interview, "I learned more in sixth grade about science and math than I did throughout middle school, high school, college or graduate school" – all from books his sixth grade teacher gave him. From that time on, Ned never got any grade less than a "B" in school. By the time he reached high school, he was already enrolled in college level courses.

Ironically, as academically gifted as Ned was, he dropped out of high school three months before graduation, even after getting a 35 ACT score and a 1550 SAT score (highest possible score is 36 and 1600 respectively). A setback in his dreams for a college swimming scholarship derailed him.

> The only thing I was disciplined at my whole life was swimming…during swim season I would be at school at 6 a.m. and except for dinner wouldn't leave school till 10 at night – that was my job. I had developed all these coping mechanisms along the way…but after state [competition] I was crushed – had I gotten fifth or better I could have gotten a full ride scholarship – I got sixth.

Because Ned had been emancipated since he was 16 years old, his only source of income was his social security (as mentioned in chapter four, his mother had devoured his trust fund). Ned said since he had "blown his athletic scholarship," he decided to just forget finishing high school; so, he drifted from job to job until at age 22, his college buddies challenged him to take the GED test and move on with his education.

> …One day a buddy of mine says to me…I was like 22 at the time – he said to me, what are you going to do with your life – I said what do you mean? He said are you going to college…you're 22 - he said you could have graduated by now – he goes you're a national merit scholar finalist – you threw away ten thousand dollars a year because you never showed up to claim the prize…. I said yeah I guess I did that - all your athletic scholarships are gone now…what are you going to do? I said I suppose I have to graduate high school first – he said no you don't – just get a GED…

Ned then completed and aced the GED without preparation; enrolled in college, and was awarded numerous academic scholarships and grants. Ned credited his continued success and resiliency to three main factors: A sixth grade teacher who believed in him, being academically gifted and having the right friends.

School response

Participant's stories of how school personnel responded to them matched earlier research that many children of incarcerated parents acting out grief for their loss, wind up being the focus of disciplinary action simply because school staff have not been properly trained to identify or manage such behaviors (Viboch, 2006; Levy-Pounds, 2006).

The education system's responsiveness to students of incarcerated mothers is exemplified in a comparison of teachers' influences on Ned and Rakeem. Although they

came from different backgrounds of race and class, their stories parallel each other. Both had horrific childhoods; both had gifted intelligence; both had great survival skills; both had a teacher who intervened; both dropped out of high school at 16 with high academic standing and both had lots of friends they could count on. The similarity ends there. A teacher intervened with Ned when he was in sixth grade, whereas it was not until he was a junior that one of Rakeem's teachers intervened. Ned's teacher intervened about his studies whereas Rakeem's teacher intervened about his drug use. That earlier intervention for Ned started him on a new path. By the time Rakeem's teacher intervened, he was heavily involved with drugs and gang activity. Ned's new path led him into relationships with new circles of friends. It was Ned's college buddies who led him back to school; Rakeem's friends were gang bangers and drug dealers who led him straight to prison." Ned grew up in a more traditional high school, whereas Rakeem said, "I grew up in prison."

Since all in this study but Ned were people of color, racial differences suggest that race may be a factor for the way schools responded or did not respond to the children's educational needs. The superintendent of Megatropolis school district recognized the school to prison pipeline. He acknowledged "schools have become incubators for corrections … when children fail to achieve in school, we most often hand them off to the correctional system where they have far fewer opportunities to succeed." He further acknowledged the racial imbalance in who ends up in prison.

> Research shows that minority youth are disproportionately the recipients of discipline, setting off a chain of disenfranchisement and formal consequences [that chain is] labeled the "school to prison pipeline" … all kids want to belong to something that makes them feel special and secure and the predatory nature of gangs find their soft spots.

Trina, a paraprofessional who tutors at an alternative school in Megatropolis said one of the educational barriers is racial difference. "You know my thing is with this no child left behind – they are leaving 'our' children behind … I really think it's a racial barrier between the students and the teachers." The alternative school has a teaching staff that is 90 percent Euro-American, and the student population is 100 percent African American. (Megatropolis school district services a population of over 3,400 students with a 64 percent poverty rate; 70 percent are students of color whereas the teaching staff is 87 percent Euro-American).

Trina explained that at a district alternative school where she works, most of the children live in foster homes and several have parents in prison. Trina was concerned about an African American male student.

> …One day he came in and he had a little attitude and I was like what's wrong with you – he snapped back at me and I said wait a minute – for one thing don't take it out on me…he was like my mom had gone to jail and he [kid] had just gotten back with her … he had been in a foster home but his sisters and brothers were still in foster homes.

Trina's concerns echoed Kara's lament about her school experience and her plea for a more positive response from teachers.

> They were just treating us like problem kids—don't treat people like problem kids you know. They never realized what we needed, that problem kids need the most attention and not just the yelling. Don't just point out the bad stuff. They never came to us positively.

Trina in her paraprofessional position said she felt really bad and helpless as she observed that a" lot of teachers did not get it." She said angrily, "Instead of trying to figure out what's going on with the child – they just throw them out of the classroom."

As a teacher in the Megatropolis school district, I had an experience of teachers "not getting it" when I accompanied leaders of Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) to a district

elementary charter school that serviced a significant population of girls who belonged to GSBB. (As mentioned in chapter four, GSBB is a prison visitation program for girls with incarcerated mothers.) The purpose of the meeting was to help teachers understand the difficulties students with incarcerated mothers might have in school. We were met largely with indifference from teachers and staff. Some teachers remarked that school problems always fall into the laps of teachers. During the session, two teachers fell asleep; others were engaged in side conversations, and other teachers were giggling across the room. This happened at a charter school whose motto was: "Holistic development and commitment to meeting the needs of individual students."

A principal to whom I complained about my experience of teacher's unresponsiveness to the GSBB presentation was frustrated, "Schools are always carrying the weight of everything that goes on in the community, everything that goes wrong with education—they always want to blame the schools---blame the teachers." Katie, an attorney for the district agreed about the blaming.

> I'm tired of the finger pointing…that's not our job or that's not my job—remember, I work for the school, and now it seems like it's always falling back on the schools. Others say there's no money…I say wait a minute—wait a minute; we don't have the money either.

Katie said the district was trying to be responsive to students of color by making an agreement to lower the suspension rate of students of color but acknowledged difficulty in honoring that agreement. She saw a problem of communication between the schools and the community.

> One of the barriers we encounter in the schools is that there are so many different entities involved with a child with behavior problems…so we keep seeing a failure to communicate and a failure to understand where everybody is coming from. Schools have our own set of laws we have to follow--our own parameters; our own data practices to follow, so there were all these kind of roadblocks to communication.

School laws and parameters troubled Kara who protested at her son's school about what she called his over-suspension from second-grade. The principal upheld the suspension decision. Imani, his grandmother was upset explaining that these suspensions can be the beginning of the "school to prison pipeline."

> What do you think sitting at home is going to do? We have got to have a better answer than that. If you lose the kid by third or fourth grade, especially male students—their interest is gone. It's a done deal! You just prepped them; they are ready now—for the penitentiary at 10 or 11 years old.

Imani's voice of experience echoed Ann Ferguson's research on the results of racist discipline practices in schools.

> Punishment is a fruitful site for a close-up look at routine institutional practices, individual acts and cultural sanctions that give life and power to racism in a school setting that not only produce massive despair among black students but that increasingly demonize them (2001, p.19-20)."

Imani, recognizing that schools have a hard time connecting to the black community, offered these suggestions:

> If "Johnny" is having a problem and the phone is disconnected – well duh – that means she [mom] couldn't pay the bill…do you have a community resource in your school where somebody could say –okay we keep seeing this behavior in Johnny – he's barely coming to school…coming to school tired…somebody needs to visit that home…find out what's going on. That's the way it used to be! That's the disconnect.

The superintendent of Megatropolis explained how this disconnect between schools and community occurred in areas of crime and poverty.

> The ideal education model uses the community for all types of support structure. Ironically, in communities of crime and poverty, the school becomes an island by separating from the community in order to create a safe environment for learning.

Imani tried to do what she could to bridge the disconnect by involving school board members in her nonprofit organization's efforts to connect schools and communities

around the issue of incarcerated mothers and their children, but attendance was poor. Imani was sad because sometimes schools “don’t have a clue” about the situations students are in. I attended one of her meetings at which she successfully brought together faith-based organizations and school administrators, counselors and board members, but less than a year later, Imani’s organization was shut down for lack of government funding.

An effort focused on meeting the needs of children of incarcerated parents also faltered. When the Children’s Bill of Rights (CBOR) committee developed a plan to work with educators to implement strategies for children of incarcerated parents, there was standing room only in the first meeting with community members. By the time the group, of which I was a part, was prepared to make presentations to Megatropolis school psychologists and social workers, membership had dwindled down to eight members due to lack of funding.

Encounters with the Mental Health System

Several participants described being involved in the mental health system; some of those experiences have occurred in their adult years. Anna, Lucy, Leona and Lela said that they suffered from a mental illness. Since all four women were abused as children, one can speculate that the multiple abuses these women had to endure contributed to the mental health issues they were dealing with as adults. Anna mentioned having received treatment for mental health concerns as a child and Kara said she had emotional issues to deal with as a result of her childhood. All but Kara and Leona said they abused drugs as well.

Lela said because of her painful past, she could never focus enough to get a high school equivalence degree. She said she'd stopped caring about herself and had attempted suicide.

Anna said she suffered from bipolarism but the schools said she had ADD; so, her mother put her in a mental hospital.

> I was prostituting in the seventh grade …someone told my mom and she sent me to a mental hospital for six months…they told me I was bipolar and gave me medication thinking that was going to help me not get depressed.

Now as an incarcerated adult, Anna said they continued to inappropriately treat her mental illness. "They put things on your head and tell you that you are crazy ... I don't understand how they can put things all over your head and be like, 'Okay you're bipolar.'"

Lucy and Yana said they suffered from anxiety, depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); Lucy described a sequence of depression episodes and treatment programs since she's been an adult.

> …I have anxiety attacks. I'm very depressed – they don't understand in court how hard it is…for me – I'm not a bad person. – They're not helping me to deal with things…when I got out of Statesville, they put me on some medication…um …depression pills – when you get out, they only give you seven days – so you have to get on AFDC to get your medication – by the time I got AFDC, I had gotten picked up on this burglary…they did a mental health thing to see if I can stand trial or something – but the man say the only thing he can see wrong with me is I have depression, bipolar and anxiety

Yana recalled how she responded to her painful experiences that resulted from her having been abused over and over again.

> Yeah – they diagnosed me with anxiety, depression and post-traumatic disorder and I thought I was going to the doctor and was going to the "head" doctor and didn't even know it…and the man kept telling me "you're competent," and I tried to commit suicide twice – they pumped over two and a half cups of pills out of my stomach…I

> mean I'm at the point to where when I was out [of jail] I was about to have a nervous breakdown because I'm scared to walk – every time I look around I got to look over my back.

Professionals voiced concern over the lack of services for or inappropriate responses to children suffering from mental illnesses that follows them into adult life. Dr. Briggs, a clinical psychologist commented on how having a mother in prison impacts a child, and that there is a need for community services to work together to respond.

> Children are the symptom bearers of everything that goes on in the family…if we can address issues that impact kids, then we are addressing issues that impact families…it's not just a mental health perspective – I think it should be something of a community perspective in terms of schools, social services, extended families, faith communities…

When a public defender accused schools of ticketing and arresting too many kids rather than providing mental health services, Katie, a special education attorney for Metro retorted,

> We can't force families to participate in mental health services; we can facilitate the services – we can set up the appointments but we can't make them go.

According to a 2006 report by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the lack of funding and inadequate coordination of mental health systems compounded by the social stigma surrounding mental illness have resulted in increased reliance on the criminal justice system as a safety net. As noted in chapter one, failure to address children with mental health disorders in schools has warranted such great concern that the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice (NCMHJJ) has mounted a nationwide initiative called Blueprint for Change, which develops and supports family-centered, community-driven service delivery models that assure the safety and well-being of children who have been identified as at-risk for abuse and/or neglect (Skowya &

Cocozza, 2006). When the State Department of Corrections (DOC) partnered with other organizations to participate in this initiative, it found that 80 percent of youth involved with the juvenile justice system were suffering from mental health disorders (2008). The study further found that a youth's disruptive or inappropriate behavior was often the result of a mental illness. A 2006 NCMHJJ study found that 60 percent of those suffering from mental illness also met the criteria for substance use disorder. Participants in my study told stories of drug use, disruptive school behavior, running away and substance abuse that points to the need children of incarcerated mothers have for mental health services.

Encounters with Legal and Corrections Systems

Participants talked about coming into contact with the legal and corrections systems in various ways. The courts and corrections had to intervene for obvious reasons - - participants had gotten into some kind of trouble. Although the runaways and those picked up for drug use had encounters with the police, Ned was the only one who talked about his reaction. Numerous times police picked him up at school. Even these many years later, he was angry. "They need to change their approach. First of all don't go to the school and pick up a kid!"

Girl scouts in the GSBB group were subject to rigid prison controls during visits with their mothers at Statesville Correctional Facility. The girls had to go through metal detectors at each visit, had to put personal belonging in lockers, were greeted by severe, even irritable guards at the reception desk, were guarded by social workers while their mothers carried their dinner trays back and forth from the cafeteria and experienced guards yelling at them when they did not follow rules. A prison rule is that only one

person is allowed in the rest rooms at a given time. When a mother and her two teenaged daughters were caught giggling and dancing in the rest room (they were so happy to be together), the guards responded as though there had been a big fistfight. The guards reprimanded the social workers for not watching the mothers and children more closely, and GSBB was denied a visit for two months. Everybody in the group was punished for the actions of three people. It became obvious that the two teenaged girls felt unfairly treated when one of the girls started dancing in the gym as we were saying our goodbyes, an attempt at being defiant.

I was there two months later when a mother said to me, “I’ll be right back I’m going to get my daughter’s prom pictures in my room.” The rule was that moving from place to place was only allowed at moving time. I was a wreck hoping that she’d be able to get back in the moving time allowed. I told a guard, “I’m waiting for a mother so she doesn’t get in trouble.” The GSBB group had constant reminders that they were visiting a prison. A humane touch, however, occurred at one visit, when a photographer in a back room took pictures of the girls and their mothers for keepsakes.

An example of an effective intervention was when a judge recommended early release for Imani so that her daughter Kara would not become a second- generation offender. Kara, Randy and Kenny were very thankful. Imani recalled,

> I had like 16 months left on my sentence and he allowed them to bring me back to the State … he looked at the fact I had never had a visit from my children and felt that that had impacted what had happened with my daughter…and he looked at my daughter Kara as being a high risk of going to prison…talk about happy lord I could come back and see my baby!

The judge was the first in the State to take the risk of using a loophole in the law that allowed Imani’s early release. Once she successfully launched her nonprofit

organization, she tried to locate the judge to thank him and let him know his decision had been justified, but she learned that he unfortunately suffered from Alzheimer's disease.

Unlike Imani's judge, some courtroom judges took it upon themselves to engage in judiciary parenting in the courtroom; calling mothers unfit and sentencing pregnant mothers to prison to keep them from using drugs during their pregnancy. Yakima recalled a judge telling her that he was going to send her to prison so that she wouldn't harm her baby.

> I had caught a federal charge and I was using crack/cocaine and the judge thought it was better to keep me in custody so I wouldn't use with the baby…I was incarcerated the whole time during my pregnancy…at nine months, they let me out to have the baby …then they said I had to turn myself back in after I had the baby.

Reyna and her family had a negative experience with a courtroom judge while waiting for the judge to sentence her brother for a drug possession charge; Reyna described how her mother was publicly chastised.

> I went in and watched this judge sentence him [her brother] but before the judge sentenced him he said, "Who's his family in here? I want you to stand up." he proceeded to ridicule my mother for the way our family turned out.

Reyna described leaving the courtroom immediately, "I kept my mouth shut because I didn't want to do anything to hurt my brother." Reyna said the prosecutor and defense attorney didn't seem to take her family seriously either because "not all of us have money to sweep everything under the carpet for us." Reyna thought being poor made one more vulnerable within the legal structures.

My research surfaced efforts by judges that recognized the need for children to visit their mothers in prison. Judges belong to a voluntary bar association; one of the most active bars in the United States and through that association, sponsor the prison visitation

program mentioned in chapter four, and also are involved in an educational project that mentors students of color and exposes them to the value of education and the law. The Advocacy for Prison Visitation (APV) is a collaboration of advocates -- judges, lawyers, and probation officers who work with a nonprofit agency to provide free trips for children of incarcerated mothers to federal prisons four times a year. The program has been in existence for three years and has been very successful. Judge Freidman of the prison visitation program shared this.

> I've been a judge for over 23 years and one of the toughest questions I've been asked was by a nine year old girl who said do you think my mommy is a bad person and I said no, good moms and good dads make mistakes; it's got nothing to do with what kind of human being she is or what kind of mom she is… if that's what I had to think about people, I wouldn't be able to impose a punishment or sentence.

Community Efforts

The Advocacy for Prison Visitation is an example of volunteer efforts on behalf of children, and as such is dependent on the good will of individuals. By the end of the data collection phase of my study, that federal prison program was still in full force; however, the Statesville visitation program had a major overhaul when the GSBB leader, a social worker who had bonded with the girls, resigned from the program because of illness. The children were left with months of no prison visits

The politics of volunteer associations and competition for limited funds is evident in Kara, Kenny and Randy's mother Imani's efforts with other female inmates who while they were still behind bars in federal prison started working to reunite children with their mothers. As incarcerated mothers, Imani and fellow inmates knew firsthand the pain of being separated from their children. Upon release, Imani put her prison visitation program Women and Families for Justice (WFJ) in full force, but because she was an ex-

felon, she was in a constant struggle to get funding for the program; Imani was only able to establish one prison visit for children and their mothers in 1997 the same year she founded WFJ. Imani recalled her experience having her program design taken by the ACA.

> …That was the most hurting thing because they [ACA as a halfway house] saw me …in a way blossom. They saw me as a broken women first going to prison to the point of coming out, building the program, working with children, trying to work with them…they saw me grow – they saw the organization grow.

Imani could not continue her visitation program because the ACA used her ideas and model for a program that received the funding from the Judges Visitation Fund that she had hoped to get. Imani learned as did her children that though she had unique experience and understanding to serve imprisoned women and their children with a visitation program, being an ex-felon diminished her legitimacy to do so.

Another program, the Amachi program sponsored by Big Brothers-Big Sisters of Megatropolis was specifically created to meet the needs of children with incarcerated parents. Its directors saw the program as stable.

> It has been predicted that 70 percent of children with parents in prison are most likely to become offenders themselves; but we found that with the intervention of the Amachi program of Big Brothers Big Sisters, that number almost flips.

The commitment of smaller, struggling programs trying to serve children with mothers in prison is exemplified in a nonprofit director's declaration.

> I don't care what the world says – I don't care how many years they push me aside and don't give me funding, my organization is going to be a big organization and we're going to make an impact on this world. If we don't, who will?"

Rakeem's experience growing up in prison led him to form a mentoring business as precautionary intervention for youth who seemed headed down the wrong path. Because Ned felt that institutions that should have been there for him as a child were not "kid

friendly," he was a volunteer working with children in a nonprofit advocacy group. He quit the group because he said it was not set up for kids but rather for parents who are incarcerated. "They are making wild assumptions about what is good for kids; it is basically doing good on somebody for somebody …it's not in the best interest of children!" He said further, "Systems are not prepared to take care of kids."

Kara regretted that no one had intervened in her life.

> They [schools, community] need to reach out to these kids while they're still younger…once they get to those middle ages – they are already lost… like if someone would have started when I was younger and got a hold of me, I probably wouldn't have done half the stuff I did – you know? I know I wouldn't have ended up pregnant at such a young age.

Recognition of Social/Economic Constraints

Only a few participants recognized their vulnerable position within social and economic systems. Kara explained the connection she saw between poverty and selling drugs to survive.

> So it's a cycle you know…if they [kids] see drug dealers out there getting money and they need money and nobody is helping them, they are going to try it.

Rakeem and Lamar, enticed by the large sums of money involved in the drug trade business, were making more money in one day than minimum wage would provide in a week. Lamar explained,

> I think minimum wage was three something an hour…whatever it was it wasn't that much compared to making two hundred dollars a day – I mean you're coming home with barely twenty three dollars for a whole day's work. I said they're joking – they've got to be kidding me…so I violated parole; I refused to get a job – so when they picked me up for violating parole, I had six hundred dollars in my pocket and I'm saying to them why do I need a job when I have other means of providing.

Rakeem recalled how he made the kids in high school envious because of all of the money he made in the drug business.

> I made them eat dirt because I'd come to school and I'd have on a Herringbone and I got all these designer clothes on and now you ask me where I get it from, and I said my grandfather would buy it.

Kara recognized her aunt's financial constraints when she took in Kara, Kenny and Randy after their mother, Imani, went to federal prison. She complained that social welfare did not want to help her auntie.

> You know families can bring kids in but that doesn't mean that families have the money to take care of these extra kids so they do need help; because then it can cause problems in the family where the family's getting stressed out then they may need to go out and do something just to get extra money.

Kenny, Kara's brother, talked in more detail about how the welfare system failed his aunt.

> …growing up, while my mom was in that situation – I wasn't mad at the system about my mom – I was mad at the system about my auntie. You know what I'm saying … because I seen how much she was working – I mean she was working hard! Man she was trying to take care of five kids. So you'd hear her talk about certain things and it's like, you kind of wonder…you wonder to yourself – why it's gotta be like this? Why it's gotta be so hard like this you know?

As a young adult, Kara talked about her continuing struggle to survive economically after her life living on the streets that started when she was a teen. She saw a parallel between what Imani, her mother, faced when Kara was a child to what she now faced with her own child.

> …I'm kind of following my mom's thing – now I can see it; because now that I have my child, and you know the county didn't want to give me nothing and then you know it had been hard for me. I would rather go out there and do what I gotta do to put food in my son's mouth, clothes on his back, make sure we had a place to live. Stuff up here is so high with the rent and everything else and trying to come over these obstacles – it's like something's got me thinking,

Kara thought her skirmishes with the law had given her a reputation that made it difficult for her to find work, and she felt she was caught in insurmountable struggles to put food on the table.

> Shucks – I'd just rather go out there and sell drugs because nobody wants to hire me because of the little stuff I do have on my record…some like me turning 18 and stuff…it's like because people think I'm violent now, you know – I've had disorderly conduct on officers so they're just like this girl's violent, you know? So it's been hard to get a job and then with rent and stuff…I could have two or three jobs and still wouldn't be able to afford my rent, my bills and put food on my table because they don't want to give me food stamps…so it's like a struggle – it's like I'm still struggling from way back.

Kara said that because she now understands her mother's struggles to keep her head above water taking care of her family, she supports her mother's efforts advocating for women in prison and for their children. Imani is clear that many of the women she works with experience poverty that is related to race. "I'm going to say in the black community where there are so many crises…it's all financial."

Analysis

Data about encounters with schools and other social systems underscore participant's dilemmas once their mothers were incarcerated and their living arrangements required them to move from place to place. Data presented in this chapter is viewed first through the theoretical lens of interpretive interactionism showing how personal troubles became public issues in encounters with policies and practices of courts, schools and social services. I further examined through a Foucauldian lens how those public encounters that often deepened personal troubles were embedded in structures based on prevailing discourse and the resulting regimes of truth. The data show also how individuals while suffering from the prevailing discourse internalized it and in that sense contributed to its continuance.

Participants telling their stories, identified experiences interactionist theory calls cumulative epiphanies that turned their lives in negative directions. Missing mom led to fighting; fighting led to expulsion; bad school experience led to drug use. Taking action

to face a crisis often led to another crisis. Rakeem started fighting in school when he was six and by the time he was 15, he was jailed for drug use for the first of many times. Said Kara, "the school system didn't care about me, so I didn't care about nothing. I wanted to get the pain out, so I brought guns to school." A turning point or epiphany for Yana at 14 was when she discovered that her grandfather was her father and turned to the streets to "find love." Then she got pregnant, a new turning point in her life. Anna valued school, and in the language of interactionism, her relived epiphany as she looked back with sadness at dropping out in ninth grade was, "I have no education."

Likewise, as participants told their stories, they recognized events, turning points, epiphanies that opened up positive directions in their lives. After Ned's sixth grade teacher intervened, he began studying and having positive school experiences. A negative epiphany of not getting a college scholarship resulted in his dropping out of senior year, but another intervention of a friend gave him the impetus to continue his education. Rakeem recognized that a teacher's intervention on his drug use that could have moved him to a different life was more an embarrassment to him; he felt that his time in prison finally awakened him to "become a man." Kara's cumulative epiphanies of being with her mother after her mother's release from prison led her to a major epiphany of appreciation for what her mother had been through, and a determination to change her own life and support her mother's work for women and children. Elise and Troy whose more stable home lives meant they didn't have to move schools told positive stories about their school experiences. Finishing school was an important goal for Troy as it was for Kenny who was pleased to graduate so his mom could be proud of him. Elise even found solace in school. Though the data is limited, the positive epiphanies

point to the power of one caring individual - a teacher, a friend - to make a difference in another's life.

Interactionist theory suggests examining public responses to personal troubles and identifying assumptions made by professionals (Denzin, 200l). The childhood experiences of the adults I interviewed did not reveal sufficient support systems in place to meet their unique needs. Though the professionals I interviewed seemed aware of the challenges children of incarcerated mothers faced, there often was, in Imani's words, a disconnect between knowledge and practice. Interactionist theory claims that in social life, "there is only interpretation." In the case of professionals planning programs for others, that planning was usually based on interpretations grounded in the life experience of the planners; unless planners had immersed themselves in the experiences of the ones for which programs were planned," faulty or incorrect understandings becomes the basis of social programs that are intended to alter and shape the lives of troubled persons" (Denzin, 200l, p.3).

The Megatropolis superintendent understood the challenges facing children of incarcerated mothers, spoke about the 'school to prison pipeline' and acknowledged that minority youth are "disproportionately the recipients of discipline setting off a chain of disenfranchisement." Yet, there was no district staff development plan in place to educate students so this disproportion would not exist. It was staff of a nonprofit group, GSBB that offered a session for teachers on responding to children of incarcerated mothers, a session that was not well received. The superintendent spoke of the school being insular and the need for community connections, but it was Imani who tried to bring community and school together, again an effort not well received. The Children's

Bill of Rights committee had a plan to work with school personnel but had difficulty getting funding. Getting sufficient funding and sufficient volunteers was difficult for most the nonprofit organizations like the Children's Bill of Rights (CBOR) program. Likewise, the Advocacy for Prison Visitation program was dependent on judges finding the necessary funding. So from an interactionist perspective, even when a school leader's assumptions took into account what children with incarcerated mothers needed, there was not sufficient funding to meet those needs. The nonprofit groups trying to fill the gaps had difficulty raising the money to do just that. Public budgets and private donations had other priorities than providing services for children with mothers in jail or prison.

Again from an interactionist perspective, the school district's attorney showed compassion in speaking about children who needed to change schools often. Yet when faced with discipline problems that arose from such moves, she was committed to holding to school rules and the school's way of doing things. The principal upheld Kara's second grade son's suspension over the protests of mother and grandmother, Imani who saw suspension as a way to deaden interest in school and prepare for the penitentiary.

"Programs don't work because they are based on a failure to take into account the perspectives and attitudes of persons served" (Denzin, 2001, p, 3). Educators are trained to be student centered, yet their perspectives come from their own social locations. Trina, a paraprofessional in an alternative school observed, "a lot of teachers just don't get it; instead of trying to figure out what is going on with a child, they just throw them out of the classroom." In the case of Megatropolis, though the student population is largely non-White, the professionals are mostly White and middle-class. Kara's lament

spoke of the disconnect between the meaning-making of professionals and those they desire to serve, “They never realized what we needed, that kids need the most attention and not just the yelling.”

Dr. Tim, talking with me about meeting the needs of children of incarcerated mothers, spoke passionately about his ideal community approach.

> It is the interweaving of family, school, law enforcement, physical brick and mortar of the infrastructure, community centers, worship in whatever form it takes, and support services like medical, financial and mental health all working in cooperation to create the well-oiled community machine.

Heeding Trina’s words and applying interactionist theory, professionals must expand their assumptions based on their personal experience to include children’s perspectives and the perspectives of their families and communities on what it is that they need. The meaning-making of professionals should take into account the meaning-making of hose they serve. On the whole, that was not the case for participants in this study.

Foucauldian theory provides another lens with which to look at the school experiences of participants in this study. Schools operated within a regime of truth rooted in public discourse about education and the role of schools. Good schools should control students. Rules often mirror the criminal justice system. Participants acting out unresolved grief in schools were punished for breaking rules. Reyna, Anna, Kara, Rakeem and Yana were suspended so many times for fighting or acting out in schools that Reyna’s mom took her out; Yana and Anna dropped out. Kara was kicked out and Rakeem was incarcerated before he could finish high school. But as evidenced in this study, suspending and expelling students only exacerbated the problem. Most of the participants who were suspended or expelled turned to the streets, the gangs and to drugs to survive. Public

discourse and the resulting regime of truth about education is that children belong in school but must conform to certain standards to stay in school. Once outside of school with no supportive social structures, their actions using drugs, being in gangs, getting pregnant did not conform to the regime of truth about acceptable behavior. Sometimes their behaviors were considered criminal, and they were jailed.

Foucault viewed school rules as instruments of normalization.

> The art of punishing, in the regime of disciplinary power is aimed neither at expiation, nor even precisely at repression. It brings quite distinct operations into play; it refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed., it differentiates individuals from one another … traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal (the 'shameful class' of the Ecole Militairs). The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates hierarchies, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes. (1979, p.183)

Further, in Foucauldian terms, governing mentalities that create seemingly no-nonsense, disciplinary and zero-tolerance policies assume that a standardized approach can solve very complex problems. Some schools even name very subjective offenses like disruptive behavior or disrespect as minor infractions. "Disciplinary power divides itself into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed…to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct, to access it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits" (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). The unintended consequence of such a standardized approach with careful surveillance is an over suspension and expulsion of low-income students of color – particularly African Americans. Many disciplinary policies are contextualized within discourse based on race and gender. Kara said the schools didn't understand that she was acting out the pain of losing her mother. But rather than addressing Kara's very complex emotional issues from Kara's perspective, the school

applied a blanket, standardized approach and expelled her. As a result, Kara felt she had been denied her education.

Foucault's theory of subjugated knowledge provides another way to look at how professionals can have knowledge based on their observations, but do not act on that knowledge because it doesn't fit a regime of truth. They have subjugated knowledge. Tina's knowledge based on her observations as a paraprofessional was subjugated knowledge. It didn't fit the regime of truth about a good school. The Megatropolis superintendent had knowledge about racial disparities that created a higher number of suspensions and expulsions among African American youth and a school-to-prison pipeline. The superintendent in Foucauldian language had sovereign power, and yet his knowledge did not fit the prevailing discourse about the role of a school and how a school should be run. (The Megatropolis district which services the largest population of low income minority students in the state continues to have the highest number of suspensions and expulsions in the state).

The special education attorney had knowledge about the plight of students with parents in prison and the number of times they missed schools because they had to move from place to place; that knowledge did not fit the discourse and political parameters and boundaries put in place by governing bodies. The regime of truth about education is that parents and students themselves need to take major responsibility.

Turning to institutions other than schools, Foucault's theory of governmentality (1991) provides a way of looking at the functioning of mental health agencies, courts and corrections that participants encountered. "Governmentality relies on technologies or ensembles of practices that consist of contradictory strategies but make up a political

rationality" (1991, p. 179). Participants suffering from mental illness were seen as problematic but left to govern themselves then criminalized for the poor choices they made. As evidenced in this study, participants who suffered from untreated PTSD were either stigmatized or criminalized. For many, PTSD was due to unresolved grief resulting from the sudden loss of a mother, exacerbated by the emotional, physical and sexual abuse they had to endure. Left untreated, participants self-medicated with illicit drugs. Yana and Lucy only received treatment after they had been incarcerated; many never received appropriate treatment.

Prevailing discourse stigmatizes mental illness. That social stigma made it difficult for health professionals and school personnel to serve people with mental health issues partly because those who needed the service had internalized the stigma. When a public defender accused schools of arresting too many students rather than providing mental health services, the special education attorney Katie explained how difficult it was for families to accept these services. Social stigmatization of mental illness by school officials, courts, corrections and first responders to mental health was evident in how people needing services were treated as problems. In Foucauldian language, there were contradictions. Individuals with mental illness along with professionals accepted the prevailing stigmatizing discourse and resulting regime of truth about mental illness. In so doing, they were complicit in continuing the prevailing discourse.

The disciplinary power exercised by courts and correction institutions functioned to maintain authority, power and control over the participants they served. Rather than providing alternatives to choices that participants made that resulted in personal pain,

courts and corrections chastised participants for not being more self-disciplined. Campbell (2000) spoke of discursive distinctions and commitments to meaning that "have the effect of allocating power, authority and legitimacy" (p. 10l). Judges who engaged in judiciary parenting, calling mothers unfit had embraced the dominant discourse on what constitutes good mothering. A judge who sentenced a mother to prison to keep her from using drugs while pregnant was again working within a regime of truth about good mothering. Women in this study who were recipients of such judgments were women of color. One could question whether race played a part in discursive distinctions.

Corrections officials at Statesville decided to turn over to caretakers the necessary paper work for inmate visitors including women's daughters. This was done without the mothers' knowledge – a clear indication that the mothers' knowledge had been disqualified and considered inadequate to the task at hand. Officials made the arbitrary assumption that the mothers had lost their parenting rights.

The five women in Ramsey County that had been let down by schools, courts and mental health services wound up repeating the cycle of their mothers' transgressions. They became engulfed by a society of "governing mentalities," shaped by racialized and gendered drug policy "as part of an evolving complex of social policies that target the behaviors of the dangerous classes but excuse those of the dominant class" (Campbell, 2000, p. 9).

Participant's private troubles led to public encounters and issues with societal institutions. Mother was gone. Living arrangements were decided by others. Institutions like schools did not, for the most part, serve them well. How they as children made meaning, did not count in decisions made about them.

Chapter 7: Private Troubles, Public Accountability

According to experts in criminal justice, children with incarcerated mothers have gone virtually ignored (Valenzuela, 2007; Poehlmann, 2005). These children, especially children of color, have become casualties and forgotten children in the war on drugs (Levy-Pounds, 2006; Golden, 2005). I decided to do research on these "forgotten children." The purpose of my research was to learn how children and adolescents made sense of what happened to them in the aftermath of a mother's incarceration. I did the research from the standpoint of a teacher who could use the findings both to improve school life for such children and to advocate for them. The previous chapters are the fruit of that research. I used C. Wright Mills' construct of private troubles and public issues as an organizing principle. I used interactionist theory to analyze private troubles and Foucauldian theory to analyze public issues. In this chapter, I highlight the research methods, findings and analysis. Finally, I present conclusions and recommendations that call for public accountability.

Research Overview

Most studies on children of incarcerated mothers have been quantitative. These studies, largely survey, have yielded powerful data from mothers and caregivers on children's plight when mothers are incarcerated. Four qualitative studies focused on children with incarcerated mothers, but did so within residential or clinical settings. Unlike researchers of those studies, I did not have a captive audience nor a circumscribed group of participants. I had to purposefully seek out research participants.

Although I wished to interview children directly, I did not do so because of ethical considerations for the vulnerability of those children. I rather gathered data from adults

taking a retrospective look at childhood with a mother incarcerated. Women and men, 17 in all, agreed to be interviewed. Most of them were reluctant research subjects. All but one of them was a person of color. Five women were in county jail awaiting sentencing when I interviewed them, and three were mothers; one mother had two sons in jail. I spent several sessions with some girl scouts visiting their mothers in prison, participated in a teacher in-service and interviewed several professionals working with children of incarcerated mothers. Aware that I have only caught a glimpse of these women and men's complex lives, I am confident that 1000 pages of interview and field notes have met the standards for what is known as "thick description" (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 28).

Participants in this study blended memories of how they felt about what had happened to them in childhood with their experiences as adults. That retrospective look gave this study the characteristics of a longitudinal study. Unlike the Boudin (2007) study in which participants took a backward look spanning three to four years (eight participants ages 19 to 22), my study participants recalled childhood experiences spanning five to 43 years (17 participants, ages 18 to 60).

My study traced participants' childhood memories that began at home living with mother, usually a single mother, in unstable economic and familial situations. There were multiple epiphanies or life-changing turning points evident throughout their stories. Kara, Kenny and Randy's home was stable, and they were shocked at their mother's arrest. Others were distressed, but not shocked, when their mothers were arrested. For most participants, although life at home was tumultuous, it all got worse when their mothers left. Childhood memories spanned years of tremendous pain and suffering in cycles of

poverty, neglect, instability, uncertainty, deprivation and abuse. Even in dysfunctional families, incarceration compounds rather than mitigates preexisting family problems (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). Participants' troubles were immense.

Memories about living arrangements after a mother's arrest ranged from a stable home with a grandmother or aunt to a series of moves to relatives, foster homes and sometimes back with mother. Children did not choose where they went. At age six, Rakeem, clutching his teddy bear, found himself in an airplane on the way to live with relatives who were strangers. Nora, Myron, Elise and Troy had the most stable situations with grandmothers and aunts. Once mothers were incarcerated, instability was less a result of the number of times a child moved than a result of the quality of relationships encountered within those moves. Relatives and foster parents were often abusive. In a couple of situations social services intervened, but participants did not describe anyone monitoring their whereabouts. Child protection challenged the very meaning of protection.

Memories of encounters with public institutions such as courts, the mental health system and schools were largely painful or confusing. The children wanted to feel normal. Even though Elise said that school was a way to feel normal, having to lie to friends about her mother's whereabouts did not seem normal for a 12-year old. Kara did not want to stand out in school but wanted to feel normal. She did not reveal her situation, struggled in school and was eventually kicked out. She had internalized the prevailing discourse and stigma of having a mother incarcerated. These children "carried the disciplinary wounds of growing up in a carceral (pervasive surveillance) network," a network that relegated their mothers to prison (Golden, 2005, xxiii-xxiv, Davis, 2003).

Children had to cope with loss and shame privately while dealing with the daily demands of public school life. Only four of the 17 participants completed high school. Schools did not have support programs to identify children grieving a mother's loss and living in problematic situations. These children's behaviors often became the focus of disciplinary procedures. Many ran away. Because of what interactionist theory calls gaps or failures in understandings, programs and policies did not work because they were based on faulty interpretations (Denzin, 2001). As Ned said, "they figure it's the kid's fault.

As adults described life-changing events in their childhoods, they spoke not only with anger, frustration and hurt, but also with acceptance of their situations and determination to keep struggling on. They kept their troubles private. As Myron said, "I don't want my business out there." They largely relied on their own resources and spoke of trying to change their attitudes. They wanted to forgive and move on.

I analyzed interviews and participant observation data both through the frameworks of interactionist theory and Foucauldian theory. Using interactionist theory, I focused on participants' ways of making meaning evident in their stories. I paid close attention to the language and perspectives expressed in their descriptions and interpretations of experiences. "In social life, there is only interpretation - that is, everyday life revolves around persons' interpreting and making judgments about their own behaviors and those of others" (Denzin, p.2). Working within interactionist theory, I also focused on epiphanies –"life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects…in these moments, personal character is manifested and made apparent" (Denzin, p.34).

Whereas interactionist theory was useful in analyzing private troubles, Foucauldian theory was useful in looking at the public issues toward which those private troubles pointed. The private and the public intersected from the day of a mother's incarceration. The law determined the reason and terms of her incarceration. Left behind, these children were pushed into public arenas of social services and courts that most children never experience. Foucauldian theory went beyond participants' meaning-making and offered an explanation for how public institutions could be so unresponsive to what had happened to them. I relied particularly on Foucault's concept s of discourse, regimes of truth, governmentality and disciplinary power, and on feminist scholars who used Foucault in their research.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the next section I offer several conclusions that stood out for me. Readers, from their own unique perspectives, might draw additional ones. Conclusions show how private troubles point to public issues. Recommendations call for public accountability. In the conclusions, I have relied on both data presented in chapters three through six and research literature from chapter one. The suggestions and examples used in the recommendations are not all-inclusive, but are intended to stir readers' imaginations to develop initiatives that could improve the situation for children of incarcerated mothers.

Conclusions One: Relationship with mother was at the center of each participant's consciousness, no matter the quality of that relationship.

One of the most compelling findings of this study was both the centrality of participants' relationships with their mothers and their ambivalent feelings for their mothers. This key finding about the complexity of a relationship between a child and

incarcerated mother from the child's point of view is not as evident in earlier studies. Mothers were a primary focus of participants in their interviews. In the midst of any story, be it about foster home or school, there would be a reference to mother. Chapter four presented memories like Yakima's "feeling an emptiness inside" when her mother went to prison. One girl in a prison visit cried out," Mom, you never came home - you always said you would."

Regardless of painful experiences, many participants showed unconditional love for their mothers. Kenny wanted to do well in school so his mother would look like a good mother. Participants highly critical of their mothers defended them to anyone else who dared to criticize. Reyna's need to defend her mother not only affected her relationship with relatives but also her school life. Some acted like parents to their mothers though often with faulty judgment not surprising in a child. One of the girls visiting at the prison tried to cover for her mother when her mother's prescription pill count was off. She did not want her mother to be in trouble. Some described supporting their mother's poor life choices. Ned said at seven he was doing laundry, paying bills and fixing drinks for his mother and her friends. Lamar and Rakeem supplied drugs for their mothers fearful they would get tainted drugs from the streets.

Other participants expressed ambivalent, sometimes anguished feelings. "Every human situation is emergent and filled with multiple and often conflicting meanings and interpretations" (Denzin, p.46). Anna spoke of a love-hate relationship with her mother in the same breath, "I love my mother; but then I began to hate her because of what she did to me." Kara was very angry with her mother for leaving, and devastated that her mother left her in the care of a father who raped her. As an adult mother herself, Kara's

feelings shifted to a new appreciation for her mother. Even Ned, who vowed to never see his mother again, jumped on the nearest flight once he heard she'd been hospitalized. After he befriended her when he was an adult and she subsequently returned to alcohol and drugs, he concluded, "I was put in a visible, deviant position because of her. I didn't screw up. She did." Nora resented her mother but was grateful for the five months of taking care of her before her mother died. Troy who regarded his mother as a best friend before she went to prison cautioned his little brother to avoid being hurt by not putting too much trust in their mother. Some participants had epiphanies about learning from their mothers how they did not want to live their lives. Lela had an epiphany that though she had promised herself never to be like her mother, she had become like her mother, in prison with her children.

Recommendation One: Professionals working with children of incarcerated mothers must recognize and respond to each child's core relationship with his/her mother.

It is important to recognize the ambivalent feelings children have for their mothers and provide ways for children to work through those feelings. There should be counseling services for children struggling with those feelings, particularly feelings of guilt. They need to recognize that as children, they were not responsible for what happened to them nor for their mother's behavior. Mothers must not be overlooked, and mothers must not be demeaned. Children need regular opportunities to visit their mothers in prison. A later recommendation on prison visitation will address that.

Conclusion Two: Few participants, even as adults recognized the socio-economic conditions of their mother's lives.

Golden emphasized, “A child cannot discern the grand social context of his or her family’s suffering” (2005, p.77). Only a few participants recognized the cultural, economic, and political contexts of their mother’s lives. Yakima recognized that her mother did what she did to provide for her. Ned recognized that his mother was troubled and an alcoholic needing help. Kara talked of being poor and not having enough money to visit or even call her mother in prison. Golden warned that “the macro-level inequities that shape these women’s lives and identities remain hidden, thus normalizing women’s experiences of social, economic and political subjugation (2005, p.78). Participants did not mention the possibility their mothers’ lives may have been affected by abuse, although abuse was evident in the stories of the five participants in jail awaiting sentencing. Studies show that over half the women in prison have been physically or sexually abused or both, and a third of them were abused as children (Meda-Chesney-Lind, 2002).

Some of the women, now as mothers experiencing much of what their mothers had experienced, had a new understanding of their mothers’ situations. However, most participants interpreted childhood memories within a very personal context . They felt their own pain so deeply that they could not recognize their mother’s situation. Several were critical, even angry at their mother’s behavior.

Recommendation Two: Government reports, research results and personal narratives on the effects of socio-economic conditions on life-choices must be promulgated in order to influence public discourse about women who are incarcerated.

Public discourse underpins institutional regimes of truth. Children need to learn to critique existing structures that make it difficult for their parents to provide stability for a

family. The inability to name those systems makes it difficult to get out of their situations. Without being engaged in social critique, "individuals can't escape the mentality of the colonizing culture because they can't identify the social and continually configured sources of race, sex and class subordination" (Golden, 2005, p.75).

Changing public discourse is difficult. Imani, an ex-felon working with families of ex-felons had knowledge of the socio-economic and asymmetrical power conditions of women before and after they were incarcerated. However, she has been largely dismissed in her struggle to share that knowledge with schools and community leaders to shape policy and practices affecting children with incarcerated mothers.

Conclusion Three: There is no systematic process for identifying and tracking the care of children left behind when their mothers are incarcerated.

Data in this study support earlier findings that no one keeps track of children of incarcerated mothers. Reliable data on children of prisoners is limited because of the secrecy and stigma associated with imprisonment (Bockneck & Sanderson, 2008; Valenzuela, 2007; Ross, Khashu & Wamsley, 2004; Vigne, Travis & Waul, 2003; Johnson, 2002). There is no accurate count but only estimates of the number of children with mothers in prison because no one at the local, state or federal level is in charge of keeping track of children at the time of a mother's arrest. In other words, there is no standardized method for collecting data on children of prisoners (Vigne, Dave & Brazzekk, 2008; Miller, 2006, Travis &Waul, 2003; Arditti, 2003; Meyers, 1999).

Since there is no protocol in place to involve social services at the time of a mother's arrest, no one is responsible for identifying or tracking her children. Only Reyna, Kara and Lela mentioned that child protection was involved after their mothers' arrests. Reyna

and Leona's mothers were arrested away from home and did not reveal they had children, a fact which suggests distrust in the social welfare system. Reyna's mother "just didn't come home one day" and Leona thought her mother was "running the streets again." Reyna reported that child protection eventually became involved when school personnel, noticing that her little brother was wearing the same clothes day after day, contacted them. A 2008 study revealed that many families will not seek the help of child protection either at the time of a mother's arrest or if a child runs away for fear that another family member's criminal history may be exposed (Hairston). Children did not typically identify themselves as needing help because of the stigma of having a mother in jail or prison. Even when they did ask for help or run away, child protection service interventions did not necessarily make their lives better.

Without being identified and monitored, children in this study had little or no control of where they lived. Social Service agencies, corrections, and schools did not keep track of them. These multiple bureaucracies each have their own priorities, budgets and procedures. Children with incarcerated mothers receive very little attention because they are not viewed as victims (Hairston, 2007; Sari, 2005). They remain in societal shadows as a nearly invisible population (Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Robertson, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003). As evidenced in this study, the unintended consequence is the invisibility of the multiple abuses children suffer as well. Eight of the 17 participants were physically, emotionally or sexually abused. Six of the 10 female participants were sexually abused as well. (According to the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (NCPCA), girls are sexually abused more often than boys. Boys are at greater risk of serious injury and emotional neglect than girls.)

Applying Foucault's theory of regimes of truth in regard to children, it is clear that children are not recognized as vulnerable and are not considered important enough to monitor. What is more important is imprisonment of criminals.

Recommendation Three: Agencies at local, state and national levels need to cooperate in developing a system to identify and monitor children of incarcerated mothers.

Such a system is most important at the local level where the child lives at the time of his/her mother's arrest; state and national involvement is also important because the child may move. Social welfare and correctional systems need to implement specific policies that address the needs of incarcerated mothers and their children and develop a system to track these families (Halperin & Harris, 2004).

Although special care must be taken in the placement of any child regardless of gender, since girls are in more danger of being sexually abused in addition to other abuses, special attention must be paid in the placement of girls.

Developing appropriate polices and procedures require sensitivity both to safeguard a child's well-being and also to protect his/her privacy rights. Since technology has the ability to link databases between the criminal justice system, the legal system and social service systems, a database can be maintained to keep track of children with incarcerated parents. (The Amber Alert is an example of a national database.)

There needs to be a police protocol in place that involves child protection at the time of a mother's arrest. Also, police, as first responders need child-friendly training in order to address a child's fears and concerns at the time of arrest.

Conclusion Four: Opportunities for children to visit their mothers in prison are inadequate.

As noted in my first conclusion and recommendation, a child's relationship with his/her mother is critical and must be supported when a mother is incarcerated. Maintaining continuity in the mother-child relationship is imperative to the healthy development of the child.

Only three of the 17 participants with whom I had formal interviews were able to visit their mothers in prison. The nearest Federal prison to participant's residences is over 600 miles away, and Statesville is 50 miles away. Yakima at 21, was able to drive the hundreds of miles to the federal prison; Leona said she was able to visit her mother but did not reveal details of her visit and Troy's older brother was able to drive him to Statesville prison.

Research overwhelmingly stressed the importance of a child maintaining contact with their parent during incarceration ((Bouchet, 2008; Hairston, 2007; Valenzuela, 2007; Robertson, 2007; Travis & Waul, 2003; Boudin, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Golden, 2005; Arditti, 2003; Wright & Seymour, 2000; Ziebert, 2006). Studies showed that visits could decrease the level of anxiety, stress and uncertainty for a child (Hairston, 2007; Ziebert, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Travis et al. 2003). Maintaining the parent-child bond is critical to the child's healthy emotional and cognitive competence (Golden, 2005 Bowlby, 1953; Ainsworth, 1973; Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit, 1973; Krisberg & Temin, 2001). Valenzuela found that many children were able to witness their mothers' sobriety for the first time during their prison visits. Even children who had experienced a lifetime of their mother's substance abuse and recidivism described their visits as positive and their mothers as loving (2007).

The Hairston (2007) study revealed that even when caregivers made efforts to accommodate children's prison visits, prison policies and practices did not create an environment that reflected the needs of the children and their families and often undermined meaningful communication between parents and children. During my visits to Statesville prison, I experienced the importance of the continuity of the mother- child relationship but also the conditions the Hairston study noted. Troy described having to endure a search and then waiting half an hour just to see his mom; then he only got time for a hug before the visit was terminated. Troy said sadly, "That kind of beats you up a little, you know?"

Even with excellent programs like GSBB, the girls were subjected to rude guards, metal detectors, rigid visitation rules and a setting that further stigmatized their mothers. The girls and their mothers were always under the watchful gaze of guards and social workers. There was no place for a mother and daughter to have private goodbyes and if one mother in the group violated a prison rule, the entire group was punished. The program while needing some revamping was very important to the girls. They were heartbroken when it was discontinued for a short time. This data correspond to previous research. "Evaluations of visitation programs underscore the benefits of these efforts (Travis and Waul, 2003, p. 212). Visitation programs require consistent funding. While the local GSBB visitation program has gone through funding and staffing crises, it has been institutionalized. The federal prison visitation program reported in my study still depends on the generosity of the members of the voluntary Federal Bar Association – once the funding runs out, the program will be nonexistent.

Recommendation Four: Corrections and social service agencies need to provide regular opportunities for children to visit their mothers in prison.

More programs need to be created and those in existence need to be institutionalized. Nationally, there are three exemplar visitation programs: the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) program, the Snydor-Joy program and the Sesame Street program. GSBB operates locally as reported in my study and Advocacy for Prison Visitation (APV) reported in the study is a local program only.

GSBB has been institutionalized in several states and has proven successful in providing consistent transportation for prison visits. In addition to prison visits, the girls engage in other Girl Scout troop activities outside the prison. "The Snydor-Joy (1998) mother-child visitation program provides 40 mothers with special monthly visits in addition to regular visits. The Sesame Street program (Fishman, 1983) provided children and families with special playrooms next to adjacent visiting rooms" (Travis & Waul, 2003; p.213). The Advocacy for Prison Visitation (JVP) is a local collaboration of advocates - judges, lawyers, and probation officers who work with a nonprofit agency to provide free trips for children of incarcerated mothers to federal prisons four times a year. The program has been in existence for at least three years, has been very successful, but has not been institutionalized. The funding is dependent on the Judges Visitation Fund donated by members of the Federal Bar Association.

Conclusion Five: Children with mothers incarcerated lacked access to mental health services, as did their mothers.

Participants with unaddressed mental health issues, "having been swept up into socially toxic environments," made poor choices and were criminalized for those choices

(Golden, 2005, p.79). All five women in the county jail had used drugs to self-medicate their mental illnesses caused by PTSD. All of them were daughters of incarcerated mothers. Lucy, Reyna, Yana, and Anna and Lela had suffered multiple abuses. They were not receiving drug treatment nor any mental health services but were instead jailed; awaiting sentencing. “Dehumanizing discourse has been used to determine the way we define the problem of substance abuse, the way we construct women addicted to cocaine, and how we locate them on the social landscape” (Zerai and Banks, 2002, p.142).

Participants not only suffered the trauma of losing their mothers to incarceration – a trauma labeled as an ambiguous loss, a relational disorder not a psychic dysfunction (Boss, 2006) - but many had to endure cyclical physical, emotional and sexual abuse resulting in additional PTSD. They told stories of drug use and of disruptive school behavior, violence, victimization and running away. These behaviors underscore the need for mental health intervention and services. Earlier studies found that a youth’s disruptive or inappropriate behavior was often the result of a mental illness; 80 percent of youth involved with the juvenile justice system were suffering from mental health disorders, and 60 percent of those suffering from mental illness also met the criteria for substance use disorder (Blueprint for Change, 2008; NCMHJJ, 2006).

Prevailing dehumanizing discourse and regimes of truth played out in media and academia, and reinforced in racialized and gendered drug policy, made it difficult not only for participants but their mothers as well to receive appropriate mental health and drug treatment (Zerai and Banks, 2002). According to a 2006 report by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the lack of funding and inadequate coordination of mental health systems compounded by the social stigma surrounding mental illness have

resulted in increased reliance on the criminal justice system as a safety net. Eight of the 17 participants in this study had been incarcerated at some time in their lives. "What's really crazy in America is that the criminal justice system has assumed the care of hundreds of thousands of mentally ill people" (Pfeiffer, 2007, p. xiii).

Recommendation Five: Children with mothers incarcerated as well as their mothers should have access to mental health services.

This recommendation fits within a larger call to make mental health care and treatment accessible to everyone, regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status. First, there is a need to address the social stigma surrounding addiction and mental illness. This requires education and conversations that include first responders, courts, corrections, detention centers, schools, social services and communities at large to eradicate prevailing discourse about addiction and mental illness.

Dominant discourse about mental health must be changed to gain political support for better mental health services. This includes recognizing that physical and sexual child abuse results in PTSD. (A 1999 study found that 60 percent of sexual abuse cases resulted in PTSD (Dubner and Motto, 1996)). Ambiguous loss is also a type of PTSD experienced "beyond the normal range of human suffering. PTSD must first be treated as a mental disorder and second as an individual illness" (Boss, 2006, p. 41). Policy changes must be made to address these issues.

Second, schools must take a more active role n reaching out to children who show signs of mental illness. Megatropolis has two approaches to deal with drug and mental health issues. Drug counselors are available onsite to service children exhibiting

identifiable signs of drug use. There are also social workers onsite who have a referral system for students with mental health needs.

Third, the criminal justice system should work more closely with the mental health system to stop the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. The national Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) provides a model for better communication among systems and a useful framework for training first responders to mental health crisis calls. CIT also enlists all the other systems in criminal justice, mental health and emergency medicine to support the police role and to strengthen collaboration among systems. This model improves outcomes by supporting recovery and preventing future crises. (CIT was recommended as a result of University of St. Thomas Mental Health Conference, 2009).

Fourth, money spent on prison construction would be better spent on mental health care and drug treatment. Efforts have been made at the national level. The National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice (NCMHJJ) mounted a nationwide initiative, Blueprint for Change (Skowya &Cocozza, 2006). On the other hand, it is a step backward that Obama's 2012 budget calls for a decrease in funding the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) (Hughes & Fenster, 2011, Justice Policy Institute (JPI) Newsletter).

Conclusion Six: Schools failed to meet the needs of children of incarcerated parents, particularly mothers.

Research participants suffering from ambiguous loss or PTSD as children became the focus of harsh disciplinary procedures in schools. The fact that only four of the 17 participants graduated on time strongly suggests that schools were unaware of the plight of children with incarcerated mothers. Schools, in general have historically operated

under regimes of truth to be content specific, outcome based and disciplinary institutions. Viboch (2006) concluded that schools were ill equipped to handle the growing needs of children of incarcerated parents. Many children who are acting out grief for their losses "find themselves the focus of school disciplinary systems and the juvenile justice systems" (Viboch, 2006, p.3; Levy-Pounds, 2006, p.21).

Many studies reported school problems as a major issue concerning school-aged children of incarcerated parents. Wagner (2006) asserted that while children with incarcerated parents have problems similar to other at-risk youth, they also are more likely to drop out of school, abuse substances and run away. All but one of the participants in this study were African American. Coping with the loss of a parent due to incarceration was just another dimension of the myriad of problems they, like other children of color, faced.

Participants faced the trauma of victimization and social stigma. Golden asserted that "social stigma deflects attention away from the gendered racial oppression and justifies policies which maintain hierarchies of power and privilege (2005, p. xxii).
Most told stories of abuse, shame, stigma, dropping out of school or getting kicked out and running away. Anna, Lela, Lucy and Yana dropped out of school. Kara was kicked out, and Reyna's mom took her out of school; several were runaways. Rakeem was incarcerated on drug charges before he could finish high school. He as well as Lamar, Lela, Anna, Yana, Reyna and Lucy, who were also incarcerated as young adults, exemplify the school to prison pipeline

The Megatropolis district alone touts its disciplinary process as a democratic one; but in Foucauldian language, democracy and governmentality in education are conflicting

paradigms. Foucault's theory of discipline can be used to expose the myth of the school as a democratic process by showing how everyone is subjected to surveillance at all times (1977). Disciplinary power exhibits an "attentive malevolence and is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance;" which is constantly being played out in our schools (Foucault, 1977, p.139).

Professionals in the Megatropolis District acknowledged the challenges facing children of incarcerated parents and expressed concern about the school to prison pipeline phenomenon. However, there was little sign of their acting on that knowledge. A prevailing discourse of fear dictated school policy and the allocation of school resources. The district did not have the budgetary means to hire more teachers to lower class sizes; but it had the resources to hire more police, install more security cameras and add more security staff.

Recommendation Six: Schools need to work with community leaders, parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders to develop a systematized way to support children of incarcerated parents and seek solutions that are equitable and socially responsible. Students should be included in these efforts.

The Inside-Out Connections project in Greater Minnesota provides an ideal model for connecting school to community. Inside-Out Connections, funded by the Initiative Foundation, is made up of a team of of 25 to 35 community and faithbased leaders, parents, corrections staff, educators and other key stake holders who work specifically with children with parents in prison. It is based in Little Falls, Minnesota but has coalitions in seven rural counties. Central Minnesota school districts held a back-to-

school fall workshop in 2010 that focused on how to support children with incarcerated parents.

Since many school-aged children with incarcerated parents suffer from multiple traumas, schools must work more with mental health institutions and less with juvenile justice and criminal justice systems. I recommend a district-wide support program similar to that of the Vera Institute, which prevents distressed children from being the subjects of disciplinary procedures. District-level psychologists, social workers, community leaders, and nonprofits agencies should be involved in planning these efforts. I jumpstarted this process in 2007 by introducing my study to district-level social workers and psychologists.

The Big Brothers, Big Sisters (BBBS) program has been successful in recruiting high school students as mentors for younger children. I recommend an expansion of this program to specifically mentor children of incarcerated parents. BBBS has an adjunct program called Amachi (Ibo, meaning "who knows what God has brought us through this child"), which works with children of incarcerated parents; but it can be tailored to become district specific. This is particularly important since early childhood intervention is key to eradicating the school to prison pipeline.

As a teacher, I am making a commitment to provide a service-learning workshop to share my findings with other staff. My goal is to integrate concerns facing children of incarcerated parents within the context of already existing programs. Currently, my school has three initiatives in place: 1) closing the achievement gap between African Americans and white students; 2) strategic planning to deal with inequities in school disciplinary procedures; 3) mentoring high school girls in a group called Girls in Action

(GIA); and 4) counseling service for teens grieving the sudden death of a friend or loved one.

Since the majority of children with incarcerated parents are African American, integrating my in-service should be manageable. On-site staff development workshops are held several times a year. I will carve out time to present my findings at one of the workshops. I have already discussed this with the building principal who seemed impressed by my in-service proposal and wanted to know more about my findings.

The strategic planning committee consists of principals, teachers and support staff and was created to address the racially biased disciplinary practices at our school. Approximately 80 percent of our behavioral referrals and suspensions are African American students. Building cultural competency among staff is a part of this initiative. GIA is a mentorship program for high school girls in the Megatropolis district area. The girls are mentored by women community leaders in order to decrease and prevent violence and promote academics and leadership. Grief groups are facilitated by social workers and were created for students who had lost friends or relatives to murder or other sudden deaths. It should be expanded to include children grieving ambiguous loss.

I have also joined forces with Imani and Marsha and have committed to writing a grant to fund some of my efforts. Imani's nonprofit has serviced women exiting corrections and their children for over 10 years, can identify them, has the families' trust and the training necessary to help implement this support program. Marsha's nonprofit organization works with women exiting corrections and facilitates a teen circle of support for children with disciplinary issues.

Further, I plan to track data gathered from my service-learning project and maintain a research journal to reflect on staff and student responses and record my thoughts. "Learning to reflect on your behavior and thoughts, as well as the phenomenon under study; creates a means for continuously becoming a better researcher" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. xiii).

I also plan to conduct a survey study of schools statewide to find out what if any programs are in place that deal with children of incarcerated parents. Since there may be many initiatives that are not yet published, I propose using a LinkedIn account to network and share information with other stakeholders. LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network on the internet with approximately 90 million users.

Closing Reflection

A little girl's question, "When you arrest our mother, what happens to the children?" was a touchstone for my research. As a novice researcher addressing only a segment of the large and complex U.S. imprisonment phenomenon, I wonder to myself – if no one listens to well known activists like Angela Davis, Chesney-Lind, and Marc Mauer; if no one listens to high-profile community leaders; if no one listens to large nonprofits with the political force behind them – why would they listen to me? I am hopeful that education colleagues, local social agencies, and perhaps legislators will listen because I am presenting stories of women and men whose mothers were incarcerated when they were children. Those stories are compelling. Who could not be moved by hearing Kenny, "after ten years, does someone finally care?" or by Ned's lament, "there is no concern for kids." I hope that authentic stories of those who have survived terrible

childhood experiences will change the prevailing discourse about children of incarcerated parents and move professionals to action on the children’s behalf.

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